

A Call to Repentance and Faith

September 2021

Through the COVID-19 crisis our Lord Jesus Christ is calling us to repent and believe the Good News. This is always the call of our Lord, who sent out his disciples into the world to preach repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name to all nations.¹ Yet frequently we are hard of hearing, so the Lord uses difficult times to get our attention. The Scriptures repeatedly treat crises—from defeat at the hands of enemies, to plagues and famines, to the collapse of the Tower of Siloam²—as opportunities for us to take stock of where we stand before our Lord and to turn to him for the grace and deliverance we need.

For those of us who know the Saviour Jesus Christ, repentance is a joyful thing, since it means embracing once more the Good News. As David says in Psalm 32, “Blessed is the one whose rebellion is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ... when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through all my groaning. ... [But then] I said, ‘I will confess my rebellion to the LORD,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin. ... Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, O righteous, and shout for joy, all you upright in heart!”

Throughout the COVID crisis, governments, the mainstream media, and the tech giants that control social media have repeatedly pushed a narrative that goes like this: (1) COVID is deadly and everyone should be scared of it; (2) through authoritarian measures to enforce social distancing, mask mandates, limitations on social gatherings, and the closure of “non-essential” businesses, we can slow or stop the spread; and (3) the crisis will only end when most of the population is vaccinated. In this narrative, repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is irrelevant. Instead, it is human efforts that will end this crisis, and it is the governments that impose the lockdowns together with the pharmaceutical companies that provide the vaccines who are our saviours. Those who dissent from this narrative or fail to comply with its measures are a danger to society and should be punished, unless they repent and embrace this salvation that human beings have prescribed. We will refer to this as the mainstream narrative from now on.

While it is easy to see how human-centred this narrative is, enormous numbers of Christians have bought into it. This is frequently done with good intentions. People reason that the Fourth Commandment tells us to obey the government and the Fifth Commandment tells us to love our neighbours by doing what we can to preserve their lives. They therefore conclude that we have a spiritual responsibility to comply with all the measures the mainstream narrative outlines.

While we do not want to call into question the sincerity of those who hold this view, we contend that this understanding of our responsibilities before God is shallow. We invite the Christian community to reflect on all the Ten Commandments as they apply to this situation, so that our repentance may be deep, our faith may be directed to where it truly belongs, and our joy in the Good News may be great.

The First Commandment³

I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else.

The Second Commandment

You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not use His name superstitiously, or use it to curse, swear, lie, or deceive, but call on Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving.

¹ Luke 24:47.

² Ezek 18; 1 Kings 8:33-40; Joel 1:1 – 2:27; Luke 13:1-5

³ The Commandments and their explanations are taken from Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*, and follow the numbering system used in the Lutheran Church. We acknowledge that many Christian traditions use a different numbering system.

The Third Commandment

Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not neglect His Word and the preaching of it, but regard it as holy and gladly hear and learn it.

The First Commandment calls us to trust in the true and living God above everything else in all circumstances. He is our Saviour, and he is the one who will bring this crisis to an end. When we trust in human saviours in place of the Lord, we forfeit God's blessing and bring his curse down upon our heads. As God says to us through the prophet Jeremiah, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the LORD. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. ... Blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. He is like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream."⁴ It is no surprise that this crisis is dragging on and on and going from bad to worse, since few even in the Church have shown much confidence in the Lord.

At this point, many will say, "But surely we can trust in God, while still utilising the earthly tools he has given us to battle this disease." Yes, this is true. In the normal course of events God works through earthly means—including doctors, health workers, scientists, and government officials—to deliver healing and other blessings to us. Nevertheless, God is never limited to these means, and no fallible human beings or limited earthly tools deserve the unreserved confidence that belongs only to the Lord. Furthermore, there are ways of testing whether our faith is really in the Lord, or if we are simply paying lip service to him while transferring our confidence to earthly things. In particular, we can look at how we have treated the Second and Third Commandments, since these spell out what faith in God looks like in practice. If we truly trust in him above everything else, we will give all glory to him, call on him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving, honour his holy day by coming together to gladly hear his Word, and then put his Word into practice. So, some questions we should be asking are:

1. Have we treated prayer as the most important thing we can do in this crisis, and repeatedly called on our Christian brothers and sisters to join us in praying? Or have we put more effort into ensuring that people wear masks, socially distance, and follow government directives, as if these things are more important?
2. Have we honoured our God as the one who will save lives and end this crisis, or have we bought into the narrative that it is human beings who will do these things?
3. Have we given glory to Christ as the Bread of Life, who alone has conquered death? Or have we acted as if human measures to stave off death are more vital?
4. God commands us to not neglect meeting together,⁵ to celebrate the Lord's Supper,⁶ to join together in singing songs of thanksgiving to him,⁷ and to treat his Word as the one thing that is truly necessary in life.⁸ So have we done these things? Or have we been happy to shut our churches because the government declared "the one thing needful" to be inessential, while "essential" businesses like liquor stores remained open? Did we suspend the singing of God's praises because our secular government told us not to sing, while shouting at the football was OK? Did we deprive people of Holy Communion—the "medicine of immortality"⁹—at a time when people were dying and needed this healing gift? Did we treat online services as if they are just as good as the real thing, when God commands us to meet together and show each other personal encouragement and care? Have we said things like, "Of course we should shut our churches because people are dying"? Or have we instead recognised that if COVID were the black death, and many times more people were dying, this would be extra reason for churches to stay open, since only Christ has the cure for death?
5. Have we confessed in our liturgy that the Lord's Supper is a "healing gift," given to strengthen us "in body and soul to life eternal," but then indicated through our actions that we are not sure if we believe it, by

⁴ Jeremiah 17:5-8.

⁵ Hebrews 10:24-25.

⁶ 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

⁷ Psalm 149:1; Colossians 3:16

⁸ Luke 10:41-42.

⁹ John 6:54; Ignatius of Antioch, *Epistle to the Ephesians* Chapter XX.

donning masks and gloves as we preside or come to Christ's table, as if we think we might receive here an infection that kills us?¹⁰

6. Have our human attempts to engineer the outcomes we want led us to set aside the commandments of God? Have we prioritised human commands over those of God or made other moral and spiritual compromises, while assuring ourselves that the ends justify the means? Or have we instead focused on doing what God tells us to do, while leaving the results to him?
7. Do our actions show that we are afraid?

This last question is particularly telling. Hebrews 2:14-15 tells us that Christ has come to defeat the devil, who through the fear of death has kept people in lifelong slavery. So, what have we heard throughout this crisis? "Be afraid of dying, be afraid of dying, be afraid of dying, and therefore hand over all your rights and freedoms." The Scriptures tell us that this is the devil's playbook, not God's. The most frequently repeated command in the Bible is "fear not." Do not fear those people or things that can kill the body but cannot kill the soul.¹¹ Fear the Lord, and then you have nothing to fear, since he is gracious and has conquered death itself. This is the message that we should be speaking loudly and clearly in this crisis. Only then are we truly honouring our Lord.

The Fourth Commandment

Honour your father and your mother.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not despise or anger our parents and others in authority, but respect, obey, love and serve them.

Many in the Church have argued that we must follow all the directives our governments give us, since the Fourth Commandment commands us to do so. Yet here it is worth remembering that the Fourth Commandment is not "obey the government" but "honour your father and your mother." It is true that Luther reasons that rulers act as fathers and mothers to their nation,¹² and therefore he includes the New Testament call to obey the governing authorities under the heading of the Fourth Commandment. Nevertheless, we should remember that this Commandment is primarily about the family, and even when we look at the rest of Scripture, the government is just one authority amongst many. Lutheran theology, as it reflects New Testament teaching, speaks about three estates that God has sanctioned within Scripture: the Church, the family, and the government. The government has God-given authority to operate in the civic realm, "to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good."¹³ Yet this does not give it authority to usurp the God-given responsibilities of the other estates or to micromanage areas of life over which God has not given it jurisdiction. God has given spiritual authority to the Church, not the government. Therefore the government does not have authority to suspend worship services or impede our celebration of the holy things that Christ himself has instituted. Furthermore, God has given primary responsibility for the health and wellbeing of family members to parents, not the government. Therefore the government does not have the right to separate loved ones, prohibit children from honouring their parents by visiting them, or to coerce families into taking medical treatments such as COVID vaccines—which are not traditional vaccines, but a form of gene therapy—without the advice of their own doctor or their informed consent. To suggest that the commandment to "honour your father and your mother" gives governments the right to dishonour and trample on families in this way is a perverse twisting of God's word.

¹⁰ When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, infectious diseases were a far greater concern than they are today. Pertussis (whooping cough), diphtheria, tetanus, measles, chicken pox, mumps, rubella as well as common respiratory illnesses, meningitis, streptococcal and staphylococcal infections were all untreatable, and were a far greater risk than anything we face today. Yet Jesus, knowing this, never-the-less commanded us to eat and drink. The only situation in relation to the Lord's Supper that the Scriptures tell us might lead to illness or death is if we sin against the body and blood of our Lord by eating and drinking unworthily (1 Corinthians 11:27-32), without appropriate faith in our Lord and his healing gift (*Small Catechism* VI, 10).

¹¹ Matthew 10:28.

¹² *Large Catechism* I, 142.

¹³ 1 Peter 2:13; cf. Romans 13:1-7.

The Fifth Commandment

You shall not kill.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not hurt our neighbour in any way, but help him in all his physical needs.

At first glance, proponents of the mainstream narrative appear to be on safe ground when they claim that the Fifth Commandment supports their stance. Yet matters are not that simple, for the following reasons:

1. When it comes to saving lives, we must consider all lives. Lockdowns may contribute to preventing deaths from COVID, at least in the short term. Yet lockdowns also increase the number of deaths from other causes. In the developed world they increase deaths from suicide, depression, domestic violence, and drug and alcohol abuse. They decrease life expectancy by causing stress and limiting healthy activity, and increase the number of people who will die from illnesses such as cancer and heart disease by impeding early treatment. In the developing world they cause even more deaths, by pushing people into extreme poverty so that they starve or experience severe malnutrition, and by disrupting control measures for serious diseases such as TB, AIDS, and malaria. Only if we do a cost benefit analysis that takes all these lives into consideration can we know if we are on balance saving lives or not. This is something that proponents of the mainstream narrative routinely fail to mention or consider.
2. There is more than one way to save lives. Some medical experts have called for “focused protection” of high risk groups rather than broadscale lockdowns.¹⁴ Others, including leaders in the field of frontline care, have pointed to a growing body of data that suggests that early treatment with various supplements and cheap, off-the-shelf drugs (which make little to no money for the big pharmaceutical companies) can reduce hospitalisations and deaths by more than 85%.¹⁵ Yet such approaches have been suppressed and their proponents slandered and censored. It is difficult to know what will save the most lives if we are not allowed to have an open conversation.
3. The data on the COVID jabs is too poor and contested to come to firm conclusions. It is likely that in certain high-risk populations such as the elderly and infirm the benefits of these jabs outweigh the risks. It is also probable that in young and healthy people, for whom the risks from COVID are extremely low, these jabs pose a greater danger than the disease. Certainly significant numbers of injuries and deaths from the COVID jabs have been reported around the world, and numerous mechanisms for harm have been identified.¹⁶ Yet this has all been poorly investigated. Until we have long-term safety and efficacy data, and a climate in which red flags are investigated, critics are heard, and the research is not monopolized by those with vested interests, it is almost impossible to know if these jabs are on balance saving lives or not. Furthermore, given that all of these injections are either produced or tested using human tissue derived from aborted fetuses, Christians should have grave ethical concerns about their use.
4. The Fifth Commandment is not just about staving off death. It is also about fostering all those things that make life worth living. As we read in Luther’s *Small Catechism*, this commandment means “that we do not

¹⁴ See for example the Great Barrington Declaration: www.gbdeclaration.org

¹⁵ See for example the work of the Frontline Critical Care Alliance (www.covid19criticalcare.com), The British Ivermectin Recommendation Development (www.bird-group.org), Dr Peter McCollough and Truth for Health (www.truthforhealth.org), Dr Richard Fleming (www.flemingmethod.com), and the Covid Medical Network here in Australia (www.covidmedicalnetwork.com).

¹⁶ 52,949 adverse events including 505 deaths connected to the COVID jabs here in Australia had been reported to the Therapeutic Goods Administration as of 1st September 2021 (www.tga.gov.au/database-adverse-event-notifications-daen). Passive reporting systems such as this one, which rely on voluntary reports, suffer from 2 great limitations: (1) reports need to be investigated before it can be known for sure if the injuries and deaths were caused by the injections, or were merely correlated with the injections, and few of these reports have been investigated in this way; and (2) they only capture the tip of the iceberg in terms of the true number of correlations. A review of the Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS), a similar passive reporting system in the USA, that was commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services and was conducted by Harvard University consultants, concluded that fewer than 1% of vaccine injuries got reported: <https://digital.ahrq.gov/sites/default/files/docs/publication/r18hs017045-lazarus-final-report-2011.pdf>. As of August 27, 2021, despite these low reporting rates, 13,911 deaths connected to the COVID jabs had been reported to VAERS (<https://medalerts.org/vaersdb/findfield.php>).

hurt our neighbour in any way, but help him in all his physical needs.”¹⁷ Our Lord tells us that he did not merely come to extend our physical existence, but so that we may have life to the full.¹⁸ There are many things in life that are more important than staving off death at all costs, including faith, love, righteousness, honour, wisdom, courage, holiness, joy, the mission of the Gospel and the sure hope of everlasting life that we have through Christ. When we steal people’s liberty from them, and in this way steal so much joy from them that depression and suicide rates increase enormously, we are not keeping this commandment. The Exodus, the great salvation event of the Old Testament, was an act of liberation. So is what Christ did for us on the cross.¹⁹ In the Old Testament Law the penalty for enslaving another person was death,²⁰ and in the New Testament we are told, “You were bought with a price, do not become slaves of human beings.”²¹ A free person does not need permission to leave home, go to work, go to church, or visit a loved one. Only a slave needs that kind of permission. Furthermore, if a person no longer has sovereignty over their own body, but others can dictate what they have injected into it, then they have no sovereignty at all.²² We cannot claim to be keeping this commandment if we support the enslavement of our fellow citizens in this way.

5. Given what the Bible teaches us about the sinfulness of humankind, we know that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. In our human efforts to battle the coronavirus we have empowered governments and private corporations with unprecedented power, from the power of mass surveillance, to the power to strip people of their rights and freedoms, to the power to silence those who speak in opposition, to power over what people have injected into their bodies without any liability for the drug companies that profit. Both history and theology tell us that this power is guaranteed to be abused.

The Seventh Commandment

You shall not steal.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not take our neighbour’s money or property, or get them in any dishonest way, but help him to improve and protect his property and means of making a living.

This commandment not only prohibits stealing, but calls on us to help our neighbour “to improve and protect his property and means of making a living.”²³ When we impose lockdowns that destroy small businesses, prohibit “non-essential” people from working, damage the global economy and in this way cause great harm to the poor, accept job-keeper money, and steal from future generations by encouraging the government to run up massive debts, this commandment should cause us to do some soul-searching regarding our willingness to protect our lives and livelihoods at other people’s expense.

The Eighth Commandment

You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour.

What does this mean for us?

We are to fear and love God so that we do not betray, slander, or lie about our neighbour, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way.

One of the most disturbing elements of this crisis has been the way that anyone who dissents from the mainstream narrative gets slandered. Anti-vaxxer, anti-science, selfish, greedy, moronic, granny-killer, conspiracy-theorist:

¹⁷ *Small Catechism* I, 10

¹⁸ John 10:10.

¹⁹ John 8:34-36; Galatians 5:1.

²⁰ Exodus 21:16; Deuteronomy 24:7; cf. 1 Timothy 1:10.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 7:23.

²² Enforced or coerced medical treatment is prohibited by section 51(xxiiiA) of the Australian Constitution, as well as the Nuremberg Code and the Universal Declaration of Bioethics and Human Rights. The latter states that, “Any preventive, diagnostic and therapeutic medical intervention is only to be carried out with the prior, free and informed consent of the person concerned” (Article 6, 1). These principles of medical ethics are now under threat by vaccine mandates.

²³ *Small Catechism* I, 14.

these are just some of the labels that are routinely thrown around to defame and dismiss those who express contrary views. The people of God should never buy into this kind of slander.

Coupled to this slander is the largest censorship effort the world has ever seen, as governments, mainstream media cartels such as the Trusted News Initiative, and tech giants such as Google and Facebook use their muscle to cancel, deplatform, shadow ban and “fact check” anyone who questions the agreed upon narrative. In the firing line are Nobel Prize winners like Michael Levitt and Luc Montagnier, eminent vaccinologists like Byram Bridle, Geert Vanden Bossche, and Robert Malone, public health specialists like Jay Bhattacharya, Martin Kulldorf, and Sunetra Gupta, frontline doctors like Pierre Kory, Peter McCullough, and Richard Flemming, as well as whistle-blowers who have risked their lives and careers to speak up regarding government and corporate malfeasance in this crisis. So why should this concern us? Because as Christians we are concerned about the truth. Maybe the truth in this case lines up perfectly with those who have the power to enforce the censorship and are profiting the most from the lockdowns and COVID jobs. Maybe all those on the other side are spreaders of “disinformation.” This is possible, but highly unlikely. In human affairs truth has to be sought out by listening to multiple perspectives, and no one has a monopoly on it. As the book of Proverbs tells us, “The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him.”²⁴ Censorship ensures that the kind of examination that is essential in the quest for truth cannot take place. Furthermore, truth does not fear lies the way that lies fear the truth, since truth will win out over lies if it is allowed to be spoken. As Christians we should be alarmed by this kind of censorship, and should renounce all attempts to dismiss people without giving them a fair hearing.

The Gospel

The Gospel is primarily about the forgiveness of sins, not a social agenda. At the same time, it does have social consequences, since Christ died for all, and calls all people to come into his kingdom through repentance and faith in him. Therefore the Church must be open to all who hear and respond to this call. Recently the New South Wales government has been talking about allowing churches to reopen, but only for the vaccinated. While this kind of medical apartheid should be resisted in society as a whole, it absolutely must be rejected in the Church, or it is no longer the Church of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit, speaking through the Apostle Paul, told the Galatians that if they made circumcision a requirement for participating in the Church they had denied the Gospel and severed themselves from Christ.²⁵ How much more is this true if we make something like vaccination a requirement!

Christ does not put such barriers in people’s way. Instead, he calls us all to come to him in faith to find the forgiveness and welcome we need.

Conclusion

Christians may rightly debate how the Word of God applies to a crisis such as this one. Yet Christ calls us to examine ourselves and remove the logs from our own eyes before we demonise others or support moves to strip them of their rights, liberty, or place in the Church. We urge the Christian community to renounce fear, to reflect on all the Words of God and how they apply to this situation, and to prioritise faith in Christ and his Word above all human would-be saviours. It is the blood of Christ that covers all our sins, and he is the one who rescues us from all the dangers of life.

Respectfully submitted to the Lutheran and wider Christian community,

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We invite feedback and discussion on all the points made above.

²⁴ Proverbs 18:17.

²⁵ Galatians 1:6-9; 5:1-6.