

# How Should We Respond to the Coronavirus (COVID-19)?

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## I. Introduction

How should Christians respond to catastrophic events? Should they throw caution to the wind and say, “God’s in control; He’ll protect me”? Or should they follow the crowd: if the crowd panics—if they run to the store and hoard toilet paper and water—they should too? How should Christians balance appropriate caution with their trust in the Lord?

## II. How Should Christians Respond to Global Crises?

The Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been declared a worldwide pandemic (the only continent not affected is Antarctica). Panic is here and affecting everything: everyday and international commerce, social life, religious life, etc. What should be the Christian’s response?

**What is Coronavirus (COVID-19)?** It’s a respiratory illness that can spread from person to person who are in close contact (within 6 feet) through coughing and sneezing; it’s a disease caused by a novel coronavirus.

**What are the symptoms?** Fever, Cough, and Shortness of Breath (these may appear 2-14 days after exposure). Emergency warning signs include difficulty breathing or shortness of breath, persistent pain or pressure in chest, new confusion or inability to arouse, bluish lips or face (this list is not exhaustive).

**How dangerous is COVID-19 and who’s at risk?** Nearly everyone who gets COVID-19 will survive. The people most at risk are: the Elderly, anyone with a compromised immune system, and anyone with a chronic medical condition especially heart disease, lung disease, and diabetes. How dangerous is it? The mortality rate of the regular flu is less than 1%; the mortality rate of COVID-19 globally is 3.4%.<sup>1</sup> We shouldn’t downplay the dangers of COVID-19 but to keep things in perspective, thus far in the US, as of March 13, 2020, there have been 1,629 cases of COVID-19 and 41 deaths.<sup>2</sup> During the 2017-2018 flu season there were approximately 79,000 deaths<sup>3</sup> (which meant millions of cases and hundreds of thousands of hospitalizations). Yes, the mortality rate of COVID-19 is much higher and we should do everything we can to keep it from spreading, but panic is not the proper response. Panic has made this much worse. Thousands of school districts have shut down. Many professional sports have postponed or cancelled (NBA, NHL, MLS, MLB, PGA Tour, XFL, WTA, NCAA, ATP Tour). Amusement parks, concerts, and other large venue gatherings have also been shut down. Various states have instituted bans on large gatherings. All this caused people to forgo everyday activities, which affected business, which affected investors, which caused world markets to plummet, which created more fear and panic. It’s not that we shouldn’t be cautious; we should be. After all, things can get deadly serious: the Spanish flu infected nearly 1/3 of the world (500 million) and killed between 50-100 million people.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.who.int/dg/speeches/detail/who-director-general-s-opening-remarks-at-the-media-briefing-on-covid-19---3-march-2020>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/cases-in-us.html>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/flu/about/season/flu-season-2018-2019.htm>

**What precautions should we take?** They hope to have therapeutics to fight the disease in a month and a vaccine sometime next year. In the meantime, avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands. Wash your hands with soap and water for at least 20 seconds (or use a sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol), especially after visiting public places, blowing your nose, coughing, or sneezing. Avoid close contact with those who are sick. If COVID-19 is spreading in your community, keep your distance from people (6 feet), especially if you're elderly, have a chronic medical condition (heart, lung, diabetes), or compromised immune system. If you're sick: stay home (unless you're seeking medical care), avoid public areas and transportation, don't share dishes, drinking glasses, cups, eating utensils, towels, or bedding, seek prompt medical attention if your illness worsens, limit contact with pets and animals (wash your hands before and after you interact with them), and if you have a medical appointment, call ahead to inform them that you have or may have COVID-19. Cover your mouth and nose when coughing or sneezing or use the inside of your elbow. Throw used tissues away. Facemasks: if you're not sick, you shouldn't wear a facemask; they may be in short supply and should be saved for caregivers. If you're sick and around other people or caring for someone sick, wear a facemask.

Clean and disinfect frequently touched surfaces; if surfaces are dirty, clean them (use detergent/soap and water prior to disinfection). Testing: a negative result means the virus was not found; in the early stages, it's possible the virus will not be detected. Public spaces: your risk of exposure to respiratory viruses like COVID-19 may increase in crowded, closed-in settings with little air circulation if there are people in the crowd who are sick. Avoid all non-essential travel including plane trips and especially avoid cruise ships. If you've been in contact with someone known to have COVID-19 or recently traveled from an area with ongoing spread of COVID-19, stay home and call your healthcare provider. Elderly patients who have severe underlying medical conditions or are immunocompromised should contact their healthcare provider early, even if their illness is mild. If you have severe symptoms, such as persistent pain or pressure in the chest, new confusion or inability to arouse, or bluish lips or face, contact your healthcare provider or emergency room and seek immediate care.<sup>4</sup>

**COVID-19 is a BIG deal, but...** there seems to be two perspectives: some compare COVID-19 to other killers like the flu, which comes across as downplaying the threat. Others want all hands on deck, which includes shutting everything down in order to stop the spread of the virus and prevent hospitals from being overwhelmed, which seems wise and prudent. How should Christians respond to this threat?

*They should NEVER fear death*, first, we should look at the danger of COVID-19 but in perspective: the vast majority of people who will contract COVID-19 will not die; the ones truly at risk of death are those in the high-risk groups like the elderly and those with a compromised immune system or a chronic medical condition. Second, your death is appointed by God not a virus. That is, you will never die before your time. The second determined for your death was, is, and forever will be in God's hands not in the hands of a virus or anything else (Deuteronomy 32:39). Therefore, until God's appointed time for you to die arrives, nothing can touch you. Our days are numbered by God alone (Job 14:5; Psalm 139:16). We should take all reasonable precautions (which will vary depending on whether you live in Wuhan, China or one of the states that hasn't been affected: Idaho, Alabama, West Virginia, and Alaska), but we should do so while trusting in the Lord fully because not even a deadly virus can kill us when God is watching over us (Psalm 91:9-16). If He has to, God will use an army that is invisible to the naked eye in order to protect us (2 Kings 6:8-17).

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<sup>4</sup> For more info: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/index.html>

They should NEVER panic, yes, this virus is a big deal, but there's no call for panic. In fact, even when it's time to panic, Christians shouldn't. Why not? Philippians 4:6-7! Sound too simplistic? Realize what God is ultimately saying to us in this passage, "I am the God who controls the universe including the Coronavirus. Stop getting so anxious, I've got this." So, yes, it's a big deal, yes, we should take the necessary precautions, but we should never panic. Should we shut down travel? Yes, if it's an area that's an epicenter of the virus, as they've done with Kirkland, WA and other places.

They should be brave but not foolish, Christians should never fear or panic because the God of the universe is their protector. Nothing can touch us unless He allows it and if we die, we're delivered from this difficult world into His glorious presence (Philippians 1:23). But Christians should also never be foolish: when Satan tempted Jesus to jump off the pinnacle of the temple, Jesus refused to do so even though Satan quoted Psalm 91:11-12 which tells us that God will use even His angels to protect us. Yes, God will protect us but not if we're foolish. So during this COVID-19 scare we must use elbow bumps instead of handshakes, cover our coughs and sneezes, wash our hands and utilize all the other precautions the experts advise. Now, sometimes God will call us to do something that appears foolish, but is actually not only brave but self-sacrificing. In times past when cities were routinely overrun by plagues and other life-threatening dangers Christians were the ones who stayed to help the people while others fled for safety. Why would they do this? Because that's what the Gospel does, it marches into danger where others fear to tread. And in doing so, the Church grew in number because the non-Christians saw the love of Christ in action.

**Should we cancel church?** It depends. How rampant is the spread of the virus? Is your city on mandated government lockdown? If it's an actual emergency and getting together as a church would put lives in danger, then the answer is no, we shouldn't gather in public. We should use alternatives if available (e.g., via internet). But if people are not gathering because fear and panic has set in, they're afraid they *might* get COVID-19 but there's no actual evidence to support this fear, then the answer is yes, we should gather as a church and fulfill the Lord's command to not forsake the assembling of ourselves (Hebrews 10:25). This doesn't mean that you go to church even if you're sick: there are several individuals who aren't with us this morning not because they have COVID-19 but because they don't want to get others sick with their cold/flu/illness. We must be wise, godly, and use our common sense. And we shouldn't cancel church because of how we may appear to others, as if we're being irresponsible. We must not endanger people but we must also not give in to unjustified panic.

**What does COVID-19 teach us about God?** That He is in control of EVERYTHING! He can wipe us out in a heartbeat if He wanted to. Imagine being able to bring the entire world to a halt, politically, economically, and otherwise by a bug that's invisible to the naked eye. That's power, glory, that's ultimately who controls the very air we breathe....and He's on our side!

### III. Conclusion

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*