

## Dismissing Worship Services Because of the Coronavirus

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Does Acts 5:29, that “we ought to obey God rather than men,” mean Christians must defy the government’s order of sheltering-in and not assembling?

Local congregations of the Lord are autonomous, meaning self-governing. However, God’s authoritative word transcends all congregations and is the sole authority by which all should be led. In all matters of doctrine, God’s word directs (2 Tim. 3:16-17). In matters of opinion, there is discretion within the bounds of God’s will, never beyond God’s will (Rom. 14:1-4). Elders and faithful leading brothers without elders can make decisions in behalf of the congregation (Heb.13:17; 1 Tim. 5:17; Col. 1:2). There is much confusion as to whether church leaders have the authority to cancel worship services because governing authorities have mandated it so due to the Coronavirus.

1. Many say we cannot cancel services because of Acts 5:29, that “we ought to obey God rather than men.” The context of Acts 5:29 was the Jewish council persecuting Christians to stop Christianity altogether (5:17-20,22-23,25,27-29,40). But that is not what is happening now with the shelter-in bans and restrictions because of the Coronavirus. The reason for them is not persecution, but protection. They are enjoined up all citizens and businesses, not just Christians and churches. Christians are not being singled out. We are all part of a world-wide health emergency.

2. Not assembling for worship is only sin if we “forsake the assembly” (Heb.10:25). Meaning, if we blow it off for frivolous reasons or even for persecution (12:4), which the virus is neither. The Coronavirus is not frivolous or a means of persecution. Most of us have encouraged someone who is sick to stay home on

Sunday to protect them from getting worse and infecting others. The same was true regarding the contagious disease of leprosy (Lev. 13:43-45). If “one” can stay home away from worship without sinning because of sickness, then all can.

3. Unlike the flu, one can be asymptomatic with the Coronavirus, meaning sick without symptoms. Therefore, every member should be viewed as though they have the virus, not as though they don't. Hence, we have social distancing of 6 ft away. It is contradictory to ignore the health order and come together as though the pandemic is not serious and then practice social distancing which physically acknowledges there is a serious health risk. Because that would not only be an indication of defeating the purpose for which isolation is intended, which is to minimize contaminating others, but would also acknowledge that one is knowingly putting others in unnecessary danger.

2 / 2

4. God gave governing authorities for the protection of its citizens (Rom. 13:1-5). The laws and bans being instituted because of the Coronavirus are intended to protect lives which is consistent with God's will. If these laws aren't contrary to God's will, we should all adhere (Tit. 3:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-17). Many brethren have rightly cancelled worship services because inclement weather to also protect members. Meeting for worship is not at all costs. If it was, no one could miss for any reason. It is faithful Christianity that is at all costs (Rev. 2:10; Heb. 10:39).

5. Jesus as well as the old law taught mercy over sacrifice (Mt. 12:7-13). Read Micah 6:6-8. Notice that without mercy sacrifice means nothing. Mercy compassionately helps (Lam. 3:22; Tit. 3:4-5). Disregarding the well-being of others lacks mercy and compassion (Lk. 10:30-37, [33,37]). Christianity and worship are

not at the expense of others to needlessly put them in harm's way. Who tells the aged widow she must drive on ice to not miss worship? That isn't even Christian (Mt. 10:16; Acts 16:27-28). Yet, some equally have members treacherously venturing out in the midst of this crisis.

6. Being isolated at home should not prevent us from giving God worship, no more than it did with John being isolated on the isle of Patmos, who was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day (Rev. 1:9-10). My family will come together at home on Sunday and give God worship until we are able to assemble again with our brethren.