

Current Affairs # 34 – Should We Be Going to Church During the Coronavirus, Part 1

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One of the fallouts of the coronavirus has been on how it has affected church meetings, because the tradition is to go to church on Sunday. We have seen certain ones who prefer to be arrested in defying state law. There are documented cases in both Louisiana and Florida. In one case, a fellow named Rodney Howard-Browne has been arrested and charged with various violations. Another fellow in Louisiana has been arrested, as well. Their responses are very interesting to me, because they immediately resort to their legal rights as citizens of a constitutional republic. In specific reference, they refer to the First Amendment provision of religious freedom, which says Congress shall make no law regarding the establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. Now, I want to take just a moment and address that in terms of what is a legal right, as such, but that is not the point of this message. I want to address a central question of whether or not meeting on Sundays is a biblically mandated command from God. I realize that we are wading into the heart of this matter, because it comes to the question of: What actually is the church?

People are choosing to draw a line in the sand, as it were, and making this a test of faith. When you do that, you had better be sure that this is what the Scriptures actually say. Otherwise, any claim to God's protection, or even to doing the will of God in the matter, is not only spurious, but you will get into serious trouble, and God will not defend you on that basis. Obviously, the whole question of spreading the sickness is central to the issue. Is there a biblical mandate to meet together in a building on Sunday to sing songs to God and to hear preaching that preempts the requirement of the law that you stay home and not become a center for the distribution of this virus?

So let's go back to the first question: Do you have an absolute right, according to the Constitution's First Amendment, do you have an absolute right to meet on Sundays? It is clear that the Constitution speaks of these two clauses: the Establishment Clause, and what is called the Free Exercise Clause. So on the one hand,

1. No lawmaking or rulemaking body, whether the Congress or the local zoning board, can make any law that favors one religion over against another.
2. They should make no law regarding the free exercise of religion.

However, there are other provisions in the Constitution that clash directly with the right to have the free exercise of religion. Those issues relate to public health and safety. In other words, the Tenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution requires the government to act, even to the suspension of Constitutional rights, the First Amendment rights, where the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens are concerned. Now in order to decide when the Tenth Amendment trumps another Constitutional provision, such as the First Amendment's religious freedom and Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, there has to be a test that is followed. The judges have to apply a certain test:

1. First, is there a compelling state interest? Well, I think it is pretty obvious that there is a compelling state interest when you have a virus that is lethal and is spreading exponentially. The government's right to actually legislate, or in the executive branch, to act, for the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens clearly arises to the level of a compelling right. No one would challenge that in this environment, at least no one who understands at least this much of Constitutional analysis. Number one, the state must establish that there is a compelling state interest, because that is the requirement for triggering the Tenth Amendment health, safety, and welfare powers of both the judiciary and the executive branch.
2. Secondly, once you have established the compelling state interest, you must further establish that there is a reasonable hope of accomplishing this compelling state interest through the means that you are proposing. But before that, you have to establish that you are using the least restrictive means necessary.

So when the church folks say, "I have my Constitutional right, and it is an absolute blanket right to meet on Sundays," the answer is no. It is not absolutely a blanket right.

- The Tenth Amendment gives the authority to the states to act for the health, safety, and welfare of its citizens. It is easy enough for the executives of the state, and even the federal government, to prove that there is a compelling state interest in keeping you out of assemblies of more than, say, ten people. So, there is a compelling state interest.
- The second element of the test is: Are you using the least restrictive means possible? The fact that there is a compelling state interest does not automatically mean that the state can do whatever it wants to. It is required to use the least restrictive means.

- The third test is it must show that there is a reasonable connection between these means that are used and accomplishing the compelling state interest. So you cannot just apply some arbitrary format, which amounts to no more than the expansion of executive power, under the pretext that because there is a compelling state interest, that you can use whatever means that you think up. You have to use the least restrictive means and you have to show, on the state's side, that these means are reasonably related to the outcome.

That is one aspect of it, and it shows how poorly informed preachers generally are about the idea of how the Constitution actually works. No, you do not have an absolute right to meet every Sunday, not if there are exigencies that trigger the Tenth Amendment's provision that require the state to act on behalf of all of its citizens, not just its church citizens. So if the church citizens pose a problem in the way that this virus is spreading, to become that the church people, in their church assemblies, are coming to be a center for the distribution of the virus, the state has a compelling state interest.

Now shutting down churches is pretty well consistent with shutting down everything else, except the most vital things. So for the church to say, "This is the most vital thing—meeting on Sundays is the most vital thing. We have a mandate from God. So this is not only divine mandate, this is also the freedom of expression of religion, and it trumps everything else." Let's now bore into and look at and consider whether or not such a divine mandate does exist. The typical quote is from the book Hebrews 10:25 which says, "...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." That is the gold standard. There is no other Scripture more to the point of the argument of those who insist that there is a divine mandate for meeting on Sundays than this Scripture. This is the epicenter of it.

Just at first blush, reading the Scriptures, here is what it says: "Do not forsake 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" (Hebrews 10:25). Now this is typically interpreted in this way: Exhort each other during the week to come together on Sunday, and along about Thursday or Friday, you turn up the volume of your exhortation, because Sunday is around the corner. Because,

the implication for them is “and so much more as you see the *Day* approaching,” and they think that means Sunday. What is also true is, whatever this assembling that is spoken of here means, it is against a Day when an assembling is complete. Just on that level alone, and we have many levels to go with this, to show it, to expose what this Scripture means, because it has been used as the line in the sand, foolishly in my estimation, because the ones advocating it simply do not know what it is talking about. But they hold it up as the very essence of a divine mandate that requires them to meet together on Sunday. If they are wrong in this, at this time in the world, that error is dangerous to the population, and the population will not forgive you if you become a center for the spread of this virus. Moreover, it already seems to the population in general that this is a ridiculous and absurd notion: that no matter what, in these environments, you must meet on Sunday. In fact, the fellow in Louisiana quoted on CNN the Scripture that says, “We must obey God rather than man.” So he is staking everything on his understanding of what the Scripture says.

Part of what God is doing in this time is He is bringing everything into the light. And the things that people have been so dogmatic about are being brought up to be examined as well. I say to you, judgment has begun at the House of God, and part of this judgment, not the only aspect of it, is that which requires accuracy in our doctrines. It is no longer a matter of quoting Scripture and getting a pass. You have to be accurate. So in the normal reading, in the regular go to church on Sunday meeting argument based on this Scripture, it is saying, “Do not forsake coming together on Sundays as some people do. But the duty among the people of that order is to exhort or to encourage—call people up, email them, text them—exhorting one another all the more as you see Sunday coming.” That is it. There is not another argument. That is it.

Now I want to go forward and read a little bit more, because that is not a stand-alone verse. That is verse 25. Verse 26 says,

*For [“For” means that it is connected to the foregoing—“because”] if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries (Hebrews 10:26-27, NKJV).*

It goes on from there,

*Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know Him who said, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. And again, "The Lord will judge His people." It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Hebrews 10:28-31).*

Wow! All of that because you did not go to church on Sunday. I will show you again. They stop conveniently short because that interpretation of the Scriptures makes no sense. Because it considers not going to church on Sunday a willful sin, taken after we have received the knowledge of the truth, and it puts us beyond the sacrifice of Christ—"there remains no longer a sacrifice for sin" (verse 26). So if you do not come to church on Sundays, a willful sin of this magnitude, you have put yourself beyond the ability of the sacrifice of Christ to cover you—the death on the cross. And now all you have got to look forward to is "a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation, which will devour the adversaries" (verse 27), which is what you have become if you do not go to church on Sundays.

You see, these people are cowardly. They do not stand by their conviction. None of them would agree that this is so, for not going to church on Sunday. But they use the verse conveniently to get people to come to church on Sunday. So my view is, look, if that is your reading, this is the context: Stay with your conviction. Otherwise, go home. You are not correct. This is not the interpretation. Then, comparing not coming to church on Sunday with someone who rejected Moses' law, so we now make coming to church on Sunday, Christian law, and you died without mercy under two or three witnesses. If two or three witnesses under the law of Moses alleged you did not do something that you should have done, or you did something that you should not have done, then you died without mercy under the law. So if two or three people can testify that you did not come to church on Sunday, you are one who is ready to have a worse punishment—"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose..." (because at that junction, not coming to church on Sunday) "...you have trampled underfoot the Son of God"(verse 29). It gets more ridiculous by the moment. That by not coming to church on Sunday, "you have trampled underfoot the Son of God, and you have counted the blood of the covenant with which you were sanctified, an unholy thing, and you

have insulted the Spirit of grace” (verse 29). All of which means that the vengeance of the Lord will visit you, and it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (verse 30-31). You are in deep trouble.

Now you cannot separate the two from each other, because of the word, “For.” So it says, “Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as is the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see Sunday coming. *For* if you sin willfully...” Is that what that Scripture means? Absolutely not! So let’s plow into it.

The word for “assembling” is the word *episunagóge* (Strong’s Greek 1997), and that is the word found here in Hebrews 10:25. It references a Day— “and so much the more as you see the *Day* approaching.” Now witless teachers have made that Day, Sunday. It is not. Because there is another place where the same word, *episunagóge*, occurs that tells us about what Day he is talking about, and would then speak of a very different form of assembling. Come with me to the book of 2 Thessalonians 2:1.

*Now, brethren, concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our [episunagóge] gathering together to Him, we ask you not to be soon shaken in mind or troubled, either by spirit or by word or by letter, as if from us, as though the day of Christ had come. Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God (2 Thessalonians 2:1-4 NKJV).*

Here, the word *episunagóge*, the exact word for “assembling together” as is used in Hebrews 10:25, is the word that is used here, and it specifies what the Day is; and it is *not* Sunday. It is the Day of the return of the Lord. So the *episunagóge*, gathering together, that is the assembling, not in a church building somewhere, but of the assembling of the Body of Christ into the corporate man, against the Day when the return of the Lord is due. In *that* Day, the bride and the Spirit will be in one mind, and it will be the mind of the Spirit; and the bride and the Spirit will say to the Lord Jesus Christ, “Come, Lord Jesus,” and it will be so.<sup>1</sup> He will come.

So, no, it is not Sunday. I am not arguing against people meeting on Sundays, or meeting anytime they want to, but I am telling you there is no biblical mandate for meeting on Sundays. There is not. And if you insist on one, hoping to have divine protection in the process, do not be surprised if the churches become epicenters of this virus, because God will not protect us in our stupidity. It is time for these preachers to grow up and release the people. You see, *we* are the Body of Christ. It is not a building. The building is not the House of God, because the House of God is a multigenerational family. And people know that, but the preachers will take the shortcut, and the convenience of the shortcut, to get people to sit in the pews. And most of the time, it is about money and it is about their own personal stature and identity. Because if the people are not there, then who are they? The alternative is households, organic functioning households overseen by spiritual fathers, not institutions.

In the next broadcast, I want to tell you how we got here, because of the reference to *episunagógé*. How the church, when it passed through the order of the Roman Empire, began to meet in church buildings, because the Empire gave them church buildings. But before that, they met from house to house. And you can do that anytime, but it is not a mandate from God. It is not a divine mandate. We do not have to meet in order to be the people of God, because meeting is not a substitute for relationships, nor is meeting the basis of relationships. In this time, brethren, in this time God is rewriting the script, and every nonsensical thing that has been used to imprison the people of God is being thrown down. When it is done, we will see a very new and different order, much like it was in the beginning.

I am Sam Soleyn. We will talk more on this subject. Bye-bye.

Endnotes:

1. See Revelation 22:17 NKJV: “And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’ And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come. Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely.”