

Spiritual Growth in a Crisis

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I am writing this article in April, 2020, in the middle of the Coronavirus crisis. This article is being published in a later issue, so I cannot be sure if we are still in it, but whether we are or not, I would like to share with you an observation that I was glad to note at the early part of this crisis that continued to be manifest as the crisis continued. As a matter of fact, it was indeed a blessing to observe!

Immediately after this crisis began, it became apparent the vast majority of the Lord's congregations were not going to be able to publicly assemble at any time for a while. Yes, a very few could continue to meet legally due to their very small numbers, but the vast majority of churches could not meet. Of course, we understand this was an attempt to lessen the number of infections and fatalities at the same time or to "flatten the curve" as it is being called in the general population.

This obviously put brothers and sisters in a quandary, and many of them asked, "What can we do?" or "How can we continue to serve and worship the Lord in spirit and in truth?" and "What does God's Word say about what the Lord expects from us, His people in these circumstances?" These are all valid questions that needed to be addressed. And brethren were wrestling with these and other similar questions for answers. Personally, I liked what I was seeing.

Of course, I am not referring to the virus and its many implications, for those in their own right were a grave danger to our society in specific and even to the world in general. I am specifically referring to the mental and spiritual exercises that brethren were going through. These were good and sobering questions, for it was obvious to Christians that the Lord still expected them to be His people for their own benefit and for those of the world who were watching.

As one would expect, after these many discussions, thoughts, and, I am confident, many prayers, brethren came to differing answers. Personally, that was okay with me, for I can easily understand that. After all, there is no earthly headquarters that the Lord's people can turn to for instructions. There is no clergy, as the denominations of men have, to give Christians direction. To be sure, there is the Word of God, and while some might say it contains clear answers to these important questions, of that I am not so certain. However, there are certainly principles to consider and help brethren come to conclusions.

And yet, there is still room for discussion and judgments to be made as brethren tried to navigate these seemingly special circumstances that we have had to face. It is my thought we must give brethren room to come to their own consciences in these matters. Am I, as an evangelist, the final word or authority? Are other men as leaders among the churches the final word? Of course not! Ultimately, these questions must be settled on a congregational basis only by the various elderships or by evangelists that lead some congregations or even by individual brothers who are working to lead the congregations they are part of to the best of their abilities. To be sure, there have been times in the past when brethren seemed to look to men to be spokesmen and voices for the body at large, but in many of these instances harm came as a result to many of the Lord's congregations to various extents. The Lord purposefully and with godly wisdom made His church without such earthly headship, for only Christ holds such a position.

It is for this reason that I personally trust each individual congregation to make judgments as they see fit. Are there some answers that I personally have not agreed with? Of course. But I feel I must give brethren the benefit of the doubt.

What will be the end result with brothers and sisters as they wrestle with these spiritual issues? There will be spiritual growth! As a matter of fact, there already has been that I have seen! I have personally seen and interacted with some brothers and sisters who have considered these issues with seriousness and earnestness who have never seemed to be very involved before. I am confident they have grown in their spirits due to gaining knowledge and wisdom as they have wrestled with these very important issues for what may indeed be the very first time. They have asked, "What does God want me to do?"

It may be as simple as brothers who have realized, for the very first time, they are to be the spiritual heads of their families. Perhaps they have had to lead their families in devotional activities in the privacy

of their homes that may have included reading the scriptures and praying and speaking of the great spiritual matters that they have been “forced” to consider due to special circumstances that we all have been facing. Who knows, there may even have been seeds planted in their own hearts that may lead them to participate more in their individual congregations as they begin to meet once again. And, can you imagine the precious rejoicing and better appreciation of the assemblies when they do start again! I already praise the Lord for His mercy and courage that He has already and will continue to pour out upon those with soft and sincere hearts. Perhaps they have only needed these “special” circumstances to water and fertilize the seeds that may have been already present in their hearts that they themselves may not have realized.

May we all learn and appreciate more of the truths and guarantees taught in **James 1:2-5**. May God continue to be with His people scattered throughout this earth as they deal with these various trials. In the end, I am confident the Lord will be glorified if His people hold to Him.