

Won't He?

"If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Romans 8:31). This passage was near and dear to many of the Reformers. They were keenly aware of the opponents arrayed against them, including Satan. Nevertheless, in the crucified and risen Christ, God was most definitely for them.

The next verse strikes a victorious chord for us as we near the end of Lent, and especially at a time of uncertainty and danger. It says: "He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for all of us – won't He certainly also give us all things along with Him?"

All things? Yes, all things!

Won't He? Yes, He will!

If God is for us, well, who *can* be against us?

It seems Ken has viewed Another Webinar . . .

Indeed I have. This one featured church leaders from Europe, specifically Italy and Spain, who commented on Coronavirus conditions there. A question many of them engaged was, "What do you wish someone had told you about a month ago?"

Unsurprisingly, it's a terrible time in Europe. One participant reported 500 deaths a day in Spain, and the virus has not yet peaked there! What if the U.S., with a population much larger than Spain's, ends up with a similar mortality rate?

Here are some other specifics:

- When someone dies of coronavirus, spouses are left alone – quarantined by himself or herself.
- In at least one place, the health care system collapsed and brought down communications too, since medical people were trying to share so much data online. Internet access crashed. Then, no more streaming!

- The novelty of streaming is wearing off on many people, anyway. They're yearning for person-to-person communication, even if it occurs electronically. A pastor said he's spending hours a day on the phone, mostly with people who called *him*. Another church is trying to link its members up in "intercession teams" of 6 to pray daily. Each of the 6 suggests 3 people for whom to pray. So the group prays for 18 others.
- Stress from unemployment and living in lockdown is leading to domestic abuse – verbal, sometimes physical. Getting on each others' nerves is taking a toll on marriages. One pastor said he is most concerned about those who live alone and couples with no children in the home.
- But parent/child relationships can also suffer. It's challenging to include children, currently not at school, in all day-to-day life in the home.
- A church is paying for Gospel-centered short articles on Facebook which give readers options to contact the church directly. Many readers do.
- Health care workers are stressed: overworked, of course, but when they go home they are self-isolating from their families, not wanting to transmit anything they unknowingly picked up at work. These heroes are becoming lepers.
- Churches are encouraging their members to engage in neighborhood care. If you are able to collect e-mail addresses you can form, and invite neighbors to join, an online neighborhood chat group. This can be great way to keep in touch, coordinate shopping trips, etc.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Note: Like the 2 previous special See? WOW! issues, this one also is being sent to all CID Circuit Visitors. You can simply forward it to your Circuit! Issues are archived at <http://www.cidlcms.org/cwows.html>



Another Webinar CONTINUED

What do these folks wish they knew earlier?

- To prepare a list of online resources before the crisis really hits. No one can produce everything from scratch, especially in chaotic conditions. Happily, we have done some of this work in the special *Gate Post* issue which can be found at <http://www.cidlcms.org/COVID19GatePost.pdf>
- To tell people what to do in the crisis. How can they stay in the Word when they cannot go to church? And how can they serve others when conditions take turns for the worse?
- A missionary in Italy said he wished he had been warned not to get swept up in euphoria that his new online streamed church service, and other online resources he was producing, can be seen halfway across the country. He would have been helped by a reminder not to lose focus on the people he has been called to serve.
- A couple of participants talked about supporting frontline medical personnel. Before the big crisis hits, identify such people among the membership of your church. Pray for them and speak encouraging words to them (and not only them, but also grocery store and pharmacy workers!). If possible, give the medical people of your church a place to stay if they are wary about passing illness to their family members at home. Give them meals. (Even energy bars are appreciated!) If they report that supplies are short at the medical facilities where they work, and your church and its members are able to donate such supplies, definitely do so.
- One more thing they wished someone had told them: You might die in your efforts to serve. It's a chilling thought, all right, but one we all must face. Yet if God is for us, who can be against us?

Worth considering:

I appreciated all the above points from this webinar. Yet a disquieting note was also sounded throughout it, repeatedly. We need to be aware of this, especially after the present crisis subsides.

Hosts of the webinar kept lauding the “decentralized” approach which this crisis is forcing upon the church. For, in fact, they favor this way. It's how they always want to operate. A man said it would be a shame to miss the present opportunity to “re-frame the church for community.”

The “missional” approach taken by the hosts underlies this aspiration. It tries to get away from the mass gatherings of megachurches, or even Church Growth, to emphasize God's work with and in individuals and smaller groups. That is supposed to be where God *really* works.

However, this approach emerges from a Protestant matrix of doctrine which does not recognize that the means of grace truly are means of grace – that they convey forgiveness and life from the risen Lord. On this premise, church services take a backseat. Pastors are regarded as almost passe. In the words of a comment from one viewer of the webinar: “connection over content.”

Related problems are a confusion of Law and Gospel, and even sheer *Schwaermerei*. If you regard as Gospel whatever God is doing in your neighborhood, the real Good News of forgiveness in Christ gets lost. The church will end up as an agency of the Law, expressing love and restoring order.

Let's start preparing people for the aftermath of this crisis. Will the church – and all of society – do some things differently then? Probably. But Lutherans will want to keep the Gospel and Sacraments clear and central. As we cherish God's grace, let us love the means by which He gives it.

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