

6/13/20

Facebook Article #21



Wait on the Lord; be of good courage and He shall strengthen your heart; Wait, I say, on the Lord (Ps. 14)!

Welcome Family to another Fireside Chat,

It's been 9 days since we last talked. I've tried to finish a message for at least 3 or 4 days, but Jenny has been home and I have devoted much time to her visit. This is the first *bona fide* human contact Sharon and I have had since about March 4 and the first for Jenny since about March 9. It has been a real treat on several levels.

I am pleased to say that new cases of Covid 19 have been dropping off slowly and deaths mounting at a slower pace. Since the country has begun the process of reopening, we have been watching to see what happens with new cases and deaths. Until today the new cases hovered mostly below 15,000/day. Yesterday they spiked to almost 24,000. One day does not establish a trend, but it is not unexpected with more human movement and is something that will be watched closely.

There have been only 7,000 deaths since I last wrote 9 days ago, on average less than 1,000/day. I say "only" as a relative expression. If we were to receive such news on any ordinary day, if you can remember one of those, we would be appalled, all the more when we picture the total in 9 days would have wiped out the city of St. Clairsville and maybe about 1500 to 2,000 more. Most Americans consider the Vietnam War to be one of the worst episodes in American history

because of the gross waste of human lives with no good result for the cost, but there were “only” about 58,000 deaths over a period of 19 years. This translates to 3,050/yr. or an average of 8+/day. Isn't it interesting how often and how easily we can adapt to ugly things, especially when the bodies are not falling immediately around us. If it were actually the city of St. Clairsville that dropped dead, we would be aghast, but spread it across a nation of 330 million, it's not bad. This is not a criticism; just an observation. It's probably something that human beings do naturally; perhaps it's what we have to do. If we cannot become adjusted to bad things happening, we would probably all go mad.

This relative improvement in our distress brings us to the next troubling challenge that the improvement brings. With the statistics demonstrating a favorable trend, we begin considering seriously the question of when we shall reopen the assemblies. Our elders are laboring with this question and their appeals for prayers and suggestions is both wise and understandable. The shepherds cannot take this question lightly, but neither should the sheep. There is probably not one among us who would not wish to return to “normal” times and assemble once again. But, I think the situation calls more for caution than exuberance.

Arguably, I suppose, we could return this coming Sunday with greater security than at any time since the beginning of the lockdown. But, not much. The declining numbers of cases and deaths is not so much because the disease has gone away or effective treatment for it has been found, but because we have been so very careful. Relax the care and we cannot be confident that we will not reenergize the infection.

Could we return to the assemblies just as it has always been and no one become infected? Yes, I suppose that is possible... but how probable? Could we return to the assemblies and infect someone with coronavirus and, perhaps, even die. Yes, that is possible also, but how probable no one can say. The question is which is the more probable. I think until more evidence is in and/or better treatments (or even any treatments) are available, we still need to exercise extreme caution.

Some might claim we need to have boldness in our faith and return to the assemblies, but who among that “some” will step forward to shoulder the blame if some of our brothers and sisters die. A cavalier attitude and bold faith are separated by a thin line. Are those with the bold faith prepared to take the blame if ugly things happen? The first pressure point is to reopen the assemblies and this mostly falls on the elders. The first point of blame if it is the wrong decision will typically also be on the elders. At least, this is what will happen if we do not jointly participate in this process. Whatever we do the risks must be assessed and clearly articulated, a procedure must be developed, and the sheep must follow. If the leaders cannot have confidence that the sheep will cooperate, no process will be worth the effort to develop it. The shepherds must lead, the sheep must follow, and the Lord must grant wisdom to us all.

While we all want to return to the assembly, and some perhaps more than others, we must remember that it cannot be the same as it was. One day it can be the same or something similar, but not now. If we are to act responsibly, the earlier we return the more unrecognizable the

assembly will be. What we all yearn for when we think of returning is to what it was, not what it will be. The list that follows is neither an exhaustive nor detailed list of what to expect when we return:

1. Very detailed procedures must be in place to protect the flock from itself.
2. The assembly will not look anything like that which we are so eager to return to. It might even be disappointing.
3. Failure of even one sheep to cooperate can disrupt the entire safety net planned and risk the well-being of the entire flock.
4. Human experience screams in unequivocal terms 100% cooperation in any situation will take divine intervention, or something close to it, to achieve it.
5. Make a serious mistake and we will regret it for a long time to come.

Again, a detailed, clearly articulated, formally written, and repeatedly communicated plan is needed before we move forward... and then with considerable prayer before it is implemented.

For those who are anxious to move sooner than later, ask yourself the question, “Am I ready to shoulder the responsibility and, perhaps the accompanying feeling of guilt, if we move to soon to open our assemblies, or with a poorly conceived plan, or one with which I did not cooperate that results in one or more of our brethren dying?”

All this being said, one day we will open the doors again. But we have to measure what we gain over what we do not already have versus the risk to the well-being to the flock. The church is not a location, a building, a liturgy, or a social pursuit. It is a body of believers, a spiritual family, which aids one another and brings glory to God; that does what is right by each other; that makes sacrifices for the well-being of the other. Some functions may be aided by a central meeting point. Some emotional and psychological needs and desires may be better fulfilled at the assembly. But the body still exists even while separated by space. Remember, the family has been separated for three months. This is nothing to be compared to Joseph’s separation from his family for twenty years. We can endure until the appropriate time.

But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint (Is. 40:31).