

Corona Virus Letter

(Sent: March 28, 2020)

Hi Friends,

During this challenging time, I would like to share some ideas from the Word of God regarding the perspective Christians should have both now and for our remaining time on earth.

First, in regard to governing authorities, we should be thankful for them as they occupy God-established positions to protect us from evil – in this case the Corona Virus (Rom. 13:1-5; 1 Pet. 2:13-14). Following Peter's exhortation to be subject to governing officials, he says "the will of God is while doing good to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1 Pet. 2:15). Then he instructs believers to not use "freedom" (from being controlled by sin) as a cloak for evil, but as "slaves of God" (v. 16). From this context, we can conclude that true service to God includes maintaining Christian attitudes and traits in our testimony to the world (vv. 11-12).

Later in the same passage, Peter says to "honor all . . . honor the king" (2:17). In verse 14, he shows this includes "governors", and in Romans 13:1, Paul cites "superior authorities" as a blanket statement covering all governing leaders. The word "honor" which Peter employs most basically means "to value" which should direct believers' focus to the value authorities are to us. Also, Paul uses the noun form of this word in Romans 13:7. The fact that both Paul and Peter command believers to be subject to these authorities implies we won't agree with some of what they say and do (cf. Titus 3:1-2). However, our testimony to the world, which is what is most important to God, is crucial for society and our witness can only be fueled by Spirit-empowered character. We can attain a good witness when we develop motives which proceed from a godly "conscience" (Rom. 13:5). In addition, Christians are instructed here to pay taxes to fund the efforts of these authorities while recognizing they have a constructive purpose (vv. 6-7).

Okay, what am I driving at? In practical terms, whenever possible and most the time it is, I should render value and compliance to the dictates of President Trump who is a Republican as well as Kate Brown who is the Democratic Governor of my state. Note Paul's emphasis in the context just before dealing with authorities. It exhorts believers to love our enemies, not hang with the proud, not repay evil for evil, be at peace if it is at all possible, allow God Himself to divvy out vengeance, and not to be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:14-21). According to verse 9, these actions represent "love", and "love" shows the world who God is, because He is love (1 John 4:7-8).

This is just one aspect of how the Word instructs Christians to think and act. I would like to share more biblical instructions which can help us develop a mindset upon which Spirit-enabled actions and intentions are formed.

First, who are we as Christians? It is essential that we recognize we are “strangers” and “sojourners” on earth (1 Pet. 2:11). These words could also be translated “aliens” or “foreigners”. Paul uses one of these same words in combination with a different word to describe how Gentiles were “alienated” from the citizenship of Israel and “strangers” to the promised covenants when the Jews were God’s chosen people (Eph. 2:12, 19). However, now in the Body of Christ, Jewish and Gentile believers are both one in Christ (2:13-22). Our eternal affiliation is not of this world, including the country in which we live. Scripturally, our affiliation is characterized by being part of a spiritual “Jerusalem” which encompasses those who are perfect before and acceptable to God in Christ (Gal. 4:26; Heb. 12:22).

So, how does God look at mankind today? He sees two groups of people: believers and unbelievers, also termed as those being saved and those perishing (1 Tim. 4:10, 12 // 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Thess. 2:10). Another way these two groups are defined is those “inside” and “outside” the Church (Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Cor. 5:12-13). Furthermore, Christians are called the “sons” or “children” of God, while unbelievers are described as “sons” or “children of disobedience” and are associated with the devil (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-6 // John 8:44; Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:3-4). Unfortunately, many Christians believe all men are children of God. However, although the Bible teaches all men are God’s created beings, have innate value, and are related to our common father, Adam, spiritually speaking, only those who believe in the work of Christ are the children of God.

Since God looks at humanity in this way, shouldn’t we too recognize His expressed division of mankind? And, by doing this, we would not discriminate between believers who have different backgrounds according to societal definitions. Thus, in reality, Christians are comprised of people from all countries, races, social positions, as well as both sexes. Yet, in our spiritual reality, all of these distinctions disappear because every believer occupies a righteous position before God in Christ and are members of the Body of Christ – all gifted and possessing equal value. For, “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28-29; 1 Cor. 12:14-26; 1 Pet 3:7).

In consideration of the next concept related to how believers should view themselves, note Paul’s statement that “our citizenship exists in the heavens” (Phil. 3:20). The English word “politics” is a transliteration of this word translated

“citizenship”. This word accurately defines the connection a group of people has such as those who make up a nation. It is used in this manner referring to the Nation of Israel in Ephesians 2:12. To God, Christians’ earthly nation of origin is immaterial, for in His eyes we are all part of the spiritual “household of God” – the Body of Christ (Eph. 2:15-22). In essence, we should not define our citizenship by the earthly nation we originate from, but by the spiritual reality we have been saved into with the hope of being conformed to the sinless image of our Savior when He comes (Phil. 3:20-21). In Christ, American, Russian, Italian, Nigerian, Iranian, Brazilian, Canadian, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, Polynesian, and Dutch believers lose their earthly identity and graduate to a spiritual reality as unified citizens of heaven.

Now, what are we to do as members of this divine group? Well, Paul instructs believers to “conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ” (Phil. 1:27). The word translated “conduct yourselves” is the verb form of the noun “citizenship” in 3:20. So this is literally telling us how we are to live as citizens of heaven. Later in verse 27, this action is explained as “contending together in the faith of the gospel”. Sometimes this verse has been interpreted to support believers arguing with one another in regard to what we believe. However, the word translated “contending together” is transliterated into the English verb “being athletic”, and it occurs here in combination with the preposition meaning “with”. Therefore, this verse really emphasizes how Christians are to speak and live as representatives of the gospel since we, as a group, participate together like athletes on the same team.

How we became part of this team is shown in the following verses which say we were granted saving faith by God in conjunction with His desire for us to suffer for Christ amidst the unbelieving world – our true opposition (1:28-29). Encouraging the need for humility and purposeful unity among believers to accomplish this task is the real intent of this passage. And, the ultimate example showing how we can do this is the model set by Christ Himself (2:1-11). When we join in this great fight together, we will be “lights in the world” as we serve the Lord. In addition, we will have joy far beyond what this world can offer (2:12-18).

In closing, I’d like to expand on the original thought of the actions Christians should have toward earthly authorities. In First Timothy 2:1-3, we are instructed to pray for them “in order that we might live a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and respectability, for this is good and acceptable in the presence of our savior, God”. The stated purpose for which God wants us to do this is He “desires all men to be saved and to come unto a full knowledge of the truth” (v. 4). The powerful and effective message God has provided to accomplish this goal revolves around His provision of Jesus Christ, the Mediator between Himself

and man, who procured redemption for the sin of the world by His death on the cross and subsequent resurrection (vv. 5-6).

In conclusion, we who are “aliens” and “foreigners” in this world; we who represent God as His “children”; we who are believers saved by grace; we whose citizenship (political association) is heavenly; and we who have God’s purpose of sharing the message of the gospel to the unsaved as well as helping believers fully know the truth, let us occupy our minds and hearts with His heavenly purpose! Only the true movement of God – all believers who comprise the Church – united together can accomplish what He desires for us to do.

When we focus on our righteous position in Christ before God, our promise of eternal life, and the divine joy derived from sharing the gospel, we can experience God’s peace and quiet confidence during this present time of turmoil as well as any future event causing affliction. Christians can experience the positive virtues which result from walking by the Spirit which consists of utilizing His power to follow His ways (Gal. 5:22-23). When we lose this focus, our flesh which likes to do evil naturally takes over producing strife, jealousy, hatred and factions – counterproductive actions which await our participation (Gal. 5:19-21).

The word “factions” refers to a “party spirit” and is also translated “rivalries” in some Versions. The meaning of this word is accurately illustrated by what we see in the political parties of this country. Passage after passage in the Epistles drill believers not be controlled by divisive intentions promoted by earthly factions. All Christians need to remember we are on the same team in addition to having the same directives/mandates in the Word of God. Each of us should make sure no other platform controls our actions. Every day Christians have many choices to make. May we be sure to “walk in the Spirit and you will not perfect the lust of the flesh” (Gal. 5:16). Finally, God deserves our constant thanks for what He has done and wants us to commit all of our petitions to Him in prayer while realizing we can truly rely on Him as well as His revealed Word (Phil. 4:6-7).

Cordially,

Chuck Schiedler

chuckschiedler@yahoo.com

www.edifiedliving.net

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