

Some Errors Generated By The Coronavirus Threat

Tim Haile

Covid-19 has caused more than just sickness and death. It has also produced some new errors and has caused other old errors to be revived.

While it is understandable that the virus has caused churches and individuals to make adjustments to their routines, it is not an excuse to twist and pervert plain Bible passages. For example, some churches are canceling Sunday worship services. *I do not judge my brethren for these decisions, but I am calling upon them to stop trying to use the Bible to justify that practice.* There are no Bible commands, approved examples or implications for cancelling worship. Therefore, the underlying governing principle must be that of personal responsibility. Each person must determine his own ability and own opportunity. Cancelling worship services should be determined on the basis of this same principle — ability and opportunity. Scriptures should not be twisted and misapplied (Galatians 1:6-9).

Matthew 18:20 — “Two or Three” Gathering

Tim Haile

Jesus said, *“For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them”* (Matthew 18:20)

This verse is often used by people to justify ad hoc, non-church worship gatherings, including gatherings in which the Lord’s Supper is observed. Vacationers, hunters, fishermen and other travelers cite this verse as authority to conduct small non-church meetings for the Lord’s Supper while at deer camp, on the lake fishing, going on a ship cruise, a bus tour, a holy land tour or in other circumstances where meeting with a church is not possible or convenient.

Concerns over the coronavirus have now brought the passage into the forefront of discussion. It is being cited as proof that when church services are canceled, families or small gatherings of friends can conduct worship services, including observance of the Lord’s Supper, apart from a local church assembly. Obviously, if brethren have been right to use the verse for the deer stand, cruise ship or the bass boat, it would be right to invoke it in a virus scare. However, it is being misused in all of these situations.

It should be remembered that whatever the passage means now, it has always meant and will always mean. If Matthew 18:20 authorizes ad hoc

Lord's Supper assemblies now, in this circumstance, then it authorizes such assemblies in other circumstances and long after the coronavirus threat is over.

The Context Of Matthew 18:20

A simple glance at the context proves that *Matthew 18:20 is not a worship assembly passage*. It is a *corroboration* passage.

Verses 18-20 say, *“Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. “Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*

Those familiar with the Bible recognize verse 18 as being a restatement of Matthew 16:19, where Jesus had told Peter this same thing. What Jesus said to Peter about what had been “bound” and “loosed” in heaven He says to all of the apostles in Matthew 18:18. Like Matthew 16:19, Matthew 18:18 is a *revelation* passage. The apostles would preach the gospel information that heaven (God) had bound and loosed. These are not worship assembly verses, they are divine *revelation* verses.

Verses 19 begins with the word “again,” which takes us back to Christ's earlier reference to “two or three” in the correction verse of Matthew 18:16.

Jesus said, *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. “But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of **two or three witnesses** every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector” (Matthew 18:15-17).*

The “two or three” of Matthew 18:16 is distinguished from the “individual” of verse 15 and the “church” of verse 17. Note that according to Jesus, “two or three” are NOT the church, but are something different. If the sinner refused to listen to the “two or three” THEN the “church” would become involved, but not before.

The Lord's “again” in verse 19 connects the principle of verses 19 and 20 back to the corroborating “witnesses” of verse 16. The point is clear and **context is everything**. The “gathering together” of “two or three” is a

reference to corroborating eye witness testimony. In the case of Matthew 18:16 it had to do with corroborating human testimony. In the case of Matthew 18:19-20 it had to do with corroborating divine testimony.

Matthew 18:20 has nothing to do with ad hoc worship assemblies. It teaches the importance of corroborative testimony.

“Forsaking” In Hebrews 10:25, The Lord’s Supper & The Church Assembly

Tim Haile

Hebrews 10:25 says, *“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.”*

Bible believers have historically used this passage to teach that Christians should not forsake the worship assembly. Sadly, the coronavirus threat has some brethren now claiming that the verse teaches the opposite. They are saying that the word “forsake” means to “abandon,” so this verse teaches that it is perfectly acceptable for churches to cancel their services in times of a virus threat. As I said in the opening remarks of my first article in this series, there are no New Testament passages addressing the cancelling of church services, so brethren should not be looking there for their authority. They should leave the matter in the realm of ability and opportunity.

Individually applied, the argument authorizes brethren to deliberately miss church services any time they want to or feel that they need to, and especially if a state governor (even a godless and hypocritical one) suggests that the church not assemble due to health risks. *(Our governor has limited gatherings to 10 but has not limited the number of people who can go to grocery stores. He has effectively shut down places of worship and places of legitimate business but has left open liquor stores and abortion clinics. I have no respect for these hypocrisies.)*

Let us remember that whatever meaning a particular verse has now, during the virus threat, it will also have at other times and in other circumstances.. If the word “forsake” authorizes sporadic worship attendance now, then it authorizes it for all times, past, present and future.

The “abandonment” argument begs the obvious question of *how many services can a member miss before it constitutes abandonment?* Is it forsaking the assembly if one attends just *one* Sunday per month and deliberately misses the other Sundays? What if he attends just one worship

service per year? Would he be forsaking the assembly the other 51 weeks of the year? If not, how many could he deliberately miss before it constituted “forsaking assembling?” One might say that it was up to each individual to determine. If so, Hebrews 10:25 would authorize Christians to deliberately miss as many worship services as they choose, provided that they are comfortable doing so. Furthermore, the absence of a definition of what constitutes “forsaking” would mean that no church could ever discipline or withdraw from any member for forsaking church assemblies.

Hebrews 10:25: Immediate and Remote Contexts

Hebrews 10:25 does not exist in a vacuum. There are both immediate and remote contexts that define its terms. For example, what does the writer mean by the word “assembling?” We know from the immediate context that they weren’t assembling to play games! Verses 22-25a say, *“let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works...not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...”*

The “assembling” of verse 25 facilitates in accomplishing the goals mentioned in the previous verses. Members use the assembly to “*exhort one another*” and “*stir one another to love and good works.*” According to Paul in Ephesians 4:16, the *local church* is God’s ordained edification society. Church members are likened to the joints and members of the physical human body. The end result of working together is the “growth” of the local church body “*by the edifying of itself in love.*”

But how regularly do these things need to be done for one another? Once a month? Once a year? Once a lifetime? How much *love* would I have for my brethren if I assembled only sporadically with them? Thankfully, we are not left in the dark on these questions. The New Testament provides us with the information that we need and this information also answers the question about what it means to “forsake” assembling.

Assembling & The Lord’s Supper

Saints are **commanded** to observe the Lord’s Supper. Quoting Jesus, Paul told the Corinthians, “*For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance*

of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me" (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).

Notice the **commands**, "take eat, do this, and this do." These commands are to be fulfilled "**when you come together as a church**" (1 Corinthians 11:18). Members are commanded to "*wait for one another*" so that all of a church's members can fulfill the command together. As I pointed out in my article on Matthew 18:20, "two or three" members do not constitute the "church" (Matthew 18:16-17). If we can determine how frequently the Lord's Supper is to be observed by the church we can determine how frequently it is possible to "forsake the assembling of ourselves together."

Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 16:2 provide the necessary information. Paul commanded the Corinthian church to do what he had commanded other churches to do regarding giving: "*Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put something aside and store it up, as he may prosper, so that there will be no collecting when I come.*"

As did other churches in the Lord, the Corinthian church members were to make a financial contribution to the church upon the first day of every week. This was to enable the Corinthian church to do the particular work to which they had committed (providing benevolent aid to the Jerusalem church, 1 Corinthians 16:3; 2 Corinthians 8, 9). The weekly collections served the purpose of establishing a fund (treasury) that would expedite the use of the funds. Note that **members were to give to the church "on the first day of every week."**

Acts 20:7 says, "*Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.*"

This passage provides *an approved apostolic example* establishing the proper *day* for the scriptural observance of the Lord's Supper. It also contains an implication from which we necessarily infer the frequency of the service. **The Lord's Supper is to be observed upon the first day of every week.** If we add verses 17, 18, 20, 33 and 34 of 1 Corinthians 11 to these facts we can confidently affirm that the Lord's Supper is to be observed ***in a church assembly upon the first day of every week.***

Acts 2:42 also shows the Lord's Supper being observed in a first day of the week assembly (Pentecost was observed on the first day of the week, our Sunday).

Remember also that mutual edification was to be done in the Hebrews 10:25 assembly. Sandwiched between the first day of the week Lord's Supper passage of 1 Corinthians 11 and the first day of the week giving passage of 1 Corinthians 16 is the church edification chapter of 1 Corinthians 14. Paul repeatedly speaks of "edification" and teaching occurring in the local church assembly (vs. 4, 5, 19, 24, 26). This sounds exactly like Hebrews 10:24-25.

Note that "singing" was also done in these worship assemblies (1 Corinthians 14:15, 26). According to Colossians 3:16, singing is a form of teaching. The Hebrews 10:25 assemblies involved "exhorting" one another. Exhortation is teaching. It should also be noted that singing to one another is *commanded* in Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16.

The Hebrews 10:25 "assembly" is clearly defined by these other passages. There are certain things that we are commanded to do in and through a local church assembly. One who forsakes the assembly disobeys these plain commands even if he does it one time. *(Any conditions that prevent one from attending the church assembly prevent him from observing the Lord's Supper just as they prevent him from singing "to" his brethren or engaging in other acts of worship with them.)*

Verses 26 and 29 of Hebrews 10 explain why the strong word "forsake" is used in this passage. The writer said, *"For if we sin **willfully** after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins... Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"* The Hebrew writer is addressing the *willful* or *deliberate* missing of the church assembly. By deliberately refusing the assembly one loses access to the saving benefits of Christ's sacrifice and tramples Him under foot. The word "forsake" emphasizes the severe and lasting consequences of this deliberate action. When those with the ability and opportunity to obey worship commands upon the first day of the week simply refuse to do so, they are forsaking both the assembly and the Lord (Matthew 22:37; 6:33). And while each Christian must individually determine his own ability to attend, he must remember that the great Judge

is constantly evaluating our choices. We should be very careful, for “*it is a fearful thing to fall into His hands of the living God*” (Hebrews 10:31).

Romans 13:1 Versus Acts 20:7? Some Thoughts On Commands & Inferences

Tim Haile

I again emphasize that I am not writing on these subjects to question the consciences or faithfulness of those who decided to cancel or not attend worship services due to the Covid-19 threat. However, I feel absolutely compelled to challenge some of the dangerous errors that the threat has generated. Bible verses continue to be butchered.

Some have argued that since submission to civil authorities is taught by *command* (Rom. 13:1) and the frequency of the Lord’s Supper is determined by *implication / inference*, then the Christian is more obligated to obey civil edicts about worship assemblies than he is to follow Acts 20:7. This is wrong for many reasons and on many levels. As I have observed in previous related articles, *are brethren prepared to accept the consequences of their new arguments and applications?* If command-authority trumps inference-authority *now*, won’t it continue to do so after the Covid-19 threat is over and from now on?

The “commands trump inferences” doctrine is older than the Covid-19 virus threat. In fact, much of the institutional movement is built upon this false premise. Institutionalists have argued for years that approved examples and necessary inferences do not bind like commands. For example, institutionalists claim that the “elders” of Acts 11:30 to whom benevolent aid was delivered from the brethren at Antioch were the “elders of the Jerusalem church.” They ignore the implication from Acts 14:23 that if elders were ordained in every *Pisidian church* then this pattern also applied in the *Judean churches*. Galatians 1:22 teaches that there were multiple churches in Judea. Acts 20:28 teaches that elders are in charge of the “*flock that is among them.*” They are not authorized to oversee *other* flocks in other places. These facts lead to another *necessary inference* from Acts 11:30 that the “elders” of Judea were the elders of all of the respective churches of Judea, NOT just those of the Jerusalem church.

Are those who are suddenly claiming that necessary inferences are not binding prepared to apologize to our institutional brethren for having previously opposed their practices as “error?” If those among us are right in

making this argument *now*, then others have been right for making it in the past!

The truth is that approved examples and necessary inferences are just as binding as commands.

— After citing the Genesis 2:24 marriage law (Matthew 19:4-5), Jesus said, *“So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together let not man separate”* (Matthew 19:6). Jesus here teaches us the power of necessary inference. The prohibition against divorce (for just any cause) was inferred from the fact that *God* was the One in control of the marriage bond, not man.

— According to Acts 10:34-35 it was by *necessary inference* that Peter concluded that Gentiles had been divinely welcomed into the church.

— It is by *necessary inference* that we learn that the priesthood of Christ was/is greater than the Levitical priesthood (Hebrews 7:1-10).

— It was by *necessary inference* that Paul learned that he was to preach the gospel to the Macedonians (Acts 16:9-10). He had been explicitly commanded to not go to Asia and Bithynia (vs. 6-7), but it was an implication / necessary conclusion by which he learned to go to Macedonia.

Truth learned through necessary inference is just as instructive and binding as truth learned by command.

Romans 13 Cannot Negate Other Commands Of God

The Scripture cannot be broken (John 10:35). The command to obey civil authorities cannot contradict the command for us to assemble to worship and serve God. Governments do not have the right to ban public worship. Interestingly, the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution insures the right of religious people to freely assemble. *(Note: I have known many good brethren over the years who correctly cite Bible verses and the 2nd Amendment in defense of their right to own and bear firearms. They (we) argue that government has no right to infringe upon our Constitutional rights. However, some of these same brethren have been very quick to ignore the 1st Amendment when told by the government that they cannot assemble for worship! This is hypocritical. There are far more Bible passages about church gatherings than there are about self-defense, and our rights as stated by the 1st Amendment are every bit as understandable as those stated in the 2nd Amendment.)*

The problem is that governments do not always limit themselves to their divinely authorized place and role. Peter and Paul taught that civil authorities were ordained by God *“for the punishment of those who do what is evil and for the praise of those who do what is good”* (1 Peter 2:24; Rom. 13:3-4). Both “evil” and “good” are defined by God. This means that governments are NOT authorized to fund abortion clinics or otherwise kill innocent people or do anything that is contrary to the will of God. The same government that has banned or severely restricted religious gatherings has authorized people to go to other public places such as grocery stores. I went to a grocery store on Monday and was around 7 or 8 times more people than I was in our worship assembly the day before.

Governors have made arbitrary rulings about which businesses may remain open. For example, clothing and shoe stores are closed but liquor stores and abortion clinics are allowed to remain open. Do liquor stores and abortion clinics provide “essential services” to the public? Are State governors promoting what is “good” by allowing abortion clinics to remain open? Abortion actually classifies under the heading “evil” in the Bible.

While we appreciate our government taking measures to keep us safe, various governing authorities have behaved quite inconsistently and irresponsibly throughout this ordeal. Good people are losing their businesses due to these arbitrary rulings. If I can practice good hygiene and follow safe health guidelines at Kroger then I can do so in some other store or in a church building.

The Romans 13:1 command to “submit” to governing authorities does not obligate us to submit *regardless* of what we are ordered to do. Governing authorities commanded Peter and the apostles to no longer teach in the name of Jesus. Peter replied, *“we must obey God rather than men”* (Acts 5:28-29). *(Note: I have read several articles in which people quickly dismiss the use of Acts 5:29 in this context, claiming that it does not apply because it is “a persecution passage and we are not facing a persecution scenario.” What on earth are these people talking about! Acts 5:29 addresses a scenario in which local governing authorities banned Bible teaching and people were being threatened with arrest if they continued to do so. This is precisely the situation now. Of course today, if approached by authorities brethren can simply peacefully disband and pursue other options for meeting together. There is no need to actually be arrested. Law enforcers in some places are presently receiving stand-down orders when it comes to arresting non-violent criminals because they wish to avoid overcrowding in jails and prisons. I can’t imagine that careful and conscientious Christians*

would be treated worse than thieves, drug offenders, drunk drivers and vandals.)

While submitting to civil authorities is commanded (Rom. 13:1), so is observing the Lord's Supper. As I wrote in an earlier article, we are commanded (1 Corinthians 11:24-25) to observe the Lord's Supper. Of course, not in just any way that we would like to. We must use the proper elements (*unleavened bread and fruit of the vine*, Matthew 26:17, 26-28). We must partake when the church has come together in one place (1 Corinthians 11:18, 20, 33). The examples in Acts 2:42 and 20:7 teach us that we must do so upon the proper day (1st day of the week). The implication in Acts 20:7 teaches us the frequency of observance (the 1st day of every week). The command to eat the Lord's Supper can only be fulfilled by meeting the stated conditions. Otherwise, as Paul said, "*it is not the Lord's Supper*" (1 Cor. 11:20).

Again, I have not written this to judge or shame people who have felt forced to cancel worship services. I have no authority to judge anyone's spiritual condition or fate (John 5:22, 27). I am only answering the misuse of some Bible passages that have been butchered by some misguided individuals. The Covid-19 threat gives us no special right to twist God's word.

Covid-19 Errors: Do Christians "Tempt God" By Assembling For Worship?

Tim Haile

As I have done in previous articles in this series, I again emphasize that *this not an indictment of churches for cancelling worship services* and I am not questioning anyone's faithfulness to God. This article is concerned only with the misuse of Bible passages.

"Then the devil took Him up into the holy city, and set Him on the pinnacle of the temple, and said to Him, If You are the Son of God, cast Yourself down: for it is written, 'He shall give his angels charge concerning you: and in their hands they shall bear you up, lest at any time you dash your foot against a stone.' Jesus said unto him, It is written again, you shalt not tempt the Lord you God" (Matthew 4:5-7).

Some people have recently suggested that Christians are "tempting God" by continuing to conduct church worship services during the Covid-19 threat. My immediate reply to this allegation was, **do these same people also "tempt God" by going to work? Do they "tempt God" by going to**

grocery stores or building supply stores or pet stores? What would be the difference? The virus does not know where it is. It doesn't consciously target some places more than it does others. It doesn't know the difference between a Christian and a non-Christian.

Invoking Psalm 91:11-12, the devil tempted Jesus to jump off of the highest part of the Temple and trust God to save Him from harm by miraculous intervention. Jesus responded with Deuteronomy 6:16.

Error often generates more error and this is certainly the case here. The charge that one "tempts God" by having a worship assembly during a virus threat is based upon the assumptive and false view that God directly causes all things to happen. This is the "fatalism" of Calvinistic theology. It is often shrouded in veiled references to God's "providence." The speaker or writer classifies a thing as happening by "God's providence," often implying some direct interference by God. They won't call it an outright *miracle* for they know that the miracle age is over (1 Corinthians 13:8-13). However, they don't mind leaving the impression that God directly controls and manipulates events in a way that sets aside natural law, and if so, then humans are fighting against God by doing whatever it is that some have *surmised* that they should not do.

The only way that people could "tempt God" by continuing to attend worship services would be if God was miraculously intervening to protect Christians from the virus by discouraging them from worshipping Him but they worshipped Him anyway! This ludicrous. From what the Bible teaches about how men tempt God I could more easily argue that people are tempting God by missing services! (I am in no way saying this, nor do I believe it, but it is a consequence of the above argument.) "*Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but happy is he who keeps the law*" (Proverbs 29:18). In the absence of divine revelation some people just make things up and do as they please. The Bible condemns *presumption* and *going beyond* the doctrine of Christ (Psalm 19:13; 2 John 9; and see Deut. 4:2 & Rev. 22:18-19). We are to "*speak as the oracles of God.*" That is, *speak where the Bible speaks* (1 Peter 4:11). The emotions of some are preventing them from doing this right now.

Too many people practice what I call "event interpretation" as their religion. They see or hear of something happening and then assign some spiritual meaning or implication to it. We need to be reminded of the words of Amos: "*Surely the Lord does nothing unless He reveals it to His servants the prophets*" (Amos 3:7). In other words, God is not revealing secret

information through mysterious signs and events. He has spoken to us through His *revealed word* (2 Peter 1:3; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Jude 3). We must be very careful about attributing events and motives to God. We could be totally and even dangerously wrong.

From what some people are alleging, one might conclude that God directly engineered and propagated the Coronavirus. The Bible teaches in Genesis 3:17-19 that the first man and woman were cast into a difficult and even hostile environment as a punishment for their disobedience. Covid-19 should be a reminder that the consequences of their actions continue to be felt by people today. Those consequences subsequently affected all humans down this very day (I just sprayed thistles yesterday). God did not *directly* engineer Covid-19 but He did allow the basic materials to exist from which either it naturally occurred or was bioengineered.

How People Really “Tempt God”

Of course, “*God cannot be tempted with evil*” (James 1:13), but He can be tempted in the sense of being *tested or challenged*. While several passages speak of people “tempting” God, Psalm 78 provides a concise and convenient list of the ways that they did so:

1. The Jews tempted God by desiring meat in addition to the manna that God had given them in the wilderness (Psalm 78:18). Men tempt God by not being satisfied with His provisions and methods.
2. The Jews tempted God by “provoking” Him in the wilderness (Psalm 78:41). That is, they complained about His guidance and charged Him with not being concerned for their well-being. After listening to the reports of the 10 faithless spies they turned against God’s leaders and discussed selecting a different one to take them back to Egypt (Num. 14:1-ff). They later complained about not having water (Num. 20). Men “provoke” God today every time they substitute their own religious concepts and practices for God’s.
3. The Jews tempted God by not keeping His testimonies (Psalm 78:56). God’s instructions are to be received. His facts are to be believed, His commands are to be obeyed and His patterns are to be followed. Men tempt God by not respecting and doing what He says in His revealed word.
4. The Jews tempted Jesus by trying to make Him contradict either the Law of Moses or civil authorities (Matthew 19:3; 22:35)

5. People tempt Christ today by living in sin while claiming to follow Christ (1 Cor. 10:9).

No Bible passage teaches that one can tempt God by doing as God instructs. It is ridiculous to say otherwise. The exact opposite is true. Men tempt God by questioning or challenging His wisdom and methods.

Covid-19 Errors **“The Present Distress” (1 Corinthians 7:26)**

Tim Haile

As I have done in my previous articles under this heading, I again emphasize that this article is not intended to judge the individual motives of others or challenge their faithfulness. My purpose is only to answer yet another error that has been generated because of the Covid virus.

Concerns over the coronavirus have caused people to take new interpretative approaches to many basic Bible passages. People are latching onto certain Bible terms and expressions that they feel might describe our present environment. This is resulting in an entirely new hermeneutic in some cases. Context is being flatly ignored or distorted in an effort to make these terms apply to our current circumstance. Hopefully, our newfound (yet radical) differences over basic worship and assembly passages will dissipate with the dissipation of the virus threat.

In the seemingly never-ending search for Bible authority for canceling worship services and replacing them with so-called “virtual worship,” some have cited 1 Corinthians 7:26. Paul said, *“I suppose therefore that this is good because of the present distress — it is good for a man to remain as he is.”*

The argument is that since Paul used the expression “present distress” and our present circumstance is also *distressing*, then 1 Corinthians 7:26 looses us from certain divine obligations. This is a dangerous misuse of this passage and it has far reaching implications for other abuses.

Paul was not discussing divine *requirements* in this verse — he was discussing *the exercise of divine liberties*. There was no law requiring a couple to either get married or not get married (vs. 6-9). There was no law requiring circumcision or condemning uncircumcision (vs. 18-19). In 1 Corinthians 7, the Holy Spirit allowed Paul’s *“judgment”* or *“advice”* to be included in inspiration. The word translated “judgment” in 1 Cor. 7:25 & 40 is translated “advice” in 2 Corinthians 8:10 — *“Herein I give my advice...”*

Because of the “present distress” Paul advised saints at Corinth to postpone marriage if possible due to the added responsibilities of marriage (1 Cor. 7:32-35). It was certainly “advice,” for he emphasized that no sin was committed if they ignored his advice and married even during the time of distress (“*but if you marry, you have not sinned*” — v. 28, see also vs. 36 & 9). Concerning Paul’s “Present Distress”

The Greek word translated “distress” has the basic meaning of *necessity*. Jesus used this word in Luke 21:23 to describe the calamity and hardships that would come upon the Jews because of the Roman invasion and their destruction of Jerusalem. Paul used the word to describe the spiritual and moral obligation that he had to preach the gospel — “*necessity is laid upon me*” (1 Cor. 9:16).

The context of 1 Corinthians 7:26 suggests a usage more like what Jesus made of the word in Luke 21. The Hebrew writer wrote Hebrew saints about the coming day of destruction. Hebrews 10:25 says, “*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching.*” We know that “the day” cannot refer to the final day of judgment, for Jesus had already taught that there would be no signs enabling us to “see” the approaching of “that day” (Matthew 24:36-42). Hebrews 10:25 refers to the same time spoken of by Jesus in Luke 21:23. Rather than cancel worship gatherings due to that coming crisis, the Hebrew writer told saints to focus even *more* upon assembling! This is the exact *opposite* of what some people are doing with the word distress.

NOTE: I am not personally arguing that we should have more church services during the Covid-19 threat. I am only answering an argument that others are making from 1 Corinthians 7:26. I am not the one invoking the passage, so the consequences that I describe above are the consequences of other people’s arguments, not mine. If one is intent upon using Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 7:26 to describe circumstances under the current Covid virus threat then he must be prepared to accept the consequences of his argument. 1 Corinthians 7:26 refers to some type of persecution directed against saints at Corinth at that time.

For several reasons, it is flatly wrong to use the “distress” passage of 1 Corinthians 7:26 as authority to cancel first day of the week worship services.

Has the coronavirus created a stressful environment? Yes, but it is no reason to “set aside the commandments of God.”

No Commanded-Action Was Involved In Paul’s “Present Distress”

Paul emphasized that he was *not* commanding action regarding marriage:

V. 6 — “*I speak this by permission, **not by commandment.***”

V. 25 — “*Now concerning virgins **I have no commandment from the Lord; yet I give my judgment...***”

V. 40 — “*But she is happier if she abide, after my judgment...*”

Regarding the question of whether or not to marry under the present distress, the contrast was not between *wrong* or *right* but between “*good*” or “*better*” (v. 38). No command would be broken and no sin would be committed if any couple went ahead and married.

Contrast this with God’s laws governing Sunday worship. **Gathering as the church to observe the Lord’s Supper upon the first day of the week is not a matter of “judgment,” it is a matter of *commandment*.** We are commanded to observe the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor. 11:24-25). This is to be done in the local church assembly. Every Lord’s Supper observance recorded in Scripture was done while the church was assembled in one place (Acts 2:42; 20:7) and Paul instructed the Corinthians to observe the Lord’s Supper in a church assembly (1 Cor, 11:18, 20, 33). Christians are also commanded to *give* upon the first day of each week (1 Cor. 16:2).

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