

“Who concerning the Truth Have Misaimed” — 2 Timothy 2:18

Misaiming concerning What Is a Prophet

Misaiming: “A prophet is one who speaks what God is speaking....

The genuine prophets in the Old Testament, New Testament and modern days do not just try to quote God, but their whole lives and lives’ message is the Word of the Lord for our generation.

Similarly, many of those who are promoted as prophets have little impact because of a lack of credibility or simply because they are so often wrong. Instead of communicating with their lives and words a lifelong message of radical obedience and consistency, they allow their own personal opinions and desire for power to corrupt the prophetic gift within them.

We are so seduced by worldly trends that we fail to speak the Word of God. Then, people are drawn toward voices that claim to be speaking for God, but are doing so without reverence and fear. So we end up in a swirl of misunderstanding.

“Recent ‘prophetic’ embarrassments related to Y2K and other the-sky-is-falling cries have caused genuine prophets to minister under alternate labels. This is a tragedy. Honest Christians could operate in the ministry gift that God wants to flow into their lives, but are hesitant because the culture around prophecy is cluttered with foolish distractions.” (Ted Haggard, “Building the Body,” *Ministries Today*, Jan./Feb. 2004, pp. 28-29).

Truth: This well-intentioned critique of Ted Haggard, who seeks to distinguish religious charlatans and seekers of base gain from those whom he believes truly have the gift of prophecy, misaims in its subtle reinforcement of an “Old Testament” perception that prophecy primarily involves foretelling the future, rather than the reality of speaking for God, especially the speaking forth of God in the New Testament age as words of grace that build up the organic Body of Christ, the church. By speaking of “prophets” who are “so often wrong” and by referring to “‘prophetic’ embarrassments related to Y2K and other the-sky-is-falling cries,” Haggard only

distinguishes between self-proclaimed prophets who speak falsely and rashly and those who are “honest” but “hesitant,” being intimidated by a culture “cluttered with foolish distractions.” And by this he means religious culture and self-aggrandizing prophecies.

There is, however, a more fundamental distinction between the prophetic word in both the Old and New Testaments. Throughout the Bible, prophecy primarily involves speaking for God, even when this speaking is predictive in nature. Our God is a speaking God; He is not a dumb idol. God communicates His intentions through both His actions and His speaking, His words, His Word. So even when Old Testament prophets were speaking of the future, prefacing their comments with “thus saith,” their principal purpose was to relay the feelings and intentions of the Lord to His people. The prophets were not merely an early warning system of impending disasters; they were the means through which God conveyed His heart’s desire to His people. Rather than just focusing on the future, there was a broad range of speaking for God by these prophets, much of which was directed toward guiding, encouraging, chastising, and warning God’s people so that they could be built up as a testimony and dwelling place for Him on earth.

In the New Testament this same aim is assisted through the spiritual exercise of the members of the Body of Christ for the building up of God’s spiritual house, the church. This aim, likewise, is accomplished by speaking for God, but in the New Testament this speaking involves three monumental dispensational developments. The first development pertains to the centrality of Christ in God’s speaking. According to Hebrews 1:1-2 God, who spoke “in many portions and in many ways to the fathers in the prophets, has at the last of these days spoken to us in the Son.” Christ, the incarnated Word as the expression of God, is now the means through whom God reveals and expresses Himself to humanity.

In His incarnation Christ spoke the words of the Father (John 14:10; 17:8), and thus is identified as a Prophet (Acts 3:22-23) in addition to the Redeemer. All genuine spiritual utterance in the New Testament

now comes through Christ, who in our experience is realized as the speaking Spirit, who is the reality of Christ. Humans, however, are no longer just borne by the Spirit (2 Pet. 1:21); rather, as believers, they are indwelt by the Spirit and even are one spirit with the Lord. Thus, the word of the Lord can, through believers who are organically joined to Him (1 Cor. 6:17), be “carried,” “announced,” “heard,” “sounded out,” and even can “run and be glorified” (Acts 13:49; 15:36; 19:10; 1 Thes. 1:8; 2 Thes. 3:1).

This points to the second dispensational development in the New Testament, namely that the prophetic word, even though it is restricted to the sphere and element of Christ, involves the speaking of the believers themselves. More than just speaking for God and much more than foretelling the future, true prophecy now involves the speaking forth of God Himself out from the believers; it involves the living impartation of God through words of spirit and life because the divine life, which is the content of these words (John 6:63), is nothing less than God Himself. When the believers speak in union with Christ, God speaks and God is imparted. And when Christ speaks in union with the believers, God speaks and God is imparted.

The final dispensational development involves the prophetic word being the inheritance and responsibility of all the believers, not just a few. According to Paul, in a meeting of the believers, all can prophesy “one by one” (1 Cor. 14:31) so that all can be built up. All believers should be filled in spirit, and all believers should overflow the abundance of the divine life in words that build up the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ does not need an early warning, as if such an objective word would appreciably alter the behavior of those who are firm in the hardness of their heart, stiff in their neck, and occupied with the affairs of this life. Rather, the Body of Christ needs the overflow of spiritual words from members who have been constituted with the written Word and saturated with reality of the speaking Spirit.

Finally, it should be noted that the passage in Ephesians, which this misaiming draws upon, does not speak of the gift of prophecy, but rather of prophets as gifts (4:8-11). The emphasis is on the person, not the work of a believer. If some are truly gifts to the Body, then it is doubtful that they would evidence any “hesitation” in exercising their spiritual capacity because some cultural clutter might be associated with their function. If some are constituted as gifts and even given as gifts by the Lord to the Body, it would seem that the very existence of this cultural clutter would provoke them to speak, not be silent. Equally suspect is the notion of a need for “alternate labels.” A label, any

label, is not needed to speak for God and to speak forth God. In fact, such “alternate labels” are yet more evidence of the religious clutter that the living word of God must penetrate and disperse.

Misaiming concerning God’s Firstborn Son

Misaiming: “Within God’s economy, ‘sonship’ is inseparably connected with *regality*, in both the angelic and the human realms....

“‘Sonship’ results from creation alone, not redemption....

“In order for God to place Adam’s progeny back into the position for which man was created—to rule and to reign—fallen man must not only be *redeemed* but *creation* must again be involved, for only *sons of God* can rule in God’s kingdom.

“That is to say, God must not only redeem fallen man but He must also perform a special creation of a nature which would place man back in the position of ‘God’s son.’ Apart from this dual act, man would *forever* be estranged from the reason God brought him into existence....

“God takes an individual who has been born from above and places him ‘in Christ,’ resulting in *an entire new creation* (II Cor. 5:17)—something which occurs at the time of the birth from above, though subsequent to this birth.

“God, at a point in time, took His Son and, *through birth*, placed Him in the position of *Firstborn* (God’s ‘only begotten Son’)—a necessary position for His Son to realize the rights of primogeniture as the second Man, the last Adam.

“The reference in each of the four appearances of the verse [‘Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee,’ Psa. 2:7] is to the Father begetting the Son at the time of the incarnation. This was an absolute necessity if the Son was to be *God’s Firstborn*, allowing the Son to hold the sceptre as the Father’s appointed ‘heir of all things’” (Arlen Chitwood, “God’s Firstborn Sons, Part 1, Christ” *The Heavenly Calling*, Jan./Feb. 2004, pp. 1-2, 4).

Truth: The goal of this quotation is laudable: the explication of the purpose and goal of sonship which is a critically important aspect of truth related to the economy of God. Regrettably, it ultimately misaims by failing to properly understand the means for obtaining sonship—the divine life of the Triune God, which has been released through His resurrection and imparted into the believers through their regeneration.

According to this article, the purpose of sonship involves God's desire that humanity would rule and reign in the dispensational fulfillment of God's desire for dominion. The article correctly points out that sonship relates to being heirs of God and heirs of the promises of God, rather than just children of God. It even points to Christ as the Firstborn and to the possibility of our sonship by being in Christ. But it errs in its understanding of the distinction between Christ being the only begotten Son of God and the firstborn Son of God; it confuses the nature of our being in Christ by separating regeneration in the divine life from becoming a new creation in Christ, and it incorrectly associates Christ's status as the Firstborn with the manifestation of divinity in humanity in the incarnation of Christ, rather than with the designation of humanity as divinity in His resurrection.

God is eternally triune—Father, Son, and Spirit. As the second of the Godhead, the Son is eternally the only begotten Son of God in His divinity. In incarnation God was manifested in the flesh and put on humanity in addition to divinity. In His humanity He knew no sin and ultimately offered up His sinless humanity, particularly His blood, as a redemptive and substitutionary sacrifice on behalf of all. In resurrection Christ, the God-man who possessed both divinity and humanity, was designated the firstborn Son of God. Christ was designated the firstborn Son of God in resurrection because it is only in resurrection that the divine life can be released and imparted into the many brothers of the Firstborn, the believers, opening the way for our participation, enjoyment, and maturation in the divine life. The believers have been regenerated unto a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet. 1:3). Contrary to the assertion that the New Testament references to Psalm 2:7—Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5—point to Christ's incarnation, it is quite clear from the context of each verse that the time frame of these declarations is the resurrection of Christ, which is the time when Christ was designated the Son of God in His divinized humanity out of the resurrection of the dead (Rom. 1:4).

It is the divine life that enables a believer to be born of God, and it is the divine life that matures children into sons and ultimately into heirs of God. Our receiving of the divine life depends upon both the incarnation of Christ for the sake of redemption and the resurrection of Christ for the sake of regeneration. As a result of our regeneration, we are spontaneously, not subsequently, joined to the Lord and become a new creation in Christ. As such, the Firstborn has many brothers, and God has the ground to conform us to the image of His Son through our living in and according to the life of the new creation, which is the

divine life released through the resurrection of Christ and which brings us into our inheritance in the resurrected Christ. The ruling and reigning of the many sons of God is a reigning that is utterly dependent upon the operation of the divine life (5:17), not just the timing of some dispensational fulfillment.

Misaiming concerning Heaven

Misaiming: "Are you ready to meet God? He loves you, and through Jesus Christ He has made a way for you to be with Him in heaven for eternity" (Billy Graham, "Are You Ready?" *Decision*, January 2004, p. 5).

Truth: The statement cited above conveys certain elements of truth. We will meet God, God loves us, and believers in Christ will be with God for eternity. The grievous error is the claim that God has made a way for us to be "with Him in heaven for eternity." This claim is misleading both in what it says and in what it ignores.

It is not correct or faithful to the Scriptures to assert that God's intention in His salvation is to provide a way for believers in Christ to be with Him in heaven for eternity. Heaven is neither the goal of God's redemption nor the consummation of God's eternal purpose. Contrary to the traditional view related to heaven, God's goal in redemption is to recover His chosen people to His original purpose, the eternal purpose for which He created all things. He desires to bring us not to heaven but to Himself, making Himself one with us through Christ and making us one with Him in Christ that we may be His corporate expression.

The words *corporate expression* point to God's eternal purpose, which issues from the desire of His heart to have many sons conformed to the image of His Son, the Firstborn, for the constituting of a corporate organic entity—the Body of Christ which consummates in the New Jerusalem. God's intention is not to make us eternal inhabitants of heaven; His intention is to make us parts of the city of God, the New Jerusalem. To preach heaven as the goal of God's salvation is both to misaim concerning the truth and to mislead the children of God concerning their eternal destiny.

Presumably, material quoted from "Are You Ready?" is intended to be the word of the gospel. Regrettably, because of what it ignores, such a word is pathetically deficient with respect to the truth of the gospel. At least four crucial aspects of the gospel are ignored: the gospel of the kingdom, proclaimed in Matthew, which calls rebels to repent and to submit to the rule of the kingdom of the heavens, the reality of which is Christ,

the heavenly King, as the seed of the kingdom; the gospel of the forgiveness of sins, presented in Luke, which assures us that God's forgiveness of our sins through the redeeming death of Christ brings us back to His original blessing; the gospel of eternal life, unfolded in John, which reveals God's desire, based upon His redemption, that we believe into Christ thereby receiving Him as eternal life for God's building, His corporate expression; and the gospel of God, announced in Romans, that heralds the marvelous truth that the gospel of God concerns the Son of God who in resurrection has become His firstborn Son, to whose image His many brothers are being conformed for God's glorious expression. Sadly, instead of being instructed in such a grand revelation of the gospel, multitudes of believers are being misled by a going-to-heaven "gospel." As a result, countless children of God are waiting to go to heaven when they should be seeking the Lord to be saved in His life (Rom. 5:10) for the building up of the Body of Christ.

Misaiming concerning Pastors

Misaiming: "The pastor is the senior spiritual authority in a local church. He is responsible for the healthy development of those within the congregation and community" (Ted Haggard, "Building the Body," *Ministries Today*, Jan./Feb. 2004, p. 29).

Truth: The words *the pastor*, which denote an individual leader in the church, betray the influence of what the Lord Jesus calls "the teaching of the Nicolaitans" (Rev. 2:15), that is, the notion of the clergy-laity system with its implied hierarchy. The pastoral system—the system in which one man leads and presides, usually with authority, over a congregation of "laymen"—may be the common, virtually universal, practice among Christians today, but it has no basis whatever in the Word of God. In the New Testament there is no such thing as "the pastor" as "the senior spiritual authority in a local church." Instead, the Scriptures speak of two offices in a genuine local church as a local expression of the Body of Christ.

The first of these two offices is that of the elders or overseers. In the first local church, the church in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1), there were elders taking care of the government of the church (11:30; 15:2, 4, 6, 22; 16:4; 21:18), and eventually elders were appointed in every local church (14:23; Titus 1:5). The function of the elders includes overseeing, teaching, shepherding, and taking care of the finances of the church. Instead of lording it over the church, the elders are to be patterns to the flock (1 Pet. 5:3). The second office in a local church is that of the deacons and deaconesses, who serve in the church by taking care of various practical

matters under the direction of the elders. Apart from the offices of elder and deacon, there is no other office in a local church. Thus, there is no such thing as "the pastor" as the supposed senior spiritual authority.

The words *senior* and *spiritual authority* indicate further errors. *Senior* implies hierarchy, for it indicates that some are *junior* to the pastor who, by definition, is senior. Such a hierarchical arrangement among the believers who live and gather as the church in their city (hence, a local church) is not only abominable in the sight of God; it also nullifies the organic function of the members of the Body of Christ and thereby frustrates the building up of the Body as the organism of the Triune God. According to the truth, just as there are no senior (superior) and junior (inferior) members in our physical body, there are no senior and junior members in the Body of Christ.

The word *senior* is connected with *spiritual authority*. "The pastor," it is alleged, is supposed to be the senior spiritual authority, the one who stands above all junior spiritual authority, and as such he is the authority who is solely responsible "for the healthy development of those within the congregation." This idea is contrary to the word of the Lord Jesus in Matthew 20:20-28 and to the teaching of the apostles (cf. 1 Cor. 3:5-9). The Lord Jesus said, "The rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and the great exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you" (Matt. 20:25-26). The concept of a so-called pastor's spiritual authority is not in keeping with either the letter or the spirit of the Lord's word here. It is also incompatible with Paul's teaching in Ephesians 4:11 and 12, where we see that the "shepherds and teachers," as gifts to the Body, are for "the perfecting of the saints unto the work of the ministry, unto the building up of the Body of Christ."

In the genuine Body life, the shepherds and teachers (one group of shepherd-teachers) do not exercise authority over the saints—they perfect the saints. If the Body of Christ is to be built up by the perfected believers with their respective functions, it will be necessary for the traditional clergy-laity system to be overcome and replaced by the God-ordained way to serve the Lord and to meet as the local church according to the divine revelation. Then in a local church, under the leadership of the elders and with the service of the deacons and deaconesses but without the senior authority of "the pastor," all the believers will be free in spirit to participate in the direct building up of the Body of Christ to fulfill God's purpose and to satisfy the desire of His heart.

The Editors