

COVID-19 and Christian Doctrine

These worldwide afflictions not only reveal that the holy God of heaven judges sinful man on earth, but they are also harbingers of the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. How often our Lord Jesus promises in the Book of Revelation, “Surely I come quickly!” This is our one “blessed hope” (Titus 2:13).

5) *Church*. The most obvious effect of the coronavirus upon the church is that of disruption. Sunday worship services, catechism classes, Bible studies, etc., are either cancelled or severely curtailed all around the world. Outside one’s own household, there is little or no communion between the saints in the way of physical contact or face-to-face meetings. The Christian sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s supper are in abeyance.

Instead of going to Lord’s day services, many must use CDs or DVDs or audio cassettes or books. Others have access to on-line sermons or live webcasting. Currently, the CPRC live streams, by video and audio, prayer and the reading and exposition of the Word from our church building at the same time as our regular Sunday services: 11am and 6pm (<https://cprc.co.uk/live-streaming>). We are looking forward to the day when we can sing Psalm 122:1 together again: “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD.” Meanwhile, let us intercede for one another and fellowship with each other by phone or on-line.

6) *Salvation*. As regards the application to us of our redemption in Christ, it is still absolutely gracious and certain, according to God’s unchangeable will, for “whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified” (Rom. 8:30)!

So what is Jehovah doing with His elect, reconciled and regenerate people through the coronavirus? The divine goal and result with His saints in this life—even now!—is the same as it has always been and will always be: conforming us “to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29)!

How is our heavenly Father doing this during this pandemic, when the official preaching of the Word and the sacraments in the (physical) gathering of believers and their seed for public worship on the Lord’s day are temporarily denied to us? (During these days of COVID-19, Psalms 42, 43, 63, 84, 137, etc., are more poignant.)

We recall that there are other means that God especially uses at times like these: earnest prayer (have you been growing cold?), the reading of the sacred Scriptures (maybe you have been neglecting the Word?), the study of Reformed books (for which you may not have had much time of late), etc. Jehovah will graciously use these spiritual means, in connection with our present trials, for “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28)!

So let us not worry about the future but trust our merciful heavenly Father (Matt. 6:24-34; Phil. 4:6-8), who will use this plague, as He formerly used a terrible famine, for His people’s salvation and everlasting “good” (Gen. 50:20). *Rev. Stewart*

Check out our new “Coronavirus Resources Page,” which includes recent sermons on “The Coronavirus and the Fourth Horseman” and “The Six Seals and the Coronavirus” (<https://cprc.co.uk/coronavirus-resources-page>).

The doctrinal framework provided by the inspired Scriptures is necessary for us to understand rightly the coronavirus pandemic. The Christian worldview makes sense of COVID-19, giving us comfort and peace in the Lord Jesus during these unsettled times. In this short article, we will see how the coronavirus fits within the six main heads of biblical doctrine (somewhat rearranged): 1) God, 2) man, 3) Christ, 4) the end times, 5) the church and 6) salvation. So do not be troubled or shaken!

1) *God*. The true and living God is infinite, eternal and unchangeable in His wisdom, power, love, faithfulness, holiness and justice. As such, the Most High is the sole Creator, universal Ruler and supreme Judge. He is absolutely sovereign, as the One who “worketh all things after the counsel of his own will” (Eph. 1:11)—including the coronavirus—for “none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?” (Dan. 4:35).

2) *Man*. Unlike the angels, human beings have a physical body, including lungs, which are especially attacked by COVID-19. Unlike the animals, man possesses a spirit and does not merely cease to exist at death like a dog (Ecc. 12:7), contrary to the myth of evolutionism with its lies that provide false consolation to millions.

Through the fall of Adam, our representative head, the entire human race, Christ excepted, is conceived and born in sin, and totally depraved by nature (Rom. 3:10-18; 5:12-21). As a rational, moral creature, man has a conscience (Rom. 2:15), a sense of right and wrong, and a fear of death and divine judgment (Heb. 2:15). This is why many unbelievers are so scared of this plague.

3) *Christ*. As the Son of God and the Son of man, our Lord Jesus is fully God and fully man. Through His perfect obedience in a sinless life and a substitutionary death, our Saviour is “Lord both of the dead and living” (Rom. 14:9). The crucified and risen Christ is now enthroned in heaven, executing God’s eternal decree and ruling over all things in providence.

He is the Lamb who, upon His exaltation, received the book from the hand of the Triune God and opens the seven seals, including the fourth seal with its pale horse (Rev. 5-6). Its rider, Death, employs especially four terrible means to kill people: war, famine, wild beasts and pestilence, including the coronavirus (Rev. 6:8; cf. Eze. 14:21).

4) *End times*. The Lord Jesus lists some of the signs of His return in Matthew 24:7: “[a] nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be [b] famines, and [c] pestilences, and [d] earthquakes, in divers places” (cf. Luke 21:10-11). The pestilence of COVID-19 is certainly “in divers places,” such as China, Italy, Iran, Spain, USA, Germany, S. Korea and, indeed, almost all the countries of the earth.

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The Idea of the Organic in Scripture (8)

In the last issue of the *News*, I was dealing with the question of the difference between God loving all men absolutely and “offering” salvation to all men on the one hand, and His commanding all men to believe in Christ on the other hand. One can consult that article for the details. The defenders of the gospel as a loving offer to everybody head for head confuse the command of the gospel with a mere offer. This is inexcusable exegesis. Even in every-day speech, who confuses an offer with a command?

The appeal of the questioner we were answering in our last article is based on II Corinthians 5:20. In this text, Paul says that, as an ambassador of the gospel of Christ, he “beseeches” the Corinthians to be “reconciled to God” through faith in Jesus. The offer defenders appeal to the word “beseech.” On that word and similar words in Scripture, they hang their doctrinal error of God’s universal love and tender plea to absolutely everyone to believe in Christ.

I pointed out in the last article that words similar to the word “beseech” indicate the seriousness of God’s command that comes to all men to believe in Christ. God means what He says when He commands all men to forsake sin and believe in the gospel. He does not play games. Several remarks must be added to this.

Historically, the Reformed churches have always made a distinction between the will of God’s command and the will of God’s decree. The doctrine of election and reprobation belongs to the will of God’s decree; the will of God’s command is that all men forsake their sin and believe in Christ. Yet the will of God’s command is related to the will of His decree, for the will of His command is the means God uses to execute the will of His decree of reprobation so that reprobation is accomplished by God in the way of wicked man’s rejection of the gospel. The doctrine of a well-meant offer to all, rooted in an alleged divine desire to save everybody, has crowded out the doctrine of sovereign double predestination. This refusal to believe the truth of divine predestination is not only rooted in its inherent conflict with the idea of a well-meant offer, but historically those who hold tenaciously to a well-meant offer of the gospel have denied, or ended up denying, double predestination.

Such has been the nature of the preaching of the gospel throughout history—even in the Old Testament times. Even then, the gospel always came with the command to forsake sin and believe the promise of God that He would send the Seed of the woman, Jesus Christ.

And so God has worked through the ages. The gospel was preached to the organism of the nation of Israel, including elect and reprobate. The gospel was always the same: it included an urgent command to all who heard it to repent of their sins and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—in the old dispensation to believe in the promise of the coming of Christ as the Seed of the woman. But that command, preached to the organism of the nation, came to the elect as well as the reprobate, for the elect had to repent and believe the promise of Christ, as well as the reprobate. That was the command of God

that came to all.

But along with that command came also the promise that whoever believed in Christ would receive eternal life in Him. That promise too came to all who heard the gospel. Those who rejected God’s command and scorned His promise were damned; those who believed the promise, forsook their sin and repented were saved.

So it is also in the new dispensation. In the organism of the church, this is always the command of the gospel: repent and believe! Never is that gospel to be reduced to a mere loving offer to all men absolutely, for that is a caricature of the gospel, and does terrible despite to the only true and sovereign God.

From God’s point of view, the true preaching of the gospel that I have described is the means He uses to accomplish His purpose of election and reprobation, for the gospel is “the power of God unto salvation” to all who believe (Rom. 1:16). God gives the gift of faith to His elect whom He knows eternally as His own (John 17:9). Whereas, He hardens the reprobate who reject the gospel and mock His command to repent.

God works in this way because He does not treat men as robots, so that the elect believe because God pushes the right button. My minister used to say that God does not take the elect to heaven in the top bunk of a Pullman sleeper. He works in them so that they actually do believe. Nor does God work in the reprobate in such a way that they reject the gospel because God compels them to reject it. Adam was created capable of doing all the things that God commanded him, but he rebelled and now his descendants show their wicked rebellion by turning their backs on Jehovah and remaining in the slime of sin.

The figure that Scripture uses to explain this truth is found in Isaiah 55:10-11 and Hebrews 6:7-8. It is the figure of rain that falls on the earth, and waters both herbs and weeds. The rain is responsible for the herbs bearing food and it is responsible for the growth of the weeds so that they manifest themselves as weeds. The same is true of our Lord’s teaching in the parable of the four kinds of soil, and the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:3-30, 36-43).

Yet it must also be remembered that the gospel is preached to an organism, whether a nation, a church or a family. Hence, in John 15:1-8, Jesus compares the nation of Israel to branches. Christ Himself is the vine and God is the husbandman. There are branches in the vine that bear fruit and there are branches that do not bear fruit. The latter are those who do not turn from their wicked way (in Jesus’ day, particularly worshipping God in outward and formal law-keeping to gain salvation by the works of the law). The former are those who confess that only by faith in Christ can they be saved (in Jesus’ day, Nicodemus, the Marys, the disciples, the thief on the cross, etc.). *Prof. Hanko*

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