

Christ's Love, Corona-Virus, and the Cure to Fear (Romans 8)

Well, welcome for those of you joining us live or tuning in to this online! In God's providence a lot has changed since last week, and especially in these last few days (hours!). A global pandemic is spreading with limited testing, and our State government has asked us to take further measures and hold off smaller gatherings like we planned. We've consulted with other pastors and respected voices and sources of what other likeminded churches are doing in our State and for at least today this is what's happening. But I'm thankful for technology so we can livestream and Lord-willing get the video up soon, and let's all be prayerful for God's wisdom for leaders of Church and State. We're hopeful we can meet again soon in a way respectful to govt. directives.

I can relate to Paul like never before when he said these words, 1 Thess 2:17 *'But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face...'* That's the prayer and desire of your leaders, some here with me helping make this possible (thank you deacons and AV folks!). As we met as elders last night, our hearts were torn considering being away in person from you, but we pray it's a short time. Our hearts are with you and we greatly desire to see you face to face soon, Lord-willing. We'll endeavor and all the more eagerly to see how can gather in the future, so pray for that!

We say with Paul in 1 Thess 3:10: *we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith... Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts...*

If that's your heart, say amen! It's ok to say amen in your living room, or wherever you are! I know some of you wouldn't dream of saying amen in church, but I never dreamed there would a Sunday like this! Things will be continuing to change this next week, we may have time to do things better next week, but what won't change is God and His Word. With all the bad news on media and social media, there's good news we need to hear today. Turn to the book of Romans, a book all about the good news or gospel, the power of God for believers. We'll be in Rom 8 but let's start in Rom 13 first

As things changed late this week and again late last night my message plans kept changing to try to keep up. With local and national emergency declared these last 48 hours, I need to preach Christ, Coronavirus, and a Cure to Fear. Our president declared today a National Day of Prayer, so we'll start there. We were in Rom 12 last month, let me read from Rom 13 before we pray.

13:1 *Let every person **be subject to the governing authorities**. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.* ² *Therefore whoever **resists the authorities resists what God has appointed**, and those who resist will incur judgment ... [look what v. 4 says of a governor] ... **he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid** ... [v. 5] *Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also **for the sake of conscience**.* ⁶ *For because of this you also pay taxes, for the **authorities are ministers of God**, attending to this very thing [and v. 7 adds we're also them pay respect and honor. v. 10] ... Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.**

Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for governing authorities on earth that you have appointed for our good. They are your servants, agents who assist your purposes, including stopping what would harm. We thank you for how you minister through those who protect and serve on local and national levels, and those who have to make the difficult decisions for their citizens, including life and death decisions. Our president, our governor, and medical authorities under them are ordained by and instituted by you. And for the sake of our conscience and our community witness and our care for neighbors, especially vulnerable ones, we obey your command in this text.

You tell us here we don't need to fear if we submit to them, but we pray for those living in fear. Many in our county are tempted to be suspicious of govt rather than being subject to govt. But God, we submit so we don't resist you

We pray globally for China, South Korea, Iran and Italy [in those] most affected
 – Other countries who are in the developing world who may not have the resources
 – health care leaders worldwide to work with discernment in developing treatments
 – global economic implications, relationships, W.H.O. to act wisely, not spark fear

We pray locally for people suffering...families with those ill, those who have died. For health care workers on the front lines...schools, events for protection, wisdom.

[As some focus on the stock market, or stockpiling goods, help us focus on the Sovereign].

We pray personally as a church ... we might have the courage to care for others ...

... taking precautions ... – that our church finds very practical ways to help in our [community] ... that we would turn to prayer to a greater degree ...that we as the church would see this as an opportunity to show the love of Christ [in His name].¹

These prayer points I found from an online source and I'm adapting them and I'll make this prayer available with links later on our sermonaudio page

May we who are merely inconvenienced remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors remember those most vulnerable. May we who have the luxury of working from home remember those who [can't] ... May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close remember those who have no options. May we who have to cancel our trips remember those that have no safe place to go. May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market remember those who have no margin at all. [Or if we have to] settle in for a quarantine at home remember those who have no home.

...During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other, [may God help us] find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbors.²

Rom 13:9-10 says loving our neighbors is the highest duty of the law. And the law of govt authority is also connected to that in this context. Fulfilling the law is love. And our motivation for changing plans today wasn't fear, it was following this text. We also have a responsibility to love our neighbors who could be in danger here, especially with dozens of elderly believers on Sunday mornings, but also others at risk (and the danger is higher than a flu as the symptoms aren't apparent for a long time, or some carriers not at all).

As I drafted an initial email Friday, one statement was we plan to abide by what our medical and civil authorities ask us, including if more restrictive parameters were given than # of people in a gathering (we confirmed more).

So till there's more clarity, many in CA will gather in houses like NT times but PTL in our times many homes can hear the same message the same time

The space-limit isn't mean-spirited persecution singling out Christians, it's meant for protection of citizens they say aren't safe gathering close together. I know some people tend to be critical, others tend to be cynical, others tend emotional or fearful. I have no intent to be political, I want to be biblical. As your pastor teacher, my goal is to help shepherd us in how we should pray, what we could say in response to our world. Last month we studied Rom 12, it says don't conform to the pattern of this world (how they think or speak) but be transformed by the renewing of our mind, so you'll know God's will. Turn to Rom 8. In God's providence this text we're memorizing is so timely

The goal of scripture memory is meditation for transformation

I didn't have to look for what to preach on today, this next text says it best.

Next 2 weeks of fighter verses are on Christ's unchanging love (8:35-39).

There's so much here and in Romans that speaks to those who groan or fear. When I preached on this a last month I didn't really get to the end. I said then maybe I would later. But I want to first read the context of v. 15-28 and set up that most famous v. 28, to see the powerful flow before that promise.

8:15 *For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into **fear**, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom **we cry, "Abba! Father!"***¹⁶ *The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,*¹⁷ *and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided **we suffer with him** in order that we may also be glorified with him.*¹⁸ *For I consider that **the sufferings of this present time** are not worth comparing with the **glory that is to be revealed to us**...*

²⁶ *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with **groanings too deep for words.***²⁷ *And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*²⁸ *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose...³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall **tribulation or distress** or persecution or famine or nakedness or **danger** or sword?³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being **killed all the day long**; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."*³⁷ *No, in all these things we are **more than conquerors** through him who loved us.*³⁸ *For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers,³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

And all God's people at home said... Amen! This is the context where Paul called Christians in the pagan persecuting Roman empire to submit to govt. They had great fears in v. 35-36, some would be killed as animals in arenas. Others died by plagues, pestilence, or disease, or other dangers and distress. But that didn't conquer the church, they were more than conquerors in God. No violence or virus stops the church. Our outline reverses the sermon title:

1. **The Cure for Fearful Believers**
2. **The Christ Who Loves us So**

Personal recent conversations: I know a fearful lady with family in Wuhan.

Also voices of other pastors we've heard in person, some Corey or I know.

How is the church to respond? Frank Erb reminded our men how we're *not* to respond. The passage of the hour isn't Rom 16 'greet one another with a holy kiss.' James 4:8 does say 'wash your hands, you sinners' (a bit different context:) But he pointed out there is a biblical basis for illness isolating from worship. Disease is part of Rom 8:19-22, this fallen world (5:12 death spread by sin).

What's the cure for fearful believers – in v. 15 we're not to be enslaved to fears, we're not to fall back into ways unbelievers are bound by fear like a slave in chains. We should fall forward on our face praying to our Father. We shouldn't freak out, we should cry out in prayer. Abba is the cry of a son in need. The word pandemic shouldn't make us panic. Why? A loving Father is at work, and in v. 16 His Spirit is at work confirming His children.

Suffering shouldn't make us fear we're not His child, v. 17 says we have to suffer, even as God's Son suffered. And it's all for glory as v. 18 explains.

What's the bigger picture cure? v. 28 says this Father is working all things together for good for those who love Him, those who are called according to His purpose. All things includes coronavirus! God works together His good purposes in all things. How? The Lord is sovereign. He controls all things.

Kuyper: 'Not one square inch on earth over which Christ doesn't say mine.'

Sproul says of sovereignty 'there is no maverick molecule in the universe'

Spurgeon says His sovereignty is 'the pillow to rest our heads on at night.'

Corrie ten Boom, who had much to worry from the Nazis, wrote “Worry doesn’t empty tomorrow of its sorrows, it empties today of its strength.”³

Solomon said “If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small.”⁴

Let me urge you to listen less to cable TV (or not at all) and more to Christ. Listen to Lk 12: *“I tell you, my friends, do not fear ... Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God. Why, even the hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not; you are of more value than many sparrows... do not be anxious about your life... which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? If then you are not able to do as small a thing as that, why are you anxious about the rest? ... do not ... be worried. Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom... seek his kingdom ... where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”* Where’s your treasure and trust?

These waves of coronavirus could subside next week or grow, either way, we look to the Lord Jesus who walks on the water to His fearful disciples and says ‘*Take heart, it is I. Do not be afraid.*’⁵ He calms waves or worriers.

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me...Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid ... “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” (Jn 14:1, 27, 16:33)⁶

Which takes us to our closing point: **Christ Who Loves Us So (Rom 8:35)**

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger... ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Say amen wherever you are! Listen, we don’t know the future, but we know the One who holds the future. As believers we can be sure of His sovereign love. If our rulers make laws that temporarily separate larger gatherings of churches into smaller gatherings, we still have a big God and nothing can separate us from His love in Christ if Jesus is our Lord. Memorize these verses! For those of you that tuned in on our website, one of the flash pages besides the livestream link is Fighter Verses, which has verses printed out.

Nothing can separate believers from Christ’s love and don’t let this week be a time you stay separate from believers. Don’t give up meeting together in some way, in smaller settings, we’ll need the body of Christ all the more in these days. Rom 8 is building to Rom 12, our commitments as members, to live out Christ’s love to others. Homework: take time after this as a family or individuals, read Rom 12 and talk about how to live that out this week.

I want to end with thinking about how we can speak to the unsaved in this time. Everyone is talking about this, we need to talk about it in a different way than talk show talking points. We’ll have opportunities this week to model hope that unbelievers don’t have, so they might ask the reason for the hope within us, and let’s make sure we answer with gentleness and respect. Sarcasm about people going crazy over this isn’t what’s needed, sympathy is what’s needed, and sensitive words of gospel hope. If more isolation stays the trend, let’s pray all the more for open doors and for gospel conversations

If you’re not in Christ, you should fear death, wrath. You need good news. They asked Jesus in Lk 13 about a disaster that wiped out a bunch of people. Jesus replied they weren’t worse sinners but if you don’t repent, you perish.

One writer says ‘point them to the One who cares and can cure any disease including the most fatal...sin!...As bad as the CoronaVirus seems to be there is something far worse than an early death. That is...eternity in Hell...

When the tower of Siloam fell, Jesus didn't take the opportunity to mock those in fear. At the same time, he didn't seem to assuage their fears, instead he used the opportunity to call them to repentance and therefore to teach us how to respond... [in Lk 13 when all those people died and everyone was talking about it, Jesus used that] to point people towards their greatest need.

... Psalm 1 describes the world as being like chaff in the wind! Whenever the wind picks up a little bit they blow around without any ability to stop, they have no anchor to be able to hold onto to keep them from panicking.

Believers on the other hand are like trees firmly planted (at least we should be) and we are not to mock the chaff that is flying wildly around us, but rather we are called to model what it's like to be people who meditate on the law of the Lord day and night and use this opportunity to point troubled souls to the cross...it's hard to not get drawn into political battles and I know it's hard to not mock the over the top doomsday scenarios we are hearing from people and the media around us, but the sake of the lost I suggest we keep our jokes to ourselves and do what we are called to do. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ begging people to be reconciled to Him. May God use this CoronaVirus to bring people to their knees in repentance and cause us all to hope in Him rather than this world!⁷

Think about it another way, there's something more lethal and widespread in this world, that no man can mitigate or contain. The epidemic of sin is already in every man, woman, and child. It was passed on from our first parents Adam and Eve, and man will never come up with a cure for it. All will die, it's just a matter of time. The Bible says the heart of sinners is incurably sick, who can know it? Most in our world with coronavirus will recover, but the corruption of sin will take us all out. The prognosis is 100% death, and eternal death for those who aren't living in Christ's kingdom.

And because of sin, the whole world could be judged at any time when the Lord returns to pour out vials of wrath that Revelation describes as plagues. But He's also given an antidote for man's pandemic sin problem: the cross.

One writer says 'The story of the Bible is the story of a God who entered a world infected with this virus. He lived among sick people, not wearing a chemical protective suit but breathing the same air as we do, eating the same food as we do. He died in isolation, excluded from his people, seemingly far from his Father on a cross—all that he might provide this sick world with an antidote... that he might heal us and give us eternal life.'

Let's pray. Abba Father, we cry out to you. Help your people not fall into fear that enslaves. We see that this world is fallen but we thank you that for us who are in Christ Jesus, who trust Him as Lord, nothing in this world can separate us from your love. May your love compel us as your ambassadors.

¹ <https://nabconference.org/coronavirus-in-your-church/>

² *Ibid.*

³ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/christians-anxious-coronavirus/>

⁴ Proverbs 24:10.

⁵ Matthew 14:27.

⁶ NIV.

⁷ <https://thecripplegate.com/wasting-the-coronavirus-and-mocking-our-mission-field/>