

## **Basic Teaching**

### **Topical – Coronavirus – A Test of Faith**

The Coronavirus or Covid 19 as it is also called has been and still is a unique experience for this world. In many ways it is a great test.

It is a test for nations, a test of their efficiency and resources. It is a test for individuals, of their character and resilience. But it has also been an unprecedented test for the people of God, a test of faith and of faithfulness. There have been and still are more severe tests, but not on a universal scale, affecting saints of all nations.

The tragedy is that in general the saints seem to have failed the Lord miserably, and continue to fail Him. We can only speak from personal experience, and hope that conditions are different in other parts of the world, but it seems that as the commencement of the pandemic produced a landslide of panic and unbelieving fear, so as conditions ease we are confronted with another such landslide of unbelief and fear.

The main reason why God has left His people in this world is to bear testimony to His Son, not to seek our own temporal and physical welfare, yet to most the latter seems to have become the number one priority in all their thinking and acting. Many saints stopped attending the meetings and most assemblies ceased gathering and closed the doors, quite voluntarily, before even the government considered it necessary. Why? Because physical health and safety was more to them than the service of the Lord who had loved them and given Himself for them: because their fear of the virus was greater than their fear of the Lord.

Once the government forbade church gatherings it was right to obey, but as the prohibition is lifted how ready are we to take advantage of it? Of course the permission is conditioned by many restrictions which some companies would find it impossible to comply with. But many companies who can comply with the restrictions are dragging their feet and others, much more seriously, are instigating changes to the divine pattern of gathering which are totally unscriptural.

As conditions ease we observe another landslide of panic and unbelieving fear. Assembly after assembly is found introducing into the Breaking of Bread individual cups and even, in some cases, individual portions of bread, practices which are not only totally unscriptural, but are even anti-scriptural. Again we ask, why? And again we have to answer; it is because fear of the virus is greater than the fear of the Lord.

If we are prepared to deviate from the crystal clear divine pattern of the most precious ordinance which God ever entrusted to man, the remembrance of His Son and the celebration of His sufferings and death which He Himself instituted in the very night in which He was being betrayed up to that death of the cross, then nothing is sacred to us any more, and it must be said once again, “This they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do”.

Like the evil king Ahaz who went to Damascus and saw an altar there that impressed him, and had a replica made so that on return he could push aside the altar of God and replace it with this innovation, so believers are replacing “the cup of the Lord” in the worship of God with the individual cups which have long been in vogue in apostate Christendom.

We are totally non-plussed by the behaviour of those we thought were good and well-taught saints who seem to have trodden this way without even asking themselves, Is this Scriptural? Is this pleasing to God? And the more who do it, the more will do it, because it panders to their fears, and stifles any feeble pang of conscience.

The Gospel records of the institution of the breaking of bread state with one accord that the Lord took a “cup” (singular) and told the disciples to drink from “it” (singular). It is worth pointing out that in New Testament Greek “cup” and “drink” are words derived from the same root, so the cup is specifically a drinking vessel not a pouring vessel. The Lord put into the hands of His disciples a drinking vessel and told them “all” to drink from “it”.

If it be argued that “cup” speaks of the contents rather than the vessel, then it should be said that the contents are “the cup” when they are the contents of the cup. Wine in a pouring vessel or in many cups and never in “the cup” at all cannot by any stretch of imagination be regarded as “the cup”. This is absurd and shows how men are prepared to abandon all sense as well as Scripture. Sadly many are.

When Paul in 1Cor. ch.11 details afresh the institution of the remembrance he speaks no less than five times of “the cup” or “this cup” and once indeed of “the cup of the Lord”. The Lord ordained and authorized only one “cup”. This is so clear that we cannot understand how it can be ignored or rejected. The use of individual cups is to depart from the crystal clear, frequently stated, divine pattern for the breaking of bread.

But more, it is to destroy completely the divine picture of the breaking of bread. In 1Corinthians ch.10 the subject of the chapter is fellowship, and the apostle instances the breaking of bread as an example of it. The fact that all in the local assembly give thanks unitedly and corporately for the appointed cup before drinking of it, and that all partake of one loaf is a picture of “the communion of the blood of Christ” and “the communion of the body of Christ”. The use of independent individual cups destroys what the communal cup so beautifully pictures, “the communion of the blood of Christ”. What a tragic loss and what an arrogant innovation to rob both God and men of this precious picture! What should be more precious to us than this, “the communion of the blood of Christ”?

The use of individual cups also displays continually and publicly our unbelief. The reason why we disobey God is because we cannot trust Him to keep us. Many say it is wiser and safer to use individual cups, and so it is from the merely human standpoint, but that is leaving God out of the reckoning entirely, something God’s people should never do. It is never wiser to disobey God than to obey Him, and it is never safer to distrust Him than to trust Him. Those who bring God into their reckoning will not need to be told that God expects His people to obey Him and leave the consequences in His hands by simple faith. God is wiser than men and we can never improve on His pattern. The most foolish and dangerous thing

Christians can do is to dare to disobey Him because we do not dare to trust Him. That is the highroad to well-deserved disaster.

The same practice discredits our worship. How can we pretend to worship God when week by week we flaunt before His face our disobedience and distrust? Where is our fear of God or love for Christ? If we love Him we will keep His commandments, obeying His instructions, not ignoring them. Such worship of a God we do not obey nor trust is an empty mockery. It shows we are breaking bread to please ourselves, not to please God.

But finally the practice disqualifies us from preaching the gospel.

How can we tell men that they need to give eternal matters priority in their lives and heed the word of God rather than the opinions of men, when we are all too obviously making physical and temporal welfare *our* priority and are ready to reject the word of God to do it?

How can we tell men that the only way of salvation is to abandon their own ideas and devices and trust alone in Christ to save them from Hell, when we cannot trust Him even to save us from 'flu and trust to our own devices instead?

How can we tell men that Christ is a mighty victorious Saviour who has overcome death and taken away all fear of death, when we are so obviously scared of catching a virus that has caused people to die? We are making it all too obvious that we are just as scared to die as they are. So much for Christ and His salvation!

How can we tell men that Christ has purchased a glorious heaven for all believers, an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, when we are desperately trying to stay out of it and remain in this poor world for as long as we possibly can, and by any device we can invent?

Our disobedience and unbelief robs us of all credibility in the gospel.

It is not for us to behave either foolishly or presumptuously, but to obey God and humbly trust Him is neither, though the worldly-wise and ungodly will think and say so.

Thank God for every good and godly soul that has proved faithful and every assembly that has held to the Scriptural pattern, though they are tragically few and far between.

We have known saints who are elderly and frail in health who have been advised by medicos and by government propaganda to isolate themselves, who have continued to support assembly gatherings right up until they were forbidden, and who recommenced attendance the moment restrictions were lifted, and who have scorned the very idea of individual cups. We have also known godly sisters who have been disgusted and distressed by the decisions made by elder brethren.

Such saints are a joy to the heart of God and a great encouragement to others who would seek to stand for God in a day of landslide.

May God abundantly bless all such and challenge and recover those who for one reason or another have failed to put God and His word and His interests in first place in their lives during this testing time.