

## COVID-19: How Should We Now Live?

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It's likely an understatement to say that the coronavirus caught us by surprise. Who would have said at our respective family Christmas gatherings that Easter worship services would be canceled and we wouldn't be with our families?

Choose your news outlet and you will find that this pandemic has influenced the world in significant ways. Many have lost scheduled appointments and projects, vacations, their jobs and businesses, and even their lives. Many have lost certain "rights" and privileges that they once regularly enjoyed including visiting family and friends, eating out, and going to church.

Beyond the significant impact the coronavirus has had on our routines, our circumstances leave us with many unanswered questions. And as we ask these questions, several have no clear answers. What is actually happening? What is true? Who is reporting objectively? Are there political schemes behind this situation driven by lust for power and control? How should we now live? How are we supposed to respond in these uncertain times?

Once again we are forced to remember and endure the limitations of our knowledge and capabilities. Once again we contemplate the pricelessness of freedom along with its fragility. Once again we need to trust God in His infinite sovereignty, knowledge, and power amidst uncertainty and seek by the Spirit to obey His commands for His glory and the good of our neighbor.

**“We know what we know and what we know is sufficient to live for God’s glory.”**

Deuteronomy 29:29 says, *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”* God has seen fit to reveal *some things* to us in creation and Scripture, but knowledge of many other things remains hidden. We know what we know and what we know is sufficient to live for God's glory. It is an impossibility for God to pass on to us His infinite knowledge. We don't need to know what God has chosen to conceal. God is clear, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”* (Is. 55:8-9).

What is my point? Here it is. This is a time for us to be humble, to trust the reputation of God, and to seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33). Who

among us knows what tomorrow holds? Who among us has a proven plan for an unknown tomorrow? As we necessarily consider many good questions during this uncertain time, it would serve us to carefully consider James 4:13–17:

Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”—<sup>14</sup> yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.<sup>15</sup> Instead you ought to say, “If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.”<sup>16</sup> As it is, you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil.<sup>17</sup> So whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin.

We do not know what today or tomorrow actually hold for us, yet we do know what God requires of us His people: *walking by the Spirit in thankful obedience to His good law*. As long as we have breath, even in uncertain times, our duty and delight is to love and serve God by joyfully and thankfully obey His law (Jn. 14:15). Let us preoccupy ourselves with this great and blessed calling.

But how do we do this? How do we apply God’s law and gospel to the coronavirus pandemic and the questions which arise? How should we now live? Here is a response to several sentiments and questions people seem to have.

### **Things don’t seem to be adding up with the coronavirus situation.**

They may not be. No one understands the situation completely or knows the exact way to respond. We are sailing in uncharted waters *together!* Circumstances like these are opportunities for clandestine wickedness and corruption, for sure, however it is helpful for us to remember that the coronavirus is a new development, and God sees behind the

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veil of secrecy. Judgment Day is indeed approaching. Christians should be quick to give grace, patience, and thanks to researchers, medical workers, politicians, and the general public, and at the same time trust that vengeance for all wrongdoings belongs to God. I don’t think we should be quick to rush to conspiracy theories especially considering this is a *global pandemic* in which many countries are responding similarly. Take heart dear Church, if there is collusion behind the coronavirus, Romans 12:19 applies.

**Is the coronavirus really any worse than influenza? Why are we taking such extreme precautions for a virus that kills less people every day than heart disease, cancer, vehicle accidents, etc.?**

From a scientific standpoint, I don't think we know the answer yet. Influenza has been around since 1918. We've seen its capabilities, learned a lot in 102 years, built up immunity, and yet people still die of influenza. We've been dealing with the coronavirus for less than four months, and many are working hard in a race for a vaccine. Many medical unknowns exist. Johns Hopkins reports:

The COVID-19 situation is changing rapidly. Since this disease is caused by a new virus, people do not have immunity to it, and a vaccine may be many months away. Doctors and scientists are working on estimating the mortality rate of COVID-19, but at present, it is thought to be higher than that of most strains of the flu.<sup>1</sup>

The jury is still out. Has our government been too restrictive? Maybe. Maybe not. Are all these precautions necessary? Maybe. Maybe not. How do we answer that accurately at this point? It helps to remember that more and more people are dying, and they are eternal souls.

How do researchers and statisticians estimate the future effects of a four month old global pandemic? They have limited knowledge. Carelessness could fill many graves quickly. Though the CDC reports differently, some news sources are saying that COVID-19 is becoming the leading cause of death in America. At this point it isn't, but again we are dealing with unknowns. Many could be *overestimating* the seriousness of COVID-19. The opposite is also true. Many could be *underestimating* it. Now is the time to give much grace, patience, and the benefit of the doubt to others.

## **Are we going to go on lockdown every time there is a new superbug or virus discovered?**

I doubt it. Again, the coronavirus is a *global pandemic* effecting 210 countries and territories. You may think back to 2003 and the SARS coronavirus and think, "Our lives didn't really change at all!" The CDC reports that there were 8,098 global cases of SARS and 774 global deaths.<sup>2</sup> Only eight cases were diagnosed in America and no one died. You might think back to 2009 and the H1N1 virus similarly. In a year's time, there were an estimated 60.8 million cases of H1N1 and an estimated 12,469 deaths in the US.<sup>3</sup> The CDC also estimates 151,700-575,400 deaths worldwide from H1N1.<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 is several months old and for the US, deaths from COVID-19 have long passed deaths from SARS and H1N1 combined.

It is a fair question to ask, "Are we overreacting here? Will this happen with every virus or health threat from here on?" Well, I certainly don't know the answer to that, however history says no. The coronavirus appears to be unique.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/health/conditions-and-diseases/coronavirus/coronavirus-disease-2019-vs-the-flu>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/sars/about/faq.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/pandemic-resources/2009-h1n1-pandemic.html>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

**What about our constitutional rights? What if vaccines are mandated? How do we as Christians follow our God-given instincts and at the same time respect authority? Is Gov. Wolf allowed to simply shut down businesses? How will this power translate in the future with other threats? Is the government overreaching its power?**

I will let legal experts and commentators address a bunch of this, but as Christians of 2020, we have enjoyed historically unprecedented liberty. The Christians of other nations are not really asking similar questions about constitutional rights because they don't have rights in their oppressive countries. As I heard one preacher say once, "Democracy is right for now and wicked for later" (referring to the return of our great King Jesus). The US is a constitutional representative democracy, and this is a great thing for us. We should be thankful to God that we have a voice! I would encourage you as Christians to make your voice heard. Contact your local, state, and US legislators, contact political decision makers, contact the President if you have access, and express your thoughts and opinions. I do not think that God requires Christians to sit idly without a voice. We are given many freedoms in the US and we should leverage them prudently.

We should begin by understanding and applying the fifth commandment and the Heidelberg Catechism. Exodus 20:12 says, "Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you." Heidelberg Catechism 104 explains:

**What does God require in the fifth commandment?** That I show all honour, love, and faithfulness to my father and mother and to all those in authority over me, submit myself with due obedience to their good instruction and discipline, and also have patience with their weaknesses and shortcomings, since it is God's will to govern us by their hand.

As we think through how the coronavirus and our government's response effects our rights, and how we should communicate our thoughts and convictions to them, it would help us to remember that authority over us is a God-ordained and good thing.

Romans 13:1-7 is also clear. Read those verses and ask the Holy Spirit to help you apply them with gratitude and joy. They aren't easy verses (especially for Christians under Roman rule in the first century), but they are the heartbeat of those who love God. We cannot forget that government is for our good. We should not resent our government, even with its many flaws. We have arguably the greatest country in the history of the

**“I would encourage you as Christians to make your voice heard.”**

world. First Peter 2:17 says, “Honor the emperor.” First Timothy 2:1-2 calls us to pray for our political leaders and to live a godly life.

At this point, it does not appear that the Church is being targeted in this pandemic. That could change. But, I would encourage you to be diligent to obey God’s law either way – *be subject to your governing authorities*. Be very slow to civil disobedience. Are our authorities asking us to do things that contradict Scripture? Are they demanding that we sin? Christians should respectfully and prayerfully disobey the government when they legislate that which contradicts God’s law; we must not follow in those circumstances. But is that what is happening now? We will give an account to God for how we responded in this situation. Let us carefully consider an appropriate application of the law and gospel.

If our current circumstances do lead to persecution for the Church, which is possible, let us carefully consider the sufferings of Christ; John 15:18ff; the Beatitudes in Matthew 5:2-11; Romans 8:31-39; and the parable of the sower in Matthew 13:1-9, 18-23, particularly vv. 20-21. Civil disobedience is a delicate matter for Christians.

## **Should I wear a mask and practice social distancing when other people don’t?**

I think the main thought that should guide us here is the summary of the second table of the Ten Commandments (the last six) – *love your neighbor as yourself*. How do we do that best? How do we honor our government, but also honor those who we may encounter “out there”?

I run in the mornings. I do not wear a mask, but I also don’t interact with people as I trudge along. My family has gone on walks, hikes, and bike rides. We don’t wear masks, but we are outdoors and don’t get too close to others. Kristina works at the hospital. She wears her mask. I went to Subway to grab some subs. I wore a mask and tried to practice loving social distancing. Not everyone wears masks or practices social distancing. I think we as Christians should. Why? For two basic reasons: we are honoring what our state has asked us to do and we are showing love to those around us. I feel loved when people wear masks and practice social distancing around me. This amounts to a third reason: we desire to love and honor God the best we can. So, regardless of how others respond, what do we believe shows maximum love for God and our neighbors?

## **How should we now live?**

My answer is simple. My answer doesn’t address all the angles. Neither does it answer every question. But I know it’s right. Here’s my simple answer. We should now live as God has called us to live in His Word. We should obey His law. We should take the law and gospel seriously and invest the thought into figuring out how to apply God’s Word to our circumstances. There is much we don’t know in our current circumstances, but we should nonetheless devote ourselves to applying God’s precepts, principles,

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teachings, and moral instructions to our situation because we love God. This requires us to know His Word and to provide one another accountability in the journey.

I'll end with this thought from Paul,

do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6–7).

I think focusing on four simple things would provide you much help: (1) do not be anxious; (2) pray with gratitude asking God for mercy; (3) rest in Christ and the peace he truly gives; (4) strive to obey God's commands and rightly and lovingly apply the gospel each day to your circumstances.

Our God is good. The Spirit within us is powerful. Let us seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness and leave the rest up to our Father.