

Prophet or Pitchman?

With the, *ahm*, "Big Game" coming up...in about a month, some of us will be watching television for the *commercials* as much as the action on the field. Advertisers will spend millions of dollars to get our *attention* and.. get us to open our wallets to buy their products. Many of the ads will be creative and memorable. More than a few will feature a celebrity to push their products.

Some such..celebrity "pitch" personalities.... get connected to companies. ...Like when William Shatner hung up his Captain Kirk uniform... to pitch for Priceline.com

Or maybe you're old enough to remember when retired slugger Joe DiMaggio moonlighted as.. Mr. Coffee? Brooke Shields rocked Calvin Klein jeans. And Michael Jordan donned his Hanes underwear.

Pitch... personalities can become so connected to a company....that we remember *them* ...years after the products have gone into retail obscurity.

But - - as often as a celebrity spokesperson *helps* a product line, many of them have done more harm than good – especially when that celebrity goes off the rails ...doing or saying something dumb at best... or criminal at worst. Consider cautionary tales:

+ Jared Fogle, featured in Subway commercials because he lost 245 pounds eating their sandwiches. But then ...he was imprisoned for sexual misconduct. No surprise when Subway immediately dropped him as spokesman.

+ Michael Phelps was pitching cereal for Kellogg's when a video of him smoking marijuana and a DUI got him bounced from the cereal aisle. He has *since* regained some *new* endorsements -- Americans being more forgiving of winners, apparently.

+ Paula Deen, the darling of The Food Networkuntil taken to court by former employees on charges of racial and sexual discrimination. Smithfield Foods dropped her as spokewoman.

+ Tiger Woods and Lance Armstrong were both at the top of their sports..

until scandal took them down... along with sponsorships from Nike and Livestrong.

These are just some of the sad stories of spokespersons gone wild. ..People who presumed to speak on behalf of the companies they represented, but their behavior turned out to be an embarrassment instead.

~ Of course, bad behavior is not limited to commercial endorsements. The church has had plenty of its own high-profile pitchmen get caught in scandal. I'm sure you can think of those who have damaged church reputation over the years.

*Those who presume to speak for God are watched even more carefully than celebrities - to see if their conduct and character *match the message* they preach. Discerning Christians ..**need always be on the lookout for authenticity**. We demand a genuine spirit.... in those who stand before us.... with what they claim to be God's Word.*

Moses knew, when his time was overthis - was going to be a problem for Israel. So... he spends some time here in the latter part of Deuteronomy listing criteria for the kind of people God calls to be spokespersons...

He also *warns them.. how to spot a fake*.

The question for them - is the same for us who preach and listen to preachers: **How do you know the difference between a real prophet and a religious pitchperson**? How can you tell if someone is genuine for God.....or if they are leading a church to spiritual bankruptcy?

In Deuteronomy 18, Moses offers two criteria for a **real** prophet (not a fortune teller! A **Forth Teller** of God's Word): 1) The prophet will be like Moses, and 2) the prophet will be raised up from among God's own people (v. 15). In other words, real prophets speak and act in line with the law of God and whatever they prophesy **will affect them** as much as the peoplebecause they have been called out **from** among the people.

These are important distinctions.

They ground the prophet's words and work in the word of God and in the community to which and out of which God calls them. Unlike a celebrity endorser, one who speaks for God should be well-known by those in that community. *Before they ever receive the call.* (*me with you, for example, or your pastor to come) : *Prophets....have had people who observed their **public** persona in*

private, witnessed their character in action, and determined whether their message matches the Scriptures.

God told Moses, *the prophet will "speak to them everything I command" and whoever fails to heed that word will be held "accountable"* (vv. 18-19).

God's minister ...has a stake in the community to whom they preach!

Whatever a true prophet proclaims for the community - will affect him or her as well. Put another way: the prophet's word is less directed towards "you" and more towards "us."

Moses' warning is poignant ...in our age when it's possible to download messages from *celebrity preachers* who are detached from our lives.

~Detached by distance.... of satellite signals. Many people assume that if someone has a huge following online....they must be a prophet. Right?
(mmmmm....not at all!)

The Truth is... a true prophet may **not** have a fat book contract - or TV show. But their people *know them* -- warts and all. (*You've seen mine!*) A true prophet's message is sometimes difficult to hear, which means their audiences may be smaller!

Most of the time, real prophets are reluctant because they know the message God has laid on them can *sting them* as much as it will the rest of the body. Just look at the struggles of Israel's prophets; it's no picnic...to tell people what they don't want to hear!

Four telltale signs for a pitchman NOT a prophet:

With that criteria in mind, it's easier to tell when someone is actually being "prophetic" versus pitching ..an agenda. Here...are four telltale signs that you're hearing a pitchman...not prophet:

1. It's all about them

A pitchman primarily is after his own benefits. They are more likely to use their platform to manipulate others to their benefit. When someone starts a statement to you with an admonition like, "*God told me to tell you ...☺*"*that should put you on high alert*. History is full of those who have claimed a hotline with God ...but who instead led people to destruction while lining their own pockets...or feeding their own hedonistic impulses.

Moses says, God warns us *to watch out* for those who: "***speak in my name a word I have not commanded the prophet to speak***". *That kind of word* is usually ...their own words. (v. 20).

2. They're holding up other gods

2. Personalities who pitch their own agenda...are holding up **other** gods

God warns against prophets who pitch for other gods (v. 20).

For Moses that meant the idols of the Canaanites. But there are plenty gods to go around today. If your favorite "preacher"... is making promises for your financial prosperity, that should be a *major red flag*. Biblical prophets are more concerned about the poor than the rich. As is Jesus! Amen!!?

Biblically speaking, if you're financially prosperous, your *first priority* is to *share* that wealth. Any church leader that puts his, her and/or your financial wealth ahead of generosity is simply pitching a product. NOT the gospel.

Jesus said you can't serve both God and money; you have to choose.

And money... is often part of an **unholy** trinity..of *other* gods that includes sex - and power. It's not that these are bad in themselves; it's that they make good servants but terrible masters. Right?

When a preacher preaches money, sex, or even a *political agenda* above God's word, then you've got yourself a pitchman for other gods. You don't have to read far in scripture to see what destruction that brings!

3. Their character doesn't match the message

Third....a false prophet's character *doesn't match* the message.

~ It's obvious; if someone is preaching words they're not living, then he or she is a *religious peddler*... not an authentic prophet. Paul warned of *such "peddlers of God's word"*. He urged people to seek those who speak and act like, quote "persons sent from God and standing in God's presence"! (2 Corinthians 2:17). **Jesus..** warned his disciples against false prophets. ~....Religious pitchmen who come as wolves in sheep's clothing. ...But whose real character is revealed by their "fruits" (Matthew 7:15-20).

The most authentic prophets are those who are vulnerable. Whose weaknesses are known by the community. Who live in humility...with good character. Real prophets may not be the most eloquent speakers, but their lives speak volumes... to the truth of the message they proclaim.

4. Their preaching comes to nothing.

And finally, through Moses, Heaven tells the people a surefire way to see whether God has spoken through a prophet or the prophet is speaking on her own: "If a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD but the thing does not take place, that is a word that the LORD has *not* spoken. The prophet has spoken it presumptuously; do *not* be frightened by it" (v. 22).

A real prophet *knows the difference* between his own word and God's. Paul differentiates his own advice on marriage - from that of the Lord's, for example. God Word is not about a prophet's predictions ..but whether the prophet has rightly discerned God's will. It's really about whether the faith community begins to change as a result.

Such discernment.. takes time.

A real prophet's message will continue to bear fruit and shape the faith family....for years ahead.

These are the guideposts.... for both preachers and congregations to evaluate themselves and one another.

We finally have to ask ourself: **How** can we help each other be more authentic in our faith.

How can I help you....be more genuine as you confess your failures....and grow in spirit?

How can you help me...be more honest about myself....and how God is at work in us all?

How can we all.....be better 'forth tellers....of God's powerful, saving, and LOVING Word?

Amen.