

Rise Up And Build

"So They said, 'Let us rise up and build,' Then they set their hands to do this good work," Neh. 2:18

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The Greatest Threat of COVID-19 is Spiritual, not Physical!

The title of this article reflects the editor's judgment; it does not state a proven fact. And the title of this article is not intended to minimize the physical threat of COVID-19. After all, COVID-19 has evolved into a global pandemic, in one way or another adversely affecting the human population. As of Dec. 3, 2020, 64.7 million people in the world have contacted the virus, already resulting in the death of 1.5 million people. On Dec. 3, 2020 over 10,000 Floridians contacted this virus on that day alone! On Dec. 1, 2020 Florida became the third state in the nation to supersede one million cases of COVID-19. Most of us probably wonder, "who among us will be its next victim?" The economic and social disruption caused by this virus is nothing short of devastating. Tens of millions of people are at risk of lapsing into extreme poverty. It has been estimated that nearly half of the world's 3.3 billion global workforce are at the risk of losing their livelihood.

Much, much more could be said about the economic effects of this virus. Such is on virtually everyone's mind, and the focus of most people's attention — so much so, that nearly everyone is experiencing a case of "Covid Fatigue." And this situation is not likely go away anytime soon. To a large degree, our nation is in a "shut down" mode, as many Mayors and Governors across the nation have mandated the closing of schools, churches, and virtually all business that are not considered "essential." Countless businesses have gone out of business. Early in 2020 our nation's economy was experiencing almost unparalleled growth, but the year is concluding with millions of Americans out of work and multitudes wondering how they can survive financially.

Yes, as previously stated, much, much more could be stated by way of illustrating the physical, financial, mental, and emotional harm wrought to our nation, and to the world at large, by this mean virus. In view of these facts, I don't want to be perceived as minimizing the this-world harm wrought by this virus. Some of our members have contacted the virus. Most of us have family members and friends who have suffered the ill effects of COVID-19, and we have mourned the demise of some of its victims who were our friends, and/or who were related to us. In view of these facts, I could not (either intelligently or emotionally) minimize the this-world harm wrought by COVID-19! So, why would I dare suggest that "the greatest threat of COVID-19 is **spiritual**, not Physical?" Some of my reasons are as follows:

1. It seems that many fear COVID-19 more than they fear God! When He sent the 12 disciples out to preach to *“the lost sheep of the house of Israel”* Jesus warned them of the enemies they would encounter, and the physical harm they could experience. Nevertheless, He cautioned them, saying, *“Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell,”* Matt. 10:28. Notwithstanding the fact that COVID-19 has become a global pandemic, it is very probable that the majority of people will never contact this virus, and over 99 percent of those who do will survive. On the other hand, the Bible teaches that *“all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom. 3:23), and that *“the wages of sin is death...”* (Rom. 6:23). Moreover, the day will come when *“we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that everyone may receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad”* (2 Cor. 5:10). One can die from the effects of COVID-19 and still go to heaven, but no one can die **in sin** and go to heaven!

2. COVID-19 has influenced countless Christians to miss the assemblies of the local church of which they are members. I recognize that those who have a compromised immune system and/or are older in years, are especially endangered by this virus. And those who have the virus and/or may be spreaders of this virus because of contact with others who have the virus, must be cautious and concerned — not only for their own health, but for the health of fellow Christians who could be victimized by such contact. Nevertheless, the fact remains that we, as Christians, must not forsake *“the assembling of ourselves together”* (Heb. 10:25), and that as Christians we must *“come together”* to eat of the Lord’s supper (I Cor. 11:20), and to worship God *“in spirit and in truth”* (John 4:23,24; Acts 2:42, etc.). While not all missing is forsaking, the fact remains that the more often we miss *“the assembling of ourselves together,”* the more likely it becomes that we will lose our desire even to assemble. While protecting our physical health, we could become more and more *“lukewarm”* without realizing the spiritual peril facing our own souls! (cf. Rev. 3:15-16).

3. Because of allowing COVID-19 to cause us to miss the assemblies, we are more and more at risk of forsaking our “one another” responsibilities. As Christians, we must *“love one another”* (John 13:34); we must *“by love serve one another”* (Gal.5:13); we must *“bear...one another’s burdens”* (Gal. 6:2); we must *“be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you,”* Eph. 4:32, etc., etc. While we don’t have to be in the regular assemblies to fulfill some of these *“one another”* responsibilities, the fact remains that the less often we are together in the assemblies the less likely we are to know each other’s needs and to respond accordingly.

4. The church, being “the pillar and ground of the truth” (I Tim. 3:15) must sound “out the word of the Lord” (I Thess. 1:8), but COVID-19 has greatly interfered in this! Think of those who have consistently gone overseas to preach the word, but travel restrictions due to this virus have interfered with such. In the last year how many gospel meeting have had to be either canceled or re-scheduled?

5. Many local churches are already small, and are bordering on going out of existence . This is very, very sad! But it is very probable that the restrictions brought on by this virus have already resulted in many such churches closing their doors and for all practical purposes ceasing to exist.

6. Satan is like some politicians; he does not intend “to let any crisis go to waste.” He is *“our adversary,”* and he, *“as a roaring lion walketh about seeking whom he may devour”* (I

Pet. 5:8). It was after Jesus had fasted 40 days and 40 nights, that Satan tempted Him, saying, “*if thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread*” (Matt. 4:3). He approached Jesus when he perceived Jesus as being most vulnerable. And so it is with us! When we are discouraged, depressed, and disheartened, we are more likely to yield to Satan’s lures. And COVID-19 has discouraged, depressed, and disheartened millions, including many Christians. This is one of the great dangers posed by COVID-19.

Consequently, in view of the preceding facts and others which could be included, it is my judgment that “the greatest threat of COVID-19 is spiritual — not physical.” However, though **adversity** brings out the worst in many people, it **brings out the best in others**. And such should be the case with you and me!

Hence, we ask the question, “how can you and I become stronger (not weaker) during this pandemic?” The following are a few suggestions. Let us:

1. Spend much time in prayer! Hard times often make us more aware that we can’t do it alone; we need God’s help, and we should be encouraged by the realization that “*the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much*” (Jas. 5:16).

2. Stay connected! Through ZOOM, skype, and other internet services, we can go on-line, interact with other Christians, and hear excellent lesson from God’s word . Being forced (as happens in some cases) to stay at home) does not necessarily mean complete isolation. Modern media affords many opportunities for us to reach out to fellow Christians and offer words of encouragement, and/or receive words of encouragement.

3. Count your many blessings! Study Mark 10:28-30 carefully, and you will discover that faithful Christians are a part of a large family (the Lord’s family!); hence, properly understood, they are never really alone! Then, too, read the first chapter of Ephesians and note the many, many “*spiritual blessings*” we enjoy in Christ Jesus! We should never allow our this-world problems to blind us to the priceless blessings we enjoy as Christians!

4. Reach out to others! Do unto them as you would have them do unto you (Matt. 7:12). COVID-19 may well afford us with added opportunities to “*do good unto*” others (Gal. 6:10).

5. Read your Bible daily and meditate thereupon (Psalm 1:1-3). It will provide nourishment for the soul, so much so that even though COVID might cause the “*outward man*” to “*perish*,” the “*inward man*” can be “*renewed day by day*” (2 Cor. 4:16).

Conclusion: Beloved, there are no words that I can offer which will diminish the physical threats posed by COVID-19, nor the this-world harm it can cause. But as Christians, we can make the best of a difficult situation and emerge from it stronger than before. Let each one of us so resolve that we will face this situation in such a way that in years to come we may be able to look back upon it as the challenge that drew us closer to God, and more fruitful in the service of God. In so doing that which many view as a course can become a **blessing!**

—B. Witherington