

Corona Virus Letter

(Sent: March 28, 2020)

Hi Friends,

During this challenging time, I'd 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 reference to governing authorities, we should be thankful for them since *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 not to use their “**freedom**” (from being controlled by sin) as a cloak for “**evil**”, but as “**slaves of God**” (v. 16). From this passage, we can conclude true service to God includes maintaining Christian attitudes and traits in our testimony to the world (vv. 11-12).

Next, Peter says to “**honor all . . . honor the king**” (2:17). In verse 14, he specifies this includes “**governors**”; also, Paul uses the phrase “**superior authorities**” as a blanket statement which covers all leaders (Rom. 13:1). The verb “**honor**” (*τιματε*) most basically means “**to value**” which is intended to *direct our focus to how authorities benefit us*. Also, Paul uses the noun form of this verb in Romans 13:7 to teach the same principle.

The fact both he and Peter command Christians to be subject to authorities implies we won't agree with some of what they say and do (cf. Titus 3:1-2). However, our testimony, **which is most important to God**, is crucial for our witness to society and can only be fueled by Spirit-empowered character. So, we're able to maintain a good witness by developing motives which proceed from a godly “**conscience**” (Rom. 13:5). Lastly, we're instructed to pay taxes to fund the efforts of these authorities, which also affirms we appreciate their 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 be compliant to the dictates of President Trump who's a Republican as well as Kate Brown who's the Democrat Governor of my state. Note Paul's emphasis just before he addresses how believers should respond to leaders. He exhorts us to love our enemies, not hang with the proud, not repay evil for evil, to promote peace with all men, allow God to divvy out vengeance then, to sum up, not to “**be overcome by evil but overcome evil with**

good" (Rom. 12:14-21). According to verse 9, these behaviors 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 us to think and act. Now, I'd like to share more guidelines which can help us develop a mindset upon which Spirit-enabled practices and intentions are built.

First, what is our identity as Christians? It's essential we recognize we're "strangers" and "sojourners" on earth (1 Pet. 2:11). These words could also be translated "aliens" or "foreigners". Paul combines one of these terms with a different word to describe how gentiles were "alienated" from the citizenship of Israel and "strangers" to promised covenants when the Jews were God's chosen people (Eph. 2:12, 19). However, in the Body of Christ, Jewish and gentile believers are both one in Christ (2:13-22). Our eternal affiliation isn't connected with this world, including the country in which we reside. Our affiliation is characterized as 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, cf. 1 Cor. 1:18; 2 Thess. 2:10). Another way these groups are defined is "inside" and "outside" the Church (Col. 4:5; 1 Thess. 4:12; 1 Cor. 5:12-13). Furthermore, we're called "sons" or "children" of God, while the Lost are termed "sons" or "children of disobedience" and associated with the Devil (Rom. 8:15; Gal. 4:5-6, cf. John 8:44; Eph. 2:2; 2 Cor. 4:3-4). Unfortunately, many Christians have been deluded to believe all people are children of God. However, though 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 God's children*.

Since this is the Father's perspective of humanity, shouldn't we too recognize this expressed division of mankind? And if we do, we won't discriminate between believers who have different societally defined backgrounds. Thus, in reality, Christians are comprised of people from all countries, races, social positions, as well as both sexes. Yet, in our new redeemed state, all these distinctions disappear since every Christian occupies a righteous position before God, is a member of Christ's Body, possesses gifts, and has equal value. For, "**there's neither Jew nor Greek, there's neither slave nor free, there's neither male nor female, for you're 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 we should view ourselves, note Paul's statement, "**our citizenship (πολιτευμα) exists in the heavens**" (Phil.

3:20). The English word '**politics**' is a transliteration of this Greek word, and it defines the connection a group of people has such as those who make up the Nation of Israel (Eph. 2:12). To God, our earthly nation of origin is immaterial, for in His eyes all Christians are part of the spiritual "**household of God**" (Eph. 2:15-22). So, we shouldn't be defined by the earthly nation we originate from, but by the spiritual reality we've been transferred into with the hope of being conformed to the sinless image of our Savior (Phil. 3:20-21; Col. 1:13). In Christ, American, Russian, Italian, Nigerian, Iranian, Brazilian, Canadian, Chinese, Indian, Mexican, Polynesian, and Dutch believers lose their earthly identity and graduate to the classification – **Citizens of Heaven**.

Now, what are members of this divine group to do? Paul instructs believers to "**conduct yourselves** (πολιτευεσθε) **in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ**" (Phil. 1:27). This verb contains the same root as the noun "**citizenship**" in 3:20, so it literally illustrates how *we're to live as citizens* of heaven. This action is defined as "**contending together in the faith of the gospel**". Sometimes this phrase is interpreted to mean we should argue with one another about what we believe. However, "**contending together**" (συναθλουντες) is a compound term, the verb of which transliterates '**being athletic**', and the preposition means '**with**'. Thus, the term really indicates we're to speak and live like a group which represents the gospel, *as athletes participating together on the same team*.

Then, how we became part of this team is revealed; we were granted saving "**faith**" by "**God**" who also desires us to "**suffer**" for Christ amidst the unbelieving world – **our true opposition** (1:28-29). So, the real intent of this passage is *to encourage Christians to have humility and purposeful unity* for the purpose of accomplishing this task. And the ultimate example demonstrating how we can do this is the model set by Christ Himself (2:1-11). When we're unified while serving the Lord in this great fight, we become "**lights in the world**". Also, we experience joy far beyond what Fallen Men can offer (2:12-18).

In closing, I'd like to expand on the thought of how Christians should respond to human authorities. In First Timothy 2:1-3, we're told to pray for them "**in order that we might live a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and respectability, for this's good and acceptable in the presence of our savior, God**". The stated purpose for why we're to do this is He "**desires all men to be saved and to come unto a full knowledge of the truth**" (v. 4). Then, the powerful and effective message God has provided to accomplish this goal is stated to revolve around Jesus Christ, the Mediator between Himself and man, who procured redemption for the world's sin by His death and subsequent resurrection (vv. 5-6).

In conclusion, we who're "**aliens**" and "**foreigners**" in this world; we who represent God as His "**children**"; we who're saved by "**grace**"; we who have a heavenly

“citizenship” (political association); we who have the purpose of sharing the “gospel”; and we who help fellow believers “fully know the truth”; **May This, Our True Identity, Occupy our Minds and Hearts** so we can accomplish His purpose! **Only the United Movement of God can attain these Heavenly Objectives.**

When we focus on our righteous position in Christ, promise of eternal life, and divine joy derived from sharing the gospel, we’ll experience celestial peace and quiet confidence during this present time of turmoil as well as any future affliction-causing-event. For, Christians can implement positive virtues which result from walking by the Spirit and drawing upon His power to follow God’s directives (Gal. 5:22-23). But when we abandon this approach, our flesh which likes to do evil naturally takes over and produces counterproductive behavior such as strife, jealousy, hatred and factions (Gal. 5:19-21).

The word “**factions**” (*εριθεῖαι*) refers to *a party spirit* and is translated ‘rivalries’ in some Versions. This term’s meaning is accurately portrayed by what we see in the political parties of this country. Passage after passage in the Epistles drill believers not to be controlled by the divisive intentions of our “**flesh**”. Therefore, **All Christians need to remember we’re on the same team with the same Directives and Mandates**. Each of us must make sure no other platform controls the many important choices we make every day. So, may we seek to “**walk in the Spirit**” and not “**perfect the lust of the flesh**” (Gal. 5:16). Finally, God deserves constant thanks for what He’s done, desires us to rely on Him in prayer, and wants us to follow the guidelines in His Word (Phil. 4:6-9).

Cordially,

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