

9 Reasons Why Churches Should Not Congregate During Coronavirus Lockdowns

Lately, the news media has highlighted how many churches in America are refusing to obey the law related to the restrictions of public gatherings of any size.

Some of the reasons churches are refusing include the fact that many older congregations have not come into the 21st century in terms of the usage of technology. This is resulting in very little giving via online platforms, such as church apps. Another reason is because some churches believe it violates their First Amendment rights, taking away the freedom of speech, religion and right to assemble.

That being said, the following are reasons why I believe the churches should obey the law during this pandemic:

1. There is no violation of the First Amendment.

There are many ways we can communicate and preach the gospel as a church outside of Sunday gatherings. If the state forbids the preaching of the gospel on the internet or airwaves, then our First Amendment would be violated. Since there is a prohibition against all public gatherings, not just church gatherings, our First Amendment rights are not being violated.

2. The state is assigned by God to protect its citizens from harm.

In my opinion, the present lockdown does not violate biblical jurisdiction. Scripture shows us that one of the primary callings of civil government is to protect its citizens from physical harm (Rom. 13:1-8).

3. Churches cannot control the physical health of Sunday

attendees.

In every gathering, there is a mixed multitude, and there are usually a large percentage of believers who have serious preexisting conditions (this is especially seen within older congregants). Many within our church members struggle with obesity, diabetes, heart and respiratory conditions. Having a congregational meeting puts all these people at serious risk. It is not the church's role to mandate preventative health measures and lifestyle changes as a requirement for attendees. The best church leaders can do is to promote and practice a healthy lifestyle. Since we enjoy being in proximity to one another, practicing physical distancing can be very difficult in a church setting.

4. Churches cannot be responsible for the faith level of each of their attendees.

Some Pentecostal preachers who move in miracles think it is an affront to their faith to cancel services. However, in my opinion, this is a lack of biblical wisdom. We cannot impose our faith on every person in our church. Scripture teaches us to grow in our faith, which implies that not every person has a high faith level (2 Thess. 1:3, Rom. 12:3). Not every person has the faith of a person like evangelist John G. Lake, who laid hands on the sick during the bubonic plague without getting infected. If a pastor believes he or she has enough faith to walk in miraculous health (this type of faith usually takes time to develop), such a strong faith level does not automatically get imparted to others. Even churches that exude an atmosphere of great faith still have people in their congregations who are sick.

5. Churches are hurting their reputation with outsiders.

Scripture makes it clear that spiritual leaders should have a good reputation with those outside the church. Even Jesus walked in favor with God and men (1 Tim. 3:7; Luke 2:52). Pastors and churches who violate the prohibition on public

gatherings, give their adversaries the ability to paint the whole church as ignorant, dangerous outliers who do not care for their neighbor.

6. Churches are not loving their neighbor.

Instead of just gathering on Sundays, the church should be focused on releasing their congregation to love and serve their neighbors. Thankfully, many Christians are obeying the command to love their neighbors during this crucial time. We see incredible acts of service, as some are volunteering to serve health care workers food and refreshments. Others, like Samaritan's Purse, are going directly into the line of fire. Samaritan's Purse has set up a makeshift hospital in Central Park, New York. Millions of individual believers are looking out for their friends, family and neighbors who are at risk. Let's not forget that there are thousands of Christians who serve on the front lines as doctors, nurses, EMT workers, first responders and so on. They are risking their lives and daily walking out their faith.

7. We should not test God.

The devil tempted Jesus to hurl Himself down from the top of the temple, referencing Psalm 91 as a reason why Jesus should do it. Jesus answered the devil by quoting another Scripture that forbids people from tempting the Lord (Matt. 4:5-7). We see many instances in Scripture where Jesus touched those who were sick. For example, Jesus touched a contagious leper (Mark 1:40-44). What is the difference between these two situations? The former was an unnecessary risk to prove God's ability, and the latter was out of an act of obedience to Jesus' assignment. The leper approached Jesus, not vice versa. Jesus discerned it was a divine opportunity to illustrate the compassion of God for an unclean social outcast. Christians who constantly cram ultra-processed food down their throats, and practice unhealthy lifestyle patterns, are intentionally violating natural law. Although God can still heal these

people supernaturally, it is a matter of stewardship to not intentionally place yourself in need of divine healing.

8. Christians are also called to be good citizens and obey the law.

Paul makes it clear that believers should obey the laws and submit to civic leadership (Rom. 13:1-8, Titus 3:1-3). When we do not do this, we become part of the problem instead of the solution. We must always endeavor to be the salt of the earth and light of the world. Only when the civic law violates our faith, then are we called to practice civil disobedience, just like Peter did (Acts 4:18-20).

9. A quarantine is a biblical concept.

The Scriptures are replete with examples of people being quarantined. In the Old Testament, during the night of the Passover, God commanded whole families to be quarantined so the plague would not strike them (Ex. 12). In addition, if somebody was deemed unclean, they had to be removed from the congregation for a period of time (Lev. 13-15). Lepers were also separated from the assembly of the Lord and quarantined (Num. 12:1-15). Hence, this is a biblical principle that is necessary during a proliferating societal contagion. Pastors who ignore this call by our officials to quarantine, lack understanding of the full counsel of God when it comes to health and preservation of life.

Finally, may the Lord grant the churches creative ways of strengthening the infrastructure of our communities during this season, so that when we do congregate, we will be stronger than ever!