

WHY THE PROPHETS DID NOT SEE THE COMING PANDEMIC

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There seems to be no end to the hyper-critical, cynical comments coming from many cessationists in the professing Christian world. One of the more virulent threads I keep seeing on the internet is the mocking tone that asks why the many prophets in the charismatic world did not foresee the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, let me be clear about one thing. This brief response is not an unqualified defense or vindication of the many names that are mentioned in this regard. Some of those who are named I know personally. They are good friends. Others I have never met. Some of them have been guilty in the past of making unsubstantiated claims that have served only to bring reproach on the name of Jesus and have cast a bad light on genuine, NT prophetic ministry. Others are doing their best to be wise and responsible in their comments. So please don't think that this article is a blanket endorsement of every so-called "prophetic" voice in the church.

Having said that, my concern is to more carefully define and defend the authenticity of the NT spiritual gift of prophecy. More specifically, I want to point out a colossal misunderstanding of the nature of NT prophecy on the part of the cynical cessationist. Now, again, not all cessationists are cynical or guilty of sinful ridicule. Many of my closest friends identify as cessationists, but they are kind, loving, and always encouraging and instructive in their observations. And, to be sure, charismatics are not immune to cynicism.

So, what is the misunderstanding that stands behind these criticisms of contemporary prophetic ministry? It is simply this. They write as if prophetic revelation is automatic, as if it is in the back pocket of charismatic believers such that he/she can prophesy at will on all matters. Listen carefully. *The reason why so many prophetically gifted people did not foresee the Covid-19 pandemic is because God did not reveal it to them!* It isn't because they do not minister in the power of prophetic ministry. It isn't because the spiritual gift of prophecy ceased with the death in the first century of the last apostle. It isn't because the canon of Scripture is closed. It is simply because all revelation that constitutes the basis for prophetic ministry is in the hands of God, to be dispensed as he wills, not as we will.

The disclosure of "revelation" is always dependent on God and his will and timing. No one can prophesy whenever they will, as if they can produce or conjure up revelation whenever they please. We do not produce revelation. It does not originate with us. We can't control it, dictating if and when and how it might be obtained. There is no "prophetic switch" in our souls that we simply have to flip on and suddenly the light of God's voice shines brightly. Of course, we are to pray that God would be pleased to reveal something that would be edifying, encouraging, and consoling to others ([1 Cor. 14:3](#)). We are to posture our souls in such a way that we would be more likely to discern his voice. But God is always the subject and source of revelation. That is to say, he is the one from whom it comes. He is the one who makes it known. And sometimes, for his own secret, sovereign, and all-wise purposes, he chooses not to say anything. We see this in [1 Corinthians 14:30](#) where Paul describes how prophetic ministry operates. He describes a typical corporate church gathering in which God's

people are assembled, ministering to one another for their edification. He says: “If a revelation is made to another sitting there” ([1 Cor. 14:30a](#)). Who produced this “revelation”? God did. No human can originate or create a revelation. Earlier in [1 Corinthians 14:26](#) Paul described how someone might come to the church meeting with “a revelation.” It would appear that God may disclose something to a person prior to the church assembly that he/she would then share during the course of a meeting.

My point is simply that whether or not a prophetically gifted person can foresee anything that is to come to pass is not up to them. It is up to them whether or not and when they choose to share publicly what God may have revealed. But only God decides whether or not to grant revelatory insight and foresight.

The answer, then, to the question of why so many in the charismatic world did not see the pandemic coming is because *our sovereign God chose not to reveal it to them*. It really is all that simple. The gift of prophecy is very much like “gifts of healings” ([1 Cor. 12:9, 28](#)). They are not in our control but are always subject to God’s purpose and timing. God reveals something by his Spirit when he is pleased to do so, not when we want it and far less demand it. God bestows power to heal a sickness when he is pleased to do so, not when we think it should happen or wish it to happen.

The reason why we don’t see everyone healed when we pray for them is because God, for his own wise and good purposes, does not will to bestow a “gift” for that “healing” at that time. No one carries the gift of healing in his/her back pocket, to be pulled out and exercised whenever we will. It is always subject to God’s will. The same is true of the gift of prophecy. We prophesy when God wills, when God chooses to make something known.

I'm not at all surprised that God chose not to reveal the pandemic to any of his prophetically gifted people. Again, the reason he didn't isn't because the prophetic gift itself is no longer valid or operative. If you're wondering if I'm now going to tell you what God's ultimate purpose was in withholding advance revelatory knowledge of the pandemic, I'm not. I don't know. He has his reasons and has not chosen to make those known (at least not to me). Perhaps that was in order that we might be compelled to trust wholly in his goodness and merciful plan. Perhaps it was to prevent some in the body of Christ from trying to profit from such knowledge. Perhaps it was because he knew of our proclivity to exploit such knowledge for personal gain or fame or promotion.

In any case, let me repeat the answer to the question one more time. In doing so, I pray that you would recognize the nature of the gift of prophecy and how it operates in the body of Christ. *If no one foresaw the coming pandemic, it was because God chose not to reveal it to them.* It is no reflection on the spiritual maturity of the prophetically gifted person. It is no indictment of their authenticity. That doesn't mean all who claim to minister prophetically are genuinely gifted. Some of them are, some aren't. Some are God-fearing, Christ-exalting, Bible-believing brothers and sisters in the body of Christ. Sadly, some are charlatans, to be avoided.

In sum, the failure of any to prophesy the pandemic says nothing whatsoever about the legitimacy of the prophetic gift for our day. So let me close with a commandment of the apostle Paul that all Bible-believing Christians should be diligent to obey:

"Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy" (1 Cor. 14:1).

“So, my brothers, earnestly desire to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues” (1 Cor. 14:39).