

# The Old Hickory Bulletin

## Old Hickory Church of Christ

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## PANDEMIC!

Our young people have learned a new vocabulary word, and maybe some adults also. With the world-wide outbreak of the deadly COVID-19 virus, an exceptionally high proportion of the population is affected. America is experiencing a pandemic!

My first thought is this: WE HAVE NEVER EXPERIENCED ANYTHING LIKE THIS IN OUR LIFETIME! Please think about that for a moment. We have no personal experience upon which to rely to establish a comfortable reaction in our thinking and behavior. This is new territory. We are walking down a road we have not travelled. It's not "old hat." As a result, new thoughts and different behavior are now required, whether we like it or not.

America has suffered through a pandemic before. The influenza pandemic lasted from January 1918 through December 1920 and infected approximately 25% of the world's population, some 500 million people. This was one of the deadliest epidemics in human history, and estimates of the number of people who died from it are varied, but some estimates range to 100 million people. Staggering! You history buffs may recall that America was at war in Europe at the time, and in order to maintain high morale on the home front, World War I censors minimized the bad-news reports, although they did report information about the situation in Spain, which action tagged the disease as "Spanish flu." Researchers have since cited three areas that promoted bacterial superinfection in those days: malnourishment, overcrowded medical camps and hospitals, and poor hygiene [via *Wikipedia*].

In 1918, theaters, schools, businesses and churches closed their doors for weeks upon recommendation by the Health Department all across the country. No one protested, but there were some churches that used their buildings as a temporary hospital because the city hospitals were turning away people. The clarion call went forth from church bulletins: "to observe strictly all the regulations urged by our State Boards of Health and cooperate in every way." Ben West of Ennis, Texas, informed the *Gospel Advocate* that "Sunday was the first day for twelve years that I have failed to attend service," and then added,

“We had three funerals here Sunday.” [via *The Christian Chronicle*] Many Christians died as a result of caring for other people.

The minister of the Campbell Street Church of Christ in Louisville, Ky., M.C. Kurfees, sent a letter to the members announcing the congregation’s compliance with the Kentucky State Board of Health. “It behooves us,” he wrote, “to cheerfully submit to this order and to exert all our energies in an earnest and sympathetic effort to cooperate with the benevolent purpose of our government to check the deplorable disease.” [also via *The Christian Chronicle*] Many worshipped God in their homes.

Of course there were some people who viewed these directives as “government interference,” and let their resentment be known by such statements as, “We must obey God rather than man.” J.C. McQuiddy, editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, had very strong convictions regarding the weekly assembly. However, he felt that just as it was a matter of mercy to care for the sick at home instead of attending the weekly service, it was also merciful to forego meeting with the saints if it “would jeopardize the lives of members of not only their families, but the families also of many other people.” [also via *The Christian Chronicle*] Certainly, government is involved in many things that Bible students would rightly regard as sinful, but not everything the government does is evil. The government has the obligation of protecting the well-being of its citizens, and they are asking ALL citizens to help by following the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) guidelines. The threat must be extinguished, and the deaths from this highly contagious virus must stop!

I fully understand and appreciate the conviction that people have developed to be in the worship assembly on the first day of the week. We teach and preach for years the importance of this; it is vital for Christians to worship God! I was having a conversation this very day with a brother whose local congregation has temporarily suspended all assemblies. His plan, based upon his convictions, is to find a church that is planning to worship tomorrow and be there. But since the Tennessee Governor called for churches to stop gatherings yesterday, when Sunday gets here he may find all doors closed in a legitimate effort to halt the risk for people’s lives. But I certainly appreciate his conviction to be at worship, “even if it kills me.” He can die at peace with his convictions, certainly, but what about the risk to the lives of others around him if he has the virus? He cannot stop that threat by saying, “I feel fine today.” (It takes anywhere from 1 to 15 days for symptoms to appear.)

There are some brothers and sisters that are charging other Christians who comply, with: “You are forsaking the assembly.” It is very discouraging to hear this, because Christians love to worship and assemble with their brethren. The pandemic is not a Hebrews 10:25

matter. My brothers and sisters in Christ are not “forsaking” the assembly, they are not “leaving it behind, abandoning” it; they are not walking away from it! When the pandemic is over, they will return to the assembly and will be thankful for the precious opportunity. This charge is just not the case, just like the person running a fever who stays away from the assembly. That person is not forsaking the assembly. Here again, I do appreciate the conviction people have to worship the Lord. Worship at home for the time being.

I am also disappointed to hear resentment for these unprecedented measures take the form of statements disparaging people’s TRUST in God. Certainly, the Christians I know trust God completely, but they also take their insulin and their blood pressure medicine. Would you similarly accuse the Christian in your neighborhood of not trusting in God if he were to install a tornado safe room? I don’t think so. And when you hear that a Christian is afraid, offer some words of encouragement, don’t condemn them with Revelation 21:8.

Take note of this news item posted yesterday: The University Church of Christ in Murray, Kentucky, held services last Sunday, despite warnings, and a few days later learned from the county health department that someone at the service afterward tested positive for COVID-19, according to the Lexington Herald-Leader, Murray Ledger & Times, and WKMS (NPR’s Murray State news station). The church has been accused online of putting the whole Murray-area community at risk by holding services despite a request not to do so by the Kentucky governor, and many other negative comments appeared on its Facebook page, which is now inaccessible, and the names and pictures of the church’s ministers and elders have now been removed from the church’s web-site. The virus’s impact on the church’s members, their families, and the community, if any, remains to be seen. [via *authentictheology.com*]

This is an assembly where the leaders felt it acceptable to proceed with worship services with some adjustments: social distancing, meeting time was limited to 30 minutes, the elderly were advised to stay at home, as were others who were afraid to assemble, latex gloves were used to pass the trays, etc. Some felt it was acceptable to assemble if no confirmed cases were in their particular geographic area. These people are enduring very harsh criticism now, and the blasphemers are coming out of the woodwork and unloading on them. Could there be a lesson to learn here? (Recall: we do not have the personal experience to rely on for guidance in this.)

Your elders carefully and unselfishly considered all the facts and information that we had available in order to make the best possible decision with regard to our assemblies. We decided to follow the advice from the health professionals and the appeal from our President by taking every precaution to stop the spread of this sickness and death. We continue to believe that we made the right decision. We sincerely thank you for praying

for us as the shepherds of this congregation, and we thank each of you for upholding our hands.

Let's remember that Christians can serve God and man, even while hibernating. Continue to seek the comfort and hope from God's word and the blessed privilege of prayer. Do what you can do while under the present distress. Make calls, write letters, check on people. Some Christians are hand-sewing masks to fill a need. Someone you know may need some food. Let your light shine!

"The LORD bless you, and keep you; The LORD make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; The LORD lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace."  
(Numbers 6:24-26).

- Gary Smalley

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## ***Snippets from Unknown Places***

John Ortberg has written: Gratitude is the ability to experience life as a gift. It opens us up to wonder, delight and humility. It makes our hearts generous. It liberates us from the prison of self-preoccupation. [John Ortberg, *When the Game is Over It All Goes Back Into the Box* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan 2007) p. 149].

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Several years ago James P. Needham wrote a very fine article that described negativism this way: "There is no place in the Christian's life for negativism, yet this is the persistent attitude of many. It constantly talks down the great work of God. It is a prophet of doom, gloom and boom! It says nothing is useful or beneficial, no, not gospel meetings, Bible classes, etc., etc. Everything proposed is a waste of time, effort, and especially money! That's the most important. Negativism is not realistic, but materialistic. Negativism is an elephant on the road to progress; a millstone around the neck of usefulness; a cancer of the mind of its advocate; and ice pack on the fervor of the faithful. It sees thorns on the rose bush, never the roses on the thorn bush. Its parent is little faith, its child is discouragement, its grandchild is cantankerousness and its first cousin is stubbornness!"

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> Ask your preacher where the Bible says Creed books, disciplines, manuals, catechisms are authorized by God. Compare his answer with Matthew 15:9!

- > “Prejudice is a great time-saver; it enables a man to form opinions without bothering to get the facts!”
  - > “The average church has too many bystanders and not enough standbysers!”
  - > “What a world of gossip would be prevented if it were only remembered that a person who tells you of the fault of others, intends to tell others of your faults!”
  - > “A Bible that’s falling apart usually belongs to a person who isn’t!”
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## ***What Must I Do To Be Saved?***

### **HEAR THE GOSPEL**

(Romans 10:14-17; John 20:30-31; Romans 1:15-17)

### **BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST**

(Acts 8:37; John 8:24; Hebrews 11:6)

### **REPENT OF PAST SINS**

(Luke 13:3; Acts 2:38; Acts 17:30)

### **CONFESS CHRIST**

(Romans 10:9-10; Acts 8:37)

### **BE BAPTIZED**

(Romans 6:3-4; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; Acts 8:36-39; 1 Peter 3:21)

### **LIVE A FAITHFUL LIFE**

(Revelation 2:10; 2 Peter 1:5-11; John 15:1-8; Hebrews 10:23-25)