

A Brief Rebuttal to Churches that Continue to Meet During the Pandemic

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I have to admit that I'm surprised. I didn't expect churches would continue to meet as the COVID-19 pandemic spread. But the issue has even grown and become very divisive. I wrote my opinion on the subject here: "Love Your Neighbor in the Coronavirus Pandemic" (<https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/love-in-pandemic/>). Briefly, my position is that, because of the high risk for spreading a deadly contagion, showing love to our neighbor means that we must not meet. We are also to obey the civil authorities (Romans 13:1; Titus 3:1), and these authorities are telling us to stay home. Yet, some pastors stubbornly refuse to close their churches. So, I want to very briefly address their arguments.

A couple of examples

"Over 1,200 people attend Louisiana church service, defying coronavirus ban" (shorturl.at/pHJW6)

"Florida Megachurch Pastor Arrested After Defying Order Not To Hold Gatherings" (shorturl.at/qrAGR) It's sad that the state attorney has to remind a church pastor of, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

"Pastor Says He Will Host 'Woodstock'-Like Easter Service in Protest of 'Stay at Home' Orders" (shorturl.at/kIZ35)

Rebuttal to "We're Obligated to Attend Church"

I've already addressed in my article cited above whether God obligates us to attend church and whether He would ever want us to attend when there is such a high risk for spreading a lethal disease. But I want to make another point.

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If we are under grace, what obligation can we have to God? We can have none. Grace is free. There can be no such thing as obligation, repayment, or debt. There can be no such thing as a work we must perform. God has forgiven all of our debts because of the work Jesus Christ has already performed in our stead on the Cross.

Yet, we have one debt to other people: "Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law" (Romans 13:8). Love is the debt we are always to be paying to others. This is not a debt to God. It is our obligation to love others. These others include our brothers and sisters in Christ, our neighbors, and even our enemies. And, the way we are to love others in this time of pandemic is to stay home so we don't spread the virus.

Rebuttal to "It's Our Constitutional Right"

Certainly, Americans have a constitutional right to free exercise of their religion and to peaceably assemble. But let me pose two hypothetical questions. First: Bill's religion requires him to offer human sacrifice. Does he have a right to practice this religion? Second: Olivia's religion tells her that she must peaceably assemble all seven million of her followers in Central Park in New York City for one month and that they must depend on the city to provide them with food, water, hygienic facilities, and temporary shelters. Does Olivia have the right to peacefully assemble her seven million followers?

If you answered "no" to either one or both of the above questions, you understand that constitutional rights are not unlimited. There are ways in which they must be restricted. If church meetings endanger the public health and welfare, why should not the government, which is obligated to protect its citizens, have the right to stop the church meetings? And, even more importantly, if exercising their civil rights endangers others, Christians should be willing to not insist upon those rights for the sake of love.

Christians are supposed to be known for and identified by their love. They shouldn't have to be told by the civil authorities to show love for their neighbors by staying home.

Rebuttal to "But the Pastor Says We're Showing a Lack of Faith to Stay Home"

The pastor who says such a thing will also, when you get sick, say that it is because of your lack of faith. And when you die, he'll tell your loved ones what a shame it was that you lacked faith. The reality is that such a pastor has a corrupt understanding of faith. Faith is a gift from God that causes you to trust

His promises. Does God promise to keep you from getting sick or spreading sickness to others if you go to church during an epidemic? No.

In Matthew 4:6-7, we read of one of the ways the devil tested Jesus in the wilderness. He set Jesus on a pinnacle of the Temple:

And [the devil] said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down. For it is written: 'He shall give His angels orders concerning you,' and, 'In their hands they will lift you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.'" Jesus said to him, "Again, it is written, 'You shall not tempt the LORD your God.'"

Matthew 4:6-7

Jesus didn't consider it a lack of faith to not throw Himself down. He considered it tempting God.

Going to church when there is a potentially deadly contagion spreading exponentially isn't showing faith. It is showing stupidity. Stop following the carnally minded lemmings. Stop listening to the wolves in sheep's clothing who apparently have something other than the welfare of their flocks in mind when they tell them to take health risks.

Suggested Reading

"What Is Faith?"

[\(https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/what-is-faith/\)](https://www.wordofhisgrace.org/wp/what-is-faith/)

Rebuttal to "But the Pastor Still Says We Should Go"

Jesus said, "By their fruits you will know them" (Matthew 7:16). When pastors tell you to do what is contrary to loving others, to ignore the orders and entreaties of government and health authorities, and to believe conspiracy theories instead of the plain facts supported by people becoming ill and dying after attending church services, they are openly declaring that they are not qualified for the position they hold.

*An example of what can happen:
"Nearly 3 dozen who attended Arkansas church event test
positive for coronavirus" (shorturl.at/nwyD9)*

Ignorance may have been an excuse near the beginning of the pandemic. But there is now incontrovertible evidence that is published widely and repeatedly that meeting together is reckless and unloving. Anyone continuing to call for people to go to church, who teaches contrary to the doctrine of love, who speaks contrary to the facts, and who urges disobeying civil orders given for our good is clearly a false teacher and deceitful worker.

What these pastors are doing is exposing their canines from under their sheep's clothing. Plainly, they are wolves. The Bible tells us, "Let all that you do be done in love" (1 Corinthians 16:14). True pastors don't lord it over their brethren (Matthew 20:25-28) and tell them to behave contrary to love, the local and national leaders, and good sense.

Now I beg you, brothers, look out for those who are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and turn away from them. For those who are such don't serve our Lord, Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and flattering speech, they deceive the hearts of the innocent.

Romans 16:17-18

Brethren, let us, as the Spirit-filled sons of God and brethren of Jesus Christ on Earth, be beacons of His love by peaceably practicing social distancing, being careful when shopping for necessities, washing our hands frequently, obeying the authorities, and safely helping others as we have the opportunity.

I pray that God watch over you and you stay in good health.

I intended to finish this article here, but I just got my mail. It included a hand-addressed envelope with the return address of K. Hall and at a street in a nearby town. Inside was a small leaflet with the title, "You Are Welcome to Attend!" and a picture of smiling, welcoming people. It is an invitation from the Jehovah's Witnesses to attend a talk this Sunday at 10:00am and to join them for their "annual commemoration of the death of Jesus Christ" this coming Tuesday! It doesn't take much figuring to conclude that they're trying to take advantage of church closings due to the COVID-19 epidemic to try to gain new members. What it really shows, however, is that these enemies of

the Gospel will apparently not stop at putting people's lives at risk in meetings to "make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, [to] make him twice as much a son of Gehenna as [them]selves" (based on Matthew 23:15)!