

Prophetic Protocol in the Church Gathering

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The Corporate Church Gatherings

It is a wonderful thing to know God personally and to experience His freedom in our lives. When we are alone, we can pray, sing, and study what we like. However, when we enter the corporate setting, it becomes necessary and expedient that we consider what God would do in us together. Obviously, it would be impossible for everyone to have each of his or her own preferences realized. Therefore, it becomes necessary that personal agendas give way to the overall agenda of God for His people. To ensure that everything is done for the building up of the church, we must understand two things—**purpose** and **protocol**.

Purpose

Definition (Webster's): "Purpose": *"The object for which something exists or is done."*

The purpose of the corporate gathering is to reflect the building and order of God for His house so that God may rest His glory on His house (Exodus 40:33-34; 2 Chronicles 5). The church is to reflect God's kingdom order to the world of disorder around us. While we have all been given different grace gifts and callings, when we come together in the church, we must be motivated by a goal higher than ourselves. Paul says, *"Even so you, since you are zealous for spiritual gifts, let it be for the edification (or "building up") of the church that you seek to excel."* (1 Corinthians 14:12). When we come together as believers our aim is to be a vessel of edification to the corporate *body*, the church. God has ordained the gifts to operate through us for the building up of the church. Yet there is a proper way for this to be accomplished. How ministries and gifts are to be recognized and released in the church we call the order or "protocol" of the house.

Protocol

Definition (Webster's): "Protocol": *"The code of ceremonial forms and courtesies, of precedence, etc. accepted as proper and correct in official dealings, as between heads of states or diplomatic officials."*

As ambassadors of Jesus Christ, we endeavor to ensure that the worship and administration of spiritual gifts in the corporate church gatherings are released according to appropriate order or "protocol". Every person seeking to operate in spiritual things should learn the protocol of the specific church (or "house") in which they seek to minister. Part of the vision of this house is to see the gifts of God in every saint "stirred up" and released. It is also our vision and responsibility as a church to ensure that this is done in a biblical and effective manner and in the right spirit. In this way we experience the greatest measure of God's blessing in spiritual things while safeguarding the body. We desire the "river" of God's Spirit to flow in our midst. Like riverbanks, protocol defines boundaries for the river to flow.

Protocol is essential in recognizing ministry. Protocol upholds honor for the house and its leadership. When protocol is not followed, it brings disorder and confusion in the house. Unwillingness to walk in submission to the order of the house marks one as insubordinate and it defiles their ministry. Even

valid ministry can be unappreciated and unrecognized because of the disorder and confusion they release in the house by ignoring protocol. With each gift and calling comes the responsibility to *“let all things be done **decently** and in **order**.”* (1 Corinthians 14:40).

Decently and In Order

God desires that the church receives the maximum benefit from its corporate gatherings whereby the ministries and gifts of God are fully realized and protected. The command to let all things be done decently and in order is given to release the gifts while protecting the church, its members, and the gifts from abuse.

The word “decently” comes from the Greek word *eushemonos* (Strongs #G2156 and #G2158) meaning *“decorously, decently, honestly, nobly (in rank), comely, honorably.”* The word “order” comes from the Greek word *taxis* (Strong’s #G5010) meaning *“regular arrangement, i.e., (in time) fixed succession (of rank or character), official dignity; order.”* From these definitions we might say that whatever takes place in the corporate setting should

1. Beautify or “decorate” the spiritual atmosphere
2. Not offend moral standards
3. Be done in a noble or dignified fashion
4. Be truthful and honest
5. Cultivate a love (rather than a distaste) for spiritual things
6. Bring honor to the Lord and to His house
7. Uphold the protocol or order of the house
8. Be submitted to proper timing

In 1 Corinthians 14 Paul gives us clear details on what he means by “decently and in order.” These things are:

1. **Love:** Without love, none of the spiritual gifts will be pure. *“Pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts.”*
2. **Speaking in the language of the people:** While tongues is a valid spiritual gift which can be used privately or in prayer with others of understanding, in the church we are to seek to communicate in a language people can understand. *“Even things without life, whether flute or harp, when they make a sound, unless they make a distinction in the sounds, how will it be known what is piped or played? For if the trumpet makes an uncertain sound, who will prepare for battle?”* (verses 7-8)
3. **Simple terminology:** People are not called to impress others with their spiritual knowledge. This is spiritual pride. Humility and love will seek to communicate with language the people can understand. *“So likewise you, unless you utter by the tongue words easy to understand, how will it be known what is spoken? For you will be speaking into the air. Therefore, if I do not know the meaning of the language, I shall be a foreigner to him who speaks, and he who speaks will be a foreigner to me.”* (verses 10-11)
4. **Interpretation:** Spiritual things can be confusing or misunderstood. We should seek to give interpretation and understanding to the spiritual things taking place within the service for the sake of those who need answers. *“Therefore let him who speaks in a tongue pray that he may interpret.”* (verse 13)

5. **Consideration of unbelievers and unlearned:** While believers who have experienced a freedom in spiritual things may feel restricted by boundaries, we are nevertheless instructed to consider how we conduct ourselves around unbelievers and the unlearned (ungifted). *“Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind?”* (verse 23)
6. **Edification:** Just because people feel they have something important to share does not mean they are to share it. We must seek the welfare of the church above our own desire to contribute. Not only this but we should make sure that what we contribute is edifying rather than self-willed, negative, critical, and filled with unbelief. *“How is it then, brethren? Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.”* (verse 26).
7. **Courtesy:** We are to be courteous and not hoggish in our desire to participate in the service. We should respect one another and consider the needs of others above ourselves. *“But if there is no interpreter, let him keep silent in church, and let him speak to himself and to God. Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. But if anything is revealed to another who sits by, let the first keep silent. For you can all prophesy one by one, that all may learn and all may be encouraged.”* (verses 28-32)
8. **Accountability:** Personal revelation is not to be viewed as infallible. Spiritual gifting is not to be seen as authoritative. Neither the prophet nor his prophecy is self-authenticating. All prophetic ministry or revelational teaching is to be accountable to the evaluation, judgment, or correction of those in responsibility. *“Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge.”* (verse 29)
9. **Self-control:** Believers should exercise self-control in their conduct and participation in the corporate gatherings. No one can blame others or God for their lack of self-control or submission. *“And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.”* (verse 32)
10. **Peace and order:** Anything that is out of God’s order removes peace. We should be sensitive to anything that may create confusion. Whatever we do, we should seek to do it in a way that it releases peace and blessing. *“For God is not the author of confusion (disorder) but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”* (verse 33)
11. **Headship in the home:** In the church, the Bible allows women to operate in spiritual gifts, prayer, in some teaching roles, and even as prophetesses under the covering of their fathers, husbands, and church leadership (see Acts 1:14; 2:17-18; 21:9; 1 Corinthians 11:3-16; Titus 2:3-5). However, to uphold God’s divine order and design, the Scriptures prohibit self-willed women from disregarding male headship and covering in the home and in the church. Even the angels will not honor those who disregard the principle of divine covering (1 Corinthians 11:10). This principle of covering by authority applies to men and women alike. *Anyone* who does not honor God’s order of headship in the home or in the church are out of order and should not be allowed to speak in the corporate gathering. Submissive and godly women who are active in the church but who are single or have husbands not involved in the church may operate in spiritual things in the church under the covering of the pastor and elders. *“Let your women keep silent in the churches, for they are not permitted to speak; but they are to be submissive, as the law also says. And if they want to learn something, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for women to speak in church.”* (verses 34-35)
12. **Scripture:** Authority flows from God through His word. Nothing is decent and in order if it disagrees with Scripture. Those who reject or ignore Scripture are out of order. *“If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commands of the Lord.”* (verse 37)

13. **Recognition by leadership:** Pastors and elders are responsible to oversee the church and its operation. They have the authority to recognize or *not* to recognize those who seek to minister in the church. Recognition gives credibility. Undue credibility given to those who are out of order damages the standard of decency and order in the house and can lead to confusion among those who have striven to walk in true order and submission. *“But if anyone does not recognize this, he is not recognized.”* (verse 38 NASB)
14. **Encourage spiritual things:** While there are dangers and abuses that come with allowing spiritual gifts to operate in the church, the benefits far outweigh the dangers if there are proper safeguards and boundaries. The proper biblical response toward spiritual gifts is to *encourage* their operation in the church within proper boundaries. *“Therefore, brethren, desire earnestly to prophesy, and do not forbid to speak with tongues. Let all things be done decently and in order.”* (verses 39-40)

Principles for Testing Prophecy

(Deuteronomy 13:1-4; 18:15-22; Matthew 7:15-23; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21; 1 Corinthians 12:1-3; 14:29; Hebrews 1:1-2; 1 John 4:1ff; Revelation 19:10)

Although testing prophetic words may be uncomfortable, the Bible is clear on the following:

1. It is scriptural to judge prophecy.
2. No person’s ministry is exempt from being judged.
3. It is not disrespectful or disloyal to weigh the words of others.
4. Local, visiting, and international ministries are to submit their ministry for judgment.
5. The judging process is necessary to protect the gift, the minister, and the recipient of prophecy from error and abuse while confirming the purpose of God for prophecy.

The principles used in testing prophecy in this house will be as follows:

1. The **Source:** Test the spirits. Does it flow from the Spirit of God, the spirit (or heart) of man, or from the influence of demonic spirits?
2. The **Objective:** Does the message glorify Jesus and edify the church?
3. The **Message:** Is the prophecy in accord with the letter and the spirit of Scripture? Is it doctrinally sound? Does the message have substance? Is it accurate for our generation and place? Does it lead the people to God? Does it include hope?
4. The **Person:** Is Jesus Lord of this person’s life? Is the person filled with the Holy Spirit? Is there a reasonable measure of holiness, righteousness, and the fear of the Lord? Are they mentally or emotionally stable? Does the person display the fruits of the Holy Spirit? Does the person submit to the Word of God and the government of the local church? Is the person known to be of a good reputation? What is the fruit of their ministry?
5. The **Delivery:** Can the people understand the prophecy? Is it able to be clearly heard by everyone? Does the prophecy fit with the flow and the order of the service? Is the person out of control and a threat to the order of the service? Is the message given out of an insecure and troubled human mind? Is the delivery hysterical, fanatical, or out of hand? Is the message manipulative or controlling (i.e., usurping the will of others, pulling rank, flattering, giving dire warnings, allowing no outside perspective, using the phrase *the Lord told me so* to eliminate feedback, promoting super-spirituality, promoting one’s own ministry or doctrinal perspective, or intimidating)? Is the prophecy brought forth in love?

6. The **Recipient**: Does my spirit bear witness that this is the Holy Spirit? Am I experiencing the peaceful assurance of the Holy Spirit? Do I now feel inspired, highly motivated to follow through with the challenge of the message? Do I see a greater maturity in my character and conduct resulting from this prophecy?
7. The **Closure**: Leadership should bring closure to the prophetic word, whether it be to summarize, to make sure the people understood what was said, to ask for clarification, to confirm, to reinforce, to correct or adjust the message, or to administer public or private correction.
8. The **Response**: Leadership is responsible for determining if, how, and when the congregation might respond to the prophetic word in confession, prayer, or ministry.

Who is responsible to judge prophecy?

1. The other prophets present (1 Corinthians 14:29)
2. Those with the manifestation of discerning of spirits (1 Corinthians 2:10)
3. Each individual present listening to the prophecy (1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 1 John 4:1)
4. The resident leadership of the house (Acts 20:28-31; 1 Thessalonians 5:19-21; 1 John 4:1)

Prophetic Protocol

This church will follow the guidelines for prophetic ministry:

1. A person who receives a prophetic word during the service should NOT go to the platform or release it from the congregation. To ensure that the prophetic word is properly covered and released, those having a prophetic word should go to one of the elders or pastors for evaluation of the content and timing of the word. If the leadership feels the word is appropriate for that time in the service, they will escort you to the platform.
2. Prophetic ministry must fit the flow of the Spirit in the service. Even if valid, prophetic ministry might not be allowed if it is deemed personal rather than corporate, be more appropriately given at another time, is being given in the wrong spirit or attitude, or needs to be given in a different way. People are asked to please honor the judgment and decision of the leadership in these matters.
3. People may participate in *prophetic* worship in dance in appropriate settings as determined by leadership. Leadership reserves the right to stop prophetic worshipers if method, modesty, the spirit, or timing is deemed inappropriate.
4. Prophetic acts are to be released in the corporate gathering only under the covering and approval of pastors or elders. Those who choose to operate independently will be asked to cease.
5. It is desired that all prophetic words given during a service be given over the microphone for audibility, covering, and recording. Those who begin prophesying from the congregation may be asked to stop and/or to come to the microphone.
6. Prophetic words may also be given during a worship service by putting it in writing with your name and date and giving it to a pastor or elder.
7. "Parking lot prophecies" are discouraged. These are personal prophetic words given outside of the service ministry time by those not in leadership. These prophecies can be dangerous when they are not given under the covering of leadership.
8. Personal prophecies

- a. If you desire to share a word with someone, speak to the pastor, assistant pastor, or one of the elders. Please honor the decision regarding the disposition of the word. Not every word is to be given, as the *“spirit of the prophet is subject to the prophet.”* (1 Corinthians 14:32)
 - b. Wives of pastors and elders may be used as covering on prophetic words with other women or in situations where the pastor or elders are not available.
 - c. If someone approaches you with a revelation or prophetic word for you while at church, please ask him or her to hold it until covering can be secured through a pastor, elder, or one of their wives.
 - d. Personal prophecies should be taped or written down for remembrance, clarification, and evaluation.
 - e. It is suggested that personal prophetic words received outside the church setting be recorded or written down and reviewed with leadership.
 - f. It is suggested that any prophetic words received from another church or ministry be reviewed with leadership.
 - g. Remember that personal prophecy is to be *confirmational* and not directional. Do not act on a word that has no validation of the Holy Spirit in your heart. Be aware of the abuse of personal prophecy to manipulate and control. Ask God for confirmation of the word if you are not sure. Seek guidance from your pastor or elders. If there is still no direction or confirmation, put it “on the shelf”, release it into the hand of God, and leave it alone.
 - h. When giving a prophetic word to women it is usually best to have the husband involved. When ministering to children it is best to have the parent or guardian involved. This helps ensure biblical covering is intact.
 - i. In services designed for children or youth, those children or youth receiving prophetic ministry will be under the covering of the children’s or youth ministry pastor (s).
 - j. Prove every word with Biblical principles and a witness of the spirit.
 - k. Hold to the good and reject the bad.
9. Prophetic words given in small group settings should be covered by the group leader and recorded or written down. Group leaders should submit questionable prophetic words to church leadership for evaluation.
 10. It is our desire and policy to tape record all prophetic utterances. This is done for both blessing and protection. Memory alone is an unreliable way to remember the content and the spirit of what was said. Often, we remember or hear what we need or want, not what was *said*. Therefore, we ask that you ensure that all prophetic ministry you receive here be taped. Blank tapes and recorders are accessible through leadership.
 11. Do not prophesy, imply, or ask someone to support you financially.
 12. Do not prophesy marriages between individuals, or pregnancies, or direction in financial investments.
 13. Do not use prophecy to manipulate or control the actions and responses of others.
 14. Not all who prophesy are prophets. Not all who call themselves prophets are prophets. While gifting and anointing are important indications of an office, Jesus said we would know true and false prophets by their fruit (Matthew 7:15-20). Those who feel called to function in the office of a prophet in this church must be a member of this church, be submitted in their heart to the pastor and elders, demonstrate the living fruit of the character of Jesus, and finish any training required of leaders.
 15. Exceptions to these guidelines may be made under the covering of leadership when corporate ministry or prophetic training is taking place.

16. Visiting prophetic ministry will operate under the covering of the pastors and elders of this church.
17. The “spirit” of these guidelines should be followed in situations not covered within these guidelines.

Banner and Flag Protocol

1. Banners and flags are more than attractive additions to our worship; they are also prophetic in nature. As a result, they must follow similar guidelines for other prophetic ministry. Each banner and flag has a symbolic or prophetic “voice.” In the corporate worship or prayer setting it is important that there is a clear, distinct, and certain sound so that those who see them may understand their meaning.
2. A banner captain in the service oversees banners and flags. They operate in the service under the authority of the pastor, elders, and praise leader. The banner captain is responsible for discerning when, where, and through whom banners and flags are to be used in the service. No one may use a banner in the corporate setting without their approval.
3. Those who feel a specific leading to release the “voice” of a banner in the house should communicate this to the banner captain. The banner captain will make the decision on whether the flag needs to be released, when it is to be released, and through whom it is to be released. Please honor their decision concerning how the flags will be used as they seek to be accurate and responsible to the Lord and to the leadership of the house.
4. Flags and banners are to be used by those who are submitted to the authority of this house in membership except in special times of ministry released by the pastor in the service.
5. Prophetic acts with the banners or flags are not to be done without the prior approval of the banner captain or pastor.
6. Thirteen years old and older are allowed to use the flags in corporate gatherings with approval from the banner captain. In certain cases, smaller children may use the smaller flags with approval of the banner captain.
7. Flags and banners may be used prophetically in intercessory prayer times as approved by the prayer leader and banner captain.