
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: **What should be our view of the coronavirus problem?**

Not everyone will agree with my views that I'm about to present. My intentions are not to anger anyone, but to give what I believe should be our response to the current coronavirus problem.

First, this message is being recorded on March 17, 2020. As of this moment, while I record this, in the United States there are 4,808 known cases of coronavirus and 94 people have died (Worldometer.info). Worldwide, there have been no deaths of children from birth to 9 years old. Those who are at the highest risk are people over 80 years old. People in their 70s are the second highest risk group. Those whose health is already compromised by diabetes, heart disease, and cancer are at a higher risk if they contract the coronavirus.

In comparison, to coronavirus: "From April 12, 2009 to April 10, 2010, CDC estimated there were 60.8 million cases (range: 43.3-89.3 million), 274,304 hospitalizations (range: 195,086-402,719), and 12,469 deaths (range: 8868-18,306) in the United States due to the (H1N1)pdm09 virus."¹ Of those who died, 1,180 were children.²

During the swine flu pandemic, no flights were canceled from any country. There were no state-wide closers of schools in any state—to my knowledge. Restaurants remained open. There were no laws against gatherings of more than 500 people. The Kentucky Derby was still held. The basketball season continued. Major league baseball continued as normal. Graduation ceremonies were held as normal. The stock market did not plummet. I personally believe a large part of the hysteria going on is the fault of mass media. You may disagree—that's fine. My point is that swine flu was contagious, deadly to those who were vulnerable, and yet there was not the present hysteria going on in 2009.

I realize we are not finished with the coronavirus. It is an ongoing problem even as I record this and the numbers are changing even as I speak, but to this point 94 people have died from coronavirus. I'm not trying to minimize the loss of these people. I'm just saying that in comparison with the swine flu, which we survived, the coronavirus has not exceeded that pandemic yet. We pray that it will not pass the devastation of the swine flu. Yes, people should wash their hands. They should cover their faces when they sneeze or cough—but they should have been doing these things out of politeness all along. It is not a danger when healthy people meet together and do things together.

I may be showing my ignorance, and that's okay—I am ignorant on many things. But if gatherings of over 500 people are forbidden, why are 5 people not also forbidden? If only one person is a carrier of coronavirus, that person will spread the virus whether in a crowd of 500 or 5. Will we eventually reach the point where no two people are allowed to associate with each other? Shall every single person isolate themselves from all others for fear that someone may infect them with some bacteria or virus? I think not.

The Church

Now, concerning the church and its services. God has commanded church members to assemble together for worship and we cannot forsake that assembling:

Hebrews 10:25

²⁵ not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

Having noticed the command God gave the church, here is my opinion and my advice.

First, if someone is sick or contagious, I believe God exempts that person from assembling. I believe this because God is the same today as He was during the Old Testament days. In the Old Testament, God's people were commanded to assemble together (Dt 31:12), but people with the contagious disease of leprosy were told not to assemble (Lev 13:46). Leprous people were not held guilty for not assembling. They were separated to keep from infecting the assembly. Because of this, it seems reasonable to conclude that God would view things in the same way today: If a person is contagious or so sick they cannot assemble, they will not be held responsible for staying home in isolation.

Second, if someone knows they have been exposed to a contagious disease, or if they have the symptoms of a contagious disease, they should stay home—especially at this time while the coronavirus is a known problem in our society. What are the symptoms?

- Fever
- Cough—this does not mean a normal cough; this means an abnormal, continuous cough.

- Shortness of breath³—again, this is not normal shortness of breath; this means an abnormal, unexpected shortness of breath.

If a person is experiencing symptoms common to coronavirus, they should see a doctor and isolate themselves from others until they know for certain they are not carriers of an infectious virus.

Third, healthy people should gather for worship as taught in scripture—which includes communion using a common cup (1 Cor 11:23-25).

Individual Communion Cups Are Not The Answer

Growing up I was reared in a congregation of the church of Christ that used individual communion cups. The congregation used individual cups because everyone feared there would be health-related dangers by drinking after others. In those days I had never heard of a congregation using a single, common cup. I will say that, in my limited experience, individual cups did not solve the concerns over disease and germs. When the tray of cups came to me and it was my turn to partake, I carefully inspected the assorted cups. Many times I could not tell if a little cup had been half filled to begin with or if someone had taken the little cup and sipped only half its content out. To "*protect*" myself I tried to choose the cup that appeared to be the fullest. (If this scenario sounds as though I was thinking more about my health than I was about the Lord and His death on the cross, you'd be correct in your judgment.)

In about 1973 my family and I began attending a congregation which used only one cup. They used one cup because that's what Jesus did and that's what the apostles taught by command and example (1 Cor 11:23-25). Individual cups arose, not because people studied the scriptures and learned that individual cups were authorized. Instead, individual cups arose out of health-care-fears—nothing more.

Today our nation is in an uproar over the coronavirus. I'm wondering when congregations will dispense with communion altogether for health-care-fears. Could it be the uncovered, little cups could be breathed on and viruses passed from the brother praying over the tray of cups? Could someone, in choosing their own sanitary little cup, accidentally touch the rim of another little cup and thereby infect the next worshipper with deadly virus? Could touching the tray holding all the cups pass on a virus? Forget about the cup—what about the loaf? Unless the church uses individual wafers (and some do), one is taking a "dangerous" risk by touching a loaf to break off a piece to eat. Even in a tray of individual wafers, can one be sure no one has touched the wafer he or she has chosen to eat?

It seems to me that all sense of trust in God has evaporated. People fear they will get germs if they keep the communion as Jesus taught by His example (1 Cor 11:23-25). I invite everyone listening to or reading this message to trust in God. Obey His commands and, whether we live another hundred years or die today in a car accident, let us serve Him on His terms and trust that He will watch over us.

Romans 14:8

⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Well ... thanks for listening to our message this week. We invite you to visit our website www.WillOfTheLord.com. There you may download the notes and the audio file of the message you just listened to.

Call again next week when we consider a new subject on *Bible Talk*.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/2009-h1n1-pandemic.html>; 3/17/20.

² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2009_flu_pandemic_in_the_United_States; 3/17/20.

³ https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fabout%2Fsymptoms.html; 3/17/20.