

### **“In This Present Distress...”**

I realize that in 1Corinthians 7:26, Paul is using “*in this present distress*” to describe persecution. My point in using the phrase relative to our current situation is simply that, as Paul points out, under extreme circumstances, that which is “normal” may not be the best course to pursue. We’re not being persecuted for or deprived of the ability to believe, practice, or even worship. We’re being asked to *alter* where and how we do so for the public good. Surely we can see that Paul’s admonition in 2Corinthians 8:21 to “*have regard for what is honorable not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men*” is appropriate in our current distress. Therefore, please also consider that...

Churches (without Elders) and Eldershops are facing decisions for which there is no precedent- at least, not one in their lifetime. Balancing *needs* versus *wants* is always difficult. Faithful members *want* to assemble, so do Elders. It’s hard to imagine not doing so if you’re healthy and able. It’s even harder to make the decision to set aside, even temporarily, what we’ve rightly been accustomed to doing with regard to weekly bible studies and worship services. But the *needs* of the whole must be taken into account- the “whole” of the congregation specifically, as well as the “whole” of society more generally. So, while you pray for your families’ safety, for your brethren and congregation’s health, as well as for our communities and nation, pray also for your Elders. Beseech the Father for their wisdom, their courage, their decision-making responsibilities, and their health (many are “at risk” themselves due to age and/or infirmity).

But please, **this is NOT the time to:**

- **Question each other’s faith and decisions regarding their safety or that of their family.** We all know what Hebrews 10:25 says, and even hopefully what it means! But deciding to *temporarily* suspend services, or to *temporarily* stay home during times of distress even if they are held, is NOT the same as “*forsaking your own assembling together.*” We understand this if there’s an ice storm, hurricane, tornado, or other natural crisis. We need to also be willing to similarly apply such to this current “natural” disaster. Take the time (since you probably have more of it “free” now!) to read and reread Romans 14:1 – 15:7, then let’s practice it, please.
- **Forget that we are our “brother’s keeper,” cf. Genesis 4:9.** Many NT passages make it clear that we have both *physical* and *spiritual* responsibilities toward our brethren, and in the world. We should be “*good Samaritans*” (Luke 10:30-37) and “*let your (our) lights shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father in heaven*” (Matthew 5:14-16). And we should certainly should “*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love... not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord... contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality*” (Romans 12:10-13). There is NEVER a time for *selfishness/self-centeredness, rudeness, unkindness*, or a lack of *grace, charity*, or *common decency*- not even in our current distress. Remember *who* and *what* God calls us to be!
- **Criticize and question rather than *submit* to your Elders, Hebrew 13:17.** We *sheep* need *shepherds*, and God knew and provided for that need. We *sheep* admitted as much when we appointed them. But it is all too easy to *question* and/or

*criticize* them when we may personally disagree with their judgment and decisions regarding *the flock* and what is best for it. Remember a couple of things in this regard: 1) They met the qualifications for the office, we didn't/don't; 2) They are *in office* to make HARD decisions from the best information they have or can get with the best knowledge, understanding, and wisdom they possess; and, 3) Because of numbers 1 & 2, we need- especially now, to *support* and *submit* to them. Again, read and reread 1Thessalonians 5:12-13.

Our "present distress" holds tremendous opportunities for Christians to show "*a still more excellent way*" to the world through our *patience, kindness, lack of jealousy/covetousness, humility, selflessness, graciousness, forbearance*, and our ability to *joyously endure* through our *faith, hope, and love*, 1Corinthians 12:31 – 13:13.

Let's DO THAT! (Philip C. Strong; Southport Church of Christ; 7202 Madison Ave, Indianapolis, IN 46227; online at [southportcofc.org](http://southportcofc.org); email to [mrpcstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:mrpcstrong@hotmail.com))