

The Christian and Civil Government (13th)

(We interrupt our studies today to reflect somewhat concerning the Christian, the congregation of God, and the civil government in connection with the Covid-19 virus.)

As you may or may not know we prepare our podcast weeks and sometimes months in advance. The purpose for this is to give myself plenty of time to hopefully devote the proper time to each lesson and to be prepared so that I don't get behind with the broadcast. Therefore, instead of continuing to review the scriptural passages from the confessions, I want to devote today's broadcast to the recent happenings regarding various things around the Covid-19 virus. To help set the stage somewhat, I am beginning to write this on March 27, 2020, though I may not finish this today. Also, to give further insight to thoughts, I have been somewhat "out of commission" the last couple of weeks because on March 13, of this year, I fell in a parking lot and scrapped my face and nose on the asphalt and broke my kneecap on my left leg. Needless to say, I have had a lot of time sitting and thinking about all that has been going on and the relationship of our current subject matter—the Christian and civil government. Due to my time of sitting and inactivity, I watched more news than I normally do and can assure you that when one focuses too much on the so-called wisdom of the world instead of centering his attention on the Holy Scriptures it greatly affects his spirituality and causes him to gravitate away from the peace of God that passes all understanding, cf. Philippians 4:7. Additionally, we know that God has not "given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind," II Timothy 1:7. Knowing these things in our head is one thing, but having the assurance of them in our spirit and soul is entirely a different thing. I believe every true believer understands what I am saying. Also, please keep these things in mind as I endeavor to enlarge on the topic at hand and know that my purpose is first and foremost to teach what God tells us in His Holy Word. I cannot control your heart. In fact, I cannot control my own heart. I know what it is to have fear and trepidation and at the same time to know that it is wrong, and that I am to pray to the Lord to bless my heart and soul to be in line with the Scriptures. As you know, we need the Lord to do this because without Him we cannot do this, John 15:5. Allow me to share something that I heard recently that I believe clearly illustrates what I am saying. There is a Christian brother in Russia that some years ago applied for a teaching position in the school system there. He had all the necessary requirements and was in line to get the job. However, when the Russian government discovered that he was a Baptist they would not give him the job. This brother said that in his head he thought of Roman 8:28 believing that all things work together for good for him, but that it took two or three weeks for his heart to catch up with his head. Do you not find this to be your case at times? We know the truth of the Scriptures, but until the Lord sanctifies it in our hearts we struggle within ourselves.

Allow me to also say that I do not think the Covid-19 virus is some minor or insignificant thing. A plague of any kind is a serious matter. There have been plagues and diseases throughout the world and as long as man lives in this sinful world there will ever be such things. Jesus said, "And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all *these things* must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these *are* the beginning of sorrows," Matthew 24:6-8. Notice that our Lord said that the Christian is not to be "troubled" or frightened. He also said that these things are "the beginning of sorrows." And yet, when a famine or storm or war or other such like things overtakes us as individuals it is no small thing. It is real to us. It is *our* life that is turned upside down. It is an emotional trauma and it is painful. As long as we focus our attention on the immediate surroundings we will panic like Peter did in the sea when he took his eyes off the Lord. See Matthew 14:25-32. (By the way, I do not mean to cast any dispersion on Peter because he had faith to get out of the ship and walk on

the water where others did not.) Nevertheless, regarding our subject matter and the Covid-19 virus, harmful viruses and diseases are part of the world in which we live.

Now we will try to address somewhat our overall subject matter—the Christian and civil government. We have shown from previous podcasts that Caesar (civil government) has no place within or over the house of God. It is true that civil government rules over Christians as citizens of the country and the Christian is commanded by God to obey the civil government so long as they do not command us to disobey the Word of God.

Currently our government, as well as other countries throughout the world, are endeavoring to rule over the house of God and unless compliance is observed to governmental mandates arrests are made and people are put in jail and issued fines. One mayor in the United States said that unless the congregations abide by his decrees they would be closed and their buildings possibly torn down. This is clearly a violation of the laws of our land—The Constitution of the United. (As a side note, many have been seeking to destroy The Constitution before and since 1861 when Abraham Lincoln suspended the writ of *habeas corpus*, but that is another study.) However, the Christian is under command to a higher law and authority. Christians down through the century have suffered for their faith under all different kinds of governments. Thankfully, here in the United States of America we have been granted religious freedom for a few hundred years, but there is a massive movement now to end this glorious freedom. (Remember there is a difference between liberty and freedom. In England, during the reign of William and Mary, the Baptists were granted liberty but not freedom. Again, that is another study.) While the Constitution regulates the powers of the Federal Government, it does not fully regulate the state governments in every situation. In fact, some states did not grant freedom of religion until the early eighteen hundreds. And there is at least one incident where a ban was issued by a state governmental agency in the history of our nation that forbade congregations to meet during the Spanish flu. During this time, a Baptist minister in Kentucky was sent to jail for continuing to hold services, <https://www.courier-journal.com/story/news/2020/03/20/coronavirus-pastor-arrested-holding-church-during-spanish-flu/2874182001/>. On a separate note, there are stories of men like B. H. Palmer who stayed in New Orleans during the Yellow Fever pestilence in 1858 and ministered in the homes of those afflicted with the disease and was preserved from contracting the disease. He did the same in another outbreak twenty years later in 1878. This was true of Martin Luther regarding the Black Plague in Europe and of Charles Spurgeon during a cholera epidemic in his day. While Palmer stayed, many of the other ministers fled the city and abandoned their flocks. (By the way, the yellow fever took the lives of some 4,858 people in the city of New Orleans in 1858, *Life and Letters of B. M. Palmer*. And Martin Luther said, “I have lived to see the greatest plague on earth—the contemning of God’s word, a fearful thing, surpassing all other plagues in the world; for thereupon most surely follow all manner of punishments, eternal and corporal.” *The Table Talk of Martin Luther* by Thomas S. Kepler, No. 28.)

The essential question for the Christian during such times is what does the Bible teach us? As we have seen in previous podcasts, the government does not have the authority to rule over the congregation of God. It is in another kingdom—the kingdom of God, which is not of this world, John 18:36. Our Lord instructed believers who were considering going back to the Old Testament worship because they were being persecuted for their faith not to forsake their assembling together, Hebrews 10:23-27. While it is true that we are not told how often the congregation is to assemble, it is generally understood that the early saints met on the first day of the week, Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:2. Today we are being challenged by the civil government regarding this issue and it appears that many congregations are simply following governmental recommendations without question. In fact, it seems that they mostly question and condemn congregations that choose to continue to worship together. Who is right? Obviously, the answer is God. What should each congregation do and how should they respond to the governmental recommendations and in some cases governmental demands? I can’t answer that for you. That is a decision that each individual congregation must prayerfully and humbly make. We are living, I believe, in

serious times and our freedoms are being eroded on a massive scale. Frankly, my prayer is that our nations would draw nigh to God, repent, beg His mercies, and that He would restore us to a more godly environment so that we may continue to freely serve Him without outside intrusion. Christians have suffered down through the centuries for exercising their obedience to the Lord. Do we have the wisdom, strength, and spirituality to be faithful to Him today? Time will tell. Yes, I believe there will be congregations faithfully serving the Lord at His return, I Corinthians 11:26. Will it be in our nation? I do not know. I believe that no believer should arrogantly say that He going to do so-n-so regardless of what the civil government says, but at the same time we must obey God rather than men when called to do so, Acts 5:29.

Much, much more could be said (and probably should be said by those wiser than I am), but our time is up for today. In closing, allow me to encourage you to pray that all of us will draw closer to the Lord, to have the wisdom to know what He would have us to do, and that He give us the power and strength to do His will to His honor and glory. May the blessings of God abide on you richly.