

How to Draw the Line Between Faith and Unnecessary Risks With COVID-19

With the coronavirus outbreak, many Christians are wrestling with the balance between faith in God over disease and the prudence of social distancing. Certainly, we trust God and believe that He can and will protect us from sickness.

The power of Jesus' name is greater than any virus. However, where do we draw the line on taking unnecessary risks? Many pastors grappled with this reality as we closed our churches and held online services in order to protect our flocks and curtail the pandemic.

Jesus, you recall, dared to touch lepers as He healed them (Mark 1:40-42). One could argue, "True, but He is God!" Yet He told His followers to do the same, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons'" (Matt. 10:7-8). Jesus also used the spoken word to heal without laying hands on people (Matt. 8:5-13).

I've made many hospital visits where I was required to wear a mask, gown and gloves to pray for patients with contagion. Admittedly, quarantine is not fun. We don't like our freedoms restricted but, remember, God "quarantined" Noah's family for about a year on the ark for their own safety.

God also made the Israelites stay in their houses as the destroyer passed over Egypt. Yes, they were protected by the blood, but they had to remain inside or risk exposure and death (Ex. 12: 22-23). God had Moses isolate lepers from the camp and burn contaminated clothes to prevent epidemics (Lev. 13:45-59). Rahab's family was also confined to her house when God razed Jericho as the scarlet cord hung in her window as a

token of divine protection (Josh. 2:18-19).

Walking by faith is one thing; straying into presumption is another. Notice when Satan tempted Jesus to jump off the top of the temple, he used Psalms 91:11-12 to bait Him. Christ didn't fall for the trap, "It is also written, 'You shall not tempt the Lord your God'" (Matt. 4:5-7).

As God in a human body, He could have jumped and landed safely. He was not bound by natural laws. After all, He walked on water, passed through walls, calmed storms, multiplied food and traveled supernaturally at times. However, He refused to follow Satan's suggestion or to tempt God.

Presumption means "to assume, to take for granted, to undertake with unreasonable boldness, to do something without the right or permission, to go too far in acting or in taking liberties." This means there are some limits to faith that prevent us from being reckless.

Acting with cautious wisdom does not indicate a lack of trust in God. A series of sayings circulating on social media provide perspective:

- We trust God, but we wear seat belts.
- We trust God, but we wash our hands.
- We trust God, but we wear life jackets.
- We trust God, but we use oven mitts with hot dishes.
- We trust God, but we lock our houses at night.
- We trust God, but we use smoke detectors in our homes.
- We trust God, but we take medicine.

Consider these biblical examples that illustrate the difference between faith and presumption:

–Faith prompted Noah to successfully build the ark; pride and presumption motivated men to build the Tower of Babel, and it failed.

–Israel routed Jericho by faith and obedience; they were humiliated by Ai due to overconfidence and compromise (Josh. 7:1-12).

–Israel placed the ark of the covenant ahead of their army and God fought their battles; backslidden Israel later tried it, and 36,000 men were slain and the ark was stolen by the Philistines (Num. 10:33-35, 1 Sam. 4:3-22).

–Barnabas' faith prompted him to sell his land, donate the profit to the church, and he was blessed; Ananias and Sapphira did the same thing deceitfully, and they were cursed (Acts 4:36-37, 5:1-11).

–Faith empowered Paul to cast out demons; the seven sons of Sceva presumed to practice exorcism and they were injured and disgraced (Acts 19:12-16).

Truth taken to extremes becomes heresy. Some people even take Jesus' words too far, "And these signs will accompany those who believe: In My name . . . they will take up serpents; if they drink any deadly thing, it will not hurt them" (Mark 16:17-18a).

Paul was bitten by a venomous viper on the Island of Melita (Malta) while building a fire. The superstitious natives assumed he was a murderer and waited for him to drop dead. When he survived, they thought he was a god. Paul wasn't hunting for snakes, but God protected him when he accidentally contacted a deadly one (Acts 28:1-6).

People who handle snakes or drink poison on purpose to prove their "faith" are tempting fate and often suffer fatal results. Besides, Jesus also said, "Look, I give you authority to trample on serpents" (Luke 10:19a). Why handle them when we

can trample them?

We know God rewards bold, aggressive faith, but He also expects us to use common sense. For instance, we shouldn't grab a live wire, jump out of a plane without a parachute, play in the street, run up big debts and await a bailout, or do other foolish, dangerous things and expect divine intervention. God protected the three Hebrews in the fiery furnace, but they didn't jump into the fire voluntarily. Yes, God kept Daniel safe in the lion's den, but he didn't leap in to prove he had faith.

In 1910, as a plague ravaged Africa, Pentecostal preacher John G. Lake experienced a documented miracle. The plague was so contagious, they offered \$1,000 to nurses who dared to care for the sick. Lake and his team volunteered without pay. They entered houses, removed and buried the dead, but no symptoms of the plague touched them.

Finally, a doctor asked him, "What have you been doing to protect yourself? You must have a secret." Lake responded, "Brother, it is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. I believe that just as long as I keep my soul in contact with the living God so that His Spirit is flowing into my soul and body, that no germ will ever attach itself to me, for the Spirit of God will kill it." Lake invited the doctor to experiment by taking the foam from the mouth of a dead plague victim and putting it under a microscope. He saw masses of living germs. Then Lake told the doctor to put the foam on his hands and said the germs would die. The doctor did so and witnessed the germs die instantly in Lake's hands.

So, concerning the Coronavirus, we know God can and believe He will protect us. At the same time, social distancing is a sensible precaution not a lack of faith.

Do we dare to minister to those who have contracted the virus? Yes, if that situation arises. Do we trust God? Certainly! Do

we wash our hands and try to stay out of harm's way? Absolutely! May God help us to find the proper balance; to walk in faith yet avoid presumption.

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