

# Covid19 Restrictions and Christian Brotherhood

As we all know, there are various opinions on how we should relate to the government and the various restrictions that have been put in place. As none of us have any experience with dealing with a pandemic before, we find ourselves in a lot of uncharted territory and with a myriad of thoughts and opinions.

How do we find our way through these trying times and learn what God wants us to learn? What are the dangers we need to understand and avoid for our spiritual good and survival?

**Here are a few thoughts for us to prayerfully consider:**

## ***Titus 2:11-3:2***

*<sup>11</sup> For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,*

*<sup>12</sup> Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;*

*<sup>13</sup> Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;*

*<sup>14</sup> Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*

*<sup>15</sup> These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.*

*<sup>1</sup> Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,*

*<sup>2</sup>To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.*

## **What Unites Us?**

- No one in our brotherhoods likes the idea of not being able to meet together as a congregation for worship and fellowship. Everyone believes that gathering for worship is essential for spiritual life and fellowship, and that our present situation is not sustainable long term and it cannot continue indefinitely.
- We all believe that we are called to always put our obedience to the higher laws of God, before our obedience to any other authority. No one feels we should just blindly follow whatever the law requires without verifying it against the higher law of God.
- We all believe to some degree or another, that there are probably some sinister forces at work behind the scenes to take advantage of the unique circumstances of this pandemic and try to foil the purposes of God.
- We all believe that God reigns supreme over the kingdoms of this world, and is firmly in control of all these situations, and always has a purpose for what He allows in the lives of His people.

## **What Are Dangers That Could Divide Us?**

Now what are some of the dangers that could divide us in these times? The question that comes up repeatedly is: when and where is the proper time and place to respectfully go choose to disobey a government mandate as a people of God? What is the practical outworking of the Biblical concept that, “we ought to obey God rather than man.” Many times in history when God’s people faced this question, things seemed to be a little more black and white. We recognize that there are different levels of thought among us on how we should practically apply the teaching of the New Testament. On the one hand we are called to respect and obey the civil government; on the other hand, how easily should we give ourselves liberty to challenge the government? There are a lot of different levels of personal conviction, life experience, spiritual maturity, and knowledge of history that make up the dynamics of a brotherhood. We should therefore be careful to not reflect against any brother that may be more hesitant, conscience-wise, to say that this certain area is the clear time and place to decisively choose to disobey the government.

One of the challenges as a Christian people is keeping the clear line of our higher obedience to God separated from our personal struggles with the restrictions placed on us? The lines of principle can get easily blurred if we are not careful. We are easily affected by inconvenience, incoherence, and infringement on personal liberties. We need to carefully discern what is personal and collective frustration, and what is a position of principle that is God directed.

A principle that is God directed is not an optional or negotiable position for the church to take. When the Apostles were instructed by the council to not preach anymore in the name of Jesus, (Acts 4:18-20) the line of principle was not very difficult to delineate. It simply was not an option to stop preaching Jesus to the world! But what happens if we allow some of our personal feelings and frustrations in the midst of these restrictive situations to factor into our feelings toward government? It has been noted with concern by brethren from various congregations and conferences, that there has surfaced a surprising amount of rebel spirit about some of these things among many of the plain people. This has the serious potential to make a clear stand on principle much more difficult, and really will not help us discern God's direction for relating to government intrusion into the spiritual domain of our lives.

For example, I don't think that any of us like the idea of being told we have to wear masks in public, or in stores, etc. Many people may feel that the government has no right to infringe on personal freedoms like this, and tell us what to do. But if we allow our frustration with mask wearing, for example, to be part of our challenge to our required obedience to the government, we cloud the issue and stand more in protest than principle. With that we also hinder our witness, and send a very confusing message to the community. In reality there is no Biblical principle that we can point to for refusing to wear a mask, no matter how much we dislike it! We need to obey and respect where there is no clear line of conflict with the higher law of God, so we are able then to spiritually discern the real lines of conflict that we will yet face in the last days, and be able to take a Biblically mandated stand on principle, and say with the Apostles, "We ought to obey God rather than man".

Another important part is the question of consequences. How often have we asked about or reviewed in our mind the issue of consequences for certain activities as part of our decision? Does the level of consequence for disobedience determine whether we "resist the ordinance", and if so, what does that tell us about the position we have taken? For example, a church or pastor declares that to have church services and worship together on Sunday morning is a mandate from Scripture, and that, regardless of the temporary Covid restrictions, they will

have worship services. If, in this generic example, it really is believed to be a Divine mandate, then there can be no retreat. No matter the increasing fines, or jail time, or whatever; if it's truly a Divine mandate there is no turning back. Keeping this clarity regarding the higher law of God will help us sort out what is a position of principle and what is only our preferences. The testimony of the church in the world is marred when those kinds of declarations are made and then, if the consequences get too severe, the position is recanted.

There is no doubt that we all cringe at the thought of an increasingly authoritarian government, and where some of the trends will lead in the future. But really isn't that beside the point? Paul wrote many of his exhortations and letters of encouragement while living under the reign of one of the most infamous tyrants to ever sit in government. We have faced so little opposition and persecution in the comfortable lifestyles of middle class America, that there may be some confusion on how to relate to the government in these changing times.

There is also the potential for information overload and the needed personal discernment. Proverbs 14:15 - "The simple believeth every word: but the prudent man looketh well to his going." This also a challenge in our time, and has the potential of dividing our thinking on issues. We need the utmost discernment and carefulness as to who we are listening to, and getting our information from! There are opinions, theories, and "scientific" facts that argue every conceivable "truth" about anything under the sun! Depending which way a person may be inclined to think about things, there will be all kinds of "information" to bolster that viewpoint.

While it may not be wrong to be informed of the times in which we live, we need to be sure that we are most concerned with how our brethren feel about these issues, and are finding our spiritual balance among those we know the best and whom we share life in Christ with together. It is important that our sisters fill the place God has given, and support the brethren in the spiritual decisions they are called to make. There needs to be carefulness and discernment with what we choose to share with each other: that it's not on the doom and gloom of this world. Let's keep inspiring faith and a vision for the many positive opportunities God has given us. Our children deserve to hear expressions of faith, trust, and hope, so we can inspire faith in their hearts, instead of fear for the future. They need to hear the stories from us of all that God has done on behalf of His people through the ages, and all His marvelous works of deliverance and providential care. That will help prepare their young hearts to face the future with confidence.

How can we find the way forward together as God's people? We want to first be sure that we are open to the lessons God wants to teach us in these circumstances. This all came upon us because God allowed it for His purposes. It's up to us to carefully consider the opportunities that all this has brought to our doorstep. This truth will also help us when we struggle with negative feelings, and become impatient with these frustrating circumstances. We need to pray that God teaches us and the world whatever it is He wants us all to learn and do. It should be a reminder to us that the comfortable and the seeming security of our lives can and will increasingly be disrupted as we continue into the last days of history.

There are opportunities like we've never seen before to witness and speak to people's fears and anxiety. We should be those who, instead of being just negative and frustrated, are instead pointing to what a faith and trust in God means to us. We have the Rock of Ages as our security, and we need to communicate that to our frightened, frustrated communities!

We should also focus on what we can do in lending helping hands to those in need around us. In history when there were calamities, plagues, and war, God's people reached out to the suffering and the needs that were at their doorstep, serving their fellowmen, even at risk at times to their own safety and health. Is there more we can do locally as brethren and sisters, and our youth in reaching out with helping hands in our communities, shining the beams of light and love into a dark world? May God continue to guide us, as we seek for His "will to be done on earth, as it is in heaven".