

# Corona – are we being cheated?

## SoundWords

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## Introduction

Not only through the Corona demonstrations, but also in our private circle we have been quickly confronted with the claim that everything is actually quite different with regard to Covid-19, that we are permanently fooled by scientists and politicians, robbed of our freedom and our basic rights through restrictions here and obligations there, and fed with fake news.

## Why are Christians especially susceptible to conspiracy theories?

The topic of Corona is probably not passing anyone by without a trace, and one has to form some kind of opinion about everything that is currently going on and often affects us concretely. Those responsible in a local church must also be adequately informed in order to be able to make good and wise decisions.

Nevertheless, one notices more and more: Many Christians seek more or less vehemently, sometimes quite subtly, to spread a very specific view among the Christians. In doing so, they often do not weigh different positions fairly against each other, but have already decided in favor of one side and are now trying to convince others of their own opinion. In the process, it is noticeable: Christians in particular are prone to conspiracy theories, or at least to alternative points of view, and are often very quick to reject the mainstream opinion – at least that's the impression one sometimes gets – simply because it is the mainstream opinion. Of course, as Christians we should be careful when it comes to mainstream opinion, because in today's world there are more and more areas where the mainstream very clearly contradicts biblical norms (evolution, abortion, marriage for all, etc.). Those who see the efforts of God's adversary, the devil, behind this are certainly not wrong in this assumption. But those who now want to discover the devil behind every corner are certainly overstating the case.

## Are we not guilty of presumption?

Of course, one can question statements of scientists and doubt the sense of certain orders of the government. But how do we get the idea that we “know” exactly which scientist is right and which is wrong, which measure is useful and which is not, on a subject that now affects almost the entire world population and about which thousands and thousands of clever minds have already thought? Doesn't that speak of great arrogance?

Scientists have argued differently, politicians have acted differently in this crisis. Is there anyone who has not been sharply criticized from any side? How much knowledge in the medical, biological, economic and social fields is necessary to be able to judge the arguments even a little bit! Most of the Christians today who are particularly strong for any side are complete laymen in all these fields. Nevertheless, they fight for the point of view they themselves prefer. Completely partisan, they sometimes rail against those who hold a different opinion or order certain actions because of their position. Instead of being glad that they themselves are not politicians with the responsibility of having to weigh up between the damage caused by too harsh measures on the one hand and further Corona deaths on the other, they criticize those who often go to great lengths to find the best solution. For non-

Christians who have a different opinion, this arrogance and partiality is then easily associated with Christianity itself, which most certainly serves to dishonor the Lord.

## Would a conspiracy change anything?

What would actually change if you would subscribe to one or the other conspiracy theory or believe an alternative opinion more than the mainstream opinion? Actually, nothing at all.

- What does it change for me whether a mouth-nose protection has a big benefit, a small benefit or no benefit at all? Yes, of course it is uncomfortable and takes the fun out of shopping. But as a Christian, I can also ask myself: to how much unnecessary spending of money did the “fun” of shopping actually lead me in the past?
- As a Christian, do I presume to be able to judge such difficult contexts, whether a lockdown was reasonable or not, ultimately really correctly? And what changes if I believe one or the other? Do I presume to weigh up human lives in Germany against the economic damage caused by the lockdown?
- What do I gain from knowing whether a Prof. Dr. D. has cheated me or not? Perhaps he, too, only acted according to his best knowledge and conscience. Is it consistent with Christianity if we participate in something that denounces this man? Some see him as the original source of evil, so to speak, and others award him the Federal Cross of Merit. It is not a question of whether he is right or wrong, but how we are to behave as Christians.
- As complete laymen, do we really want to decide whether a PCR test can detect an infection or not? Does the Lord really expect a Christian to decide who is right now: a lawyer with his self-chosen team of experts on the one hand or many virologists and medical doctors on the other? What changes for me and my environment if I consider one or the other to be right?

## Do we need to resist?

So nothing changes – whether I believe one thing or the other. But wait, someone might object, that’s why we have to demonstrate, maybe even offer passive resistance, don’t have to follow orders that we think are harmful, especially if they restrict our church life.

But what do we read in Romans 13:1-7? “Let every soul be subject to the authorities that are above him... So that he that sets himself in opposition to the authority resists the ordinance of God; and they who thus resist shall bring sentence of guilt on themselves ... Render to all their dues: to whom tribute is due, tribute; to whom custom, custom.”

Of course, one can argue whether, for example, the amount of tax is fair or unfair. But the fact is that we should pay the taxes. The Lord Jesus did not argue about the amount of taxes, but says: “Pay therefore what is Caesar’s to Caesar, and what is God’s to God” (Luke 20:25). In other words, He did not dwell on this subject at all; He had a completely different mission; even the Lord subordinated Himself to the authorities of that time. And so, in the end, the question of whether the mouth-nose protection is useful or not does not matter at all, because we simply do what the authorities expect of the citizen. Nor did the Lord Jesus state his

position on the injustices of his time, even in the face of a terrible political murder (cf. Lk 13:1–3). In contrast, many Christians today think they absolutely must take a firm stand. In reality, this is a carnal attitude, and one must accept the reproach of being conformed to the world (cf. Rom 12:2).

## Why are we not content to be humble?

As Christians, we could be a witness for Christ, especially in Corona times, if we do not participate when people slander each other, quote each other in an abbreviated way, or accuse each other. Especially we should not claim things which, if we are honest, we cannot judge at all and about which even proven experts have different opinions. On the contrary, Christians could show what Christ-centered living really means: listening to one another; trying to speak of government in a balancing and nonpartisan way and, as far as possible, in a benevolent way; denouncing no one; and encouraging prayer for government whenever we notice that people are not satisfied with the decisions of those in power (cf. 1Tim 2:1-3).

Surprisingly, we Christians also tend to attach enormous importance to a professor's title if that supports one's own opinion: "Professor XY has said that ..." The same people, however, strangely reject it when a professor appears with an opinion that is contrary to their own. In the end, this only shows that one is not at all concerned with the title of professor, but rather with making it easier to win other people over to one's own opinion with an expert. Christians should not take part in this carnal maneuver.

An example: Some lawyer, who is "of course" an absolute expert and icon in the legal area, puts forward the thesis that the PCR test is not a legally sound basis for the determination of Corona infections at all, and thus questions the proportionality of the Corona measures. And already some are jumping on this bandwagon without ever having verified the claim – and most likely without ever being able to verify it in the first place. Moreover, even if the PCR test is not a good test, isn't it still the best solution – at least if you care about the one million corona deaths that have officially occurred worldwide?<sup>1</sup> But if the statement corresponds to one's own preconceived opinion, it is gladly accepted. As said before, it often seems that people accept everything if it only does not correspond to the mainstream.

Why don't we take a much more modest position here and be grateful (at least if we live in Germany) that science, medicine and politics have obviously not got everything wrong? Yes, if you are honest, you will have to admit that – if you draw a country comparison – you live in one of the countries that has so far come through the crisis among the best. Did countries like the U.S., Sweden and Brazil, whose governments have long given priority to economic aspects, really get better through the crisis economically than Germany, considering their top position in terms of fatalities?

## How well informed do we actually need to be?

Some may object to the above arguments: We just have to inform ourselves very well, listen to both sides and compare arguments against each other, so that we come to a reasonably balanced judgment.

But even if that were possible at all without years of study in microbiology, medicine and economics: Have we ever considered how much time is consumed by wanting to be as well informed as possible? Some people, who often do not manage to listen to lectures on Christian doctrine or at least faith edifying lectures, must admit, if they are honest, that they at once listen to hour-long discourses on alternative or even mainstream opinions on the subject of Corona on the Internet, TV or radio. In the assemblies, the brethren are silent during the open meetings because they had no time – and no desire? – to study the Bible text and to read a good commentary on it; but they are full of the subject of Corona. How much time is wasted here, how many precious resources are going unused! And if we additionally participate in confronting other brothers and sisters with these things, we make ourselves even more guilty of the waste of time of others.

What if we were to make Christ the center of our thoughts and actions here as well? Then we would probably rather spend our time in evangelistic conversations, spreading sound doctrine, or providing pastoral care to concerned fellow Christians.

## **What is really the task of Christians?**

The task of Christians is not to be as knowledgeable as possible about Corona and “educate” others about it. Instead, we should inform ourselves about what the Bible has to tell us for such difficult times. The Lord will certainly not give us a merit badge for passing to brethren any “secret” information about Corona, and for fighting so that “the truth” about Corona finally has become clear to us in the end. But He will give us a Corona (the Latin word for “crown”) if we have served Him faithfully, spreading good and sound doctrine, edifying and encouraging brethren, and preaching the Gospel to the lost.

## **Is Christ glorified by our behavior?**

Much would be gained if we as Christians were more relaxed about this issue and left some decisions about right and wrong to others – and if we encouraged brothers and sisters in the faith more to prove themselves Christians right now by abiding by what the authorities expect of us, whether we think these rules make sense or not. Where can people today see – if not in us – that it was God who gave authority for our social coexistence, and that this instituted authority only works well if the ordinances are obeyed (whether they are thought to be right or not)?

We probably don't need to mention that all this also has limits, but at present Christians are not forbidden anything that clearly contradicts the Bible. No churches were closed, while soccer stadiums remained open. No meetings of Christians have been forbidden, while parties have been allowed to take place. There is not the slightest suspicion that the measures were ideological. All the measures were done out of concern for human welfare. In retrospect, of course, one can always say that none of this would have been necessary.

By the way, this also applies to the subordination to those who exercise the ministry of elders in the congregation. They have a special duty of care; on the one hand, to the claims of the Lord, and on the other hand, to the brothers and sisters of the local assembly. This is not an

easy task, even in normal times, but especially now. Rebellion and public grumbling about their decisions reflects the same rejection of God-given authority as rebellion against government edicts.

So for example, we don't have to decide at all whether aerosols are dangerous and how dangerous they are; we just shouldn't pretend that they don't exist. We must include these things in our considerations of whether and in what number we gather as a assembly of brothers and sisters – not because the dangerousness of aerosols can be scientifically proven, but because it cannot be completely dismissed and there is more than one example that shows very clearly that these aerosols could well be decisive (in terms of possible infections).

## How should we act in the Corona crisis?

Why do we not, as Christians, rather show compassion for those who have obviously had to suffer or are suffering greatly from these things, health-wise or economically? Can we Christians not live out the commandment of loving our neighbor in a very practical way here? When everyone speaks negatively about those in power, Christians could stand up for them and make people aware that Corona is a completely new situation for those in power as well, and that no one had any experience to fall back on.

It is appalling that Christians are recommending podcasts and videos even of people who are blatantly denouncing those in power – is this really something we should participate in as Christians? What a disgrace to the name of Christ it is to even join such people in a demonstration and then display a banner with the Bible verse “God has not given us a spirit of fearfulness, but of power and of love and of prudence.” Already worldly people ask, where the prudence remains there.

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Precisely because of the Corona situation, we are severely tested in our dealings with one another. If we know that some in our environment have a different opinion on the subject, do we avoid irritating them with our opinion? If we think that the fear of some is exaggerated, do we make an effort to relieve their fear in a loving way, or do we accuse them of small faith or even disbelief, without considering that fear can have very many causes? The main cause of fear seems to lie in our different natures, because even among worldly people who do not have a living faith, some are more prone to fear than others.

It is also a question of how we regard or judge each other's opinions. Anyone who has an opinion that differs from the mainstream is immediately lumped into the corner of conspiracy theorists at the slightest objection to the prescribed measures. Perhaps he does indeed adhere to a conspiracy theory, but we should be careful with such an accusation and not immediately assign a label. On the other hand, those who hold an opinion that differs from the

mainstream often accuse the other side of scaremongering and fear-mongering – without considering that a more conservative attitude may have nothing to do with panic and fear at all, but with a sense of responsibility toward one's neighbor. How much discord it brings into our families and assemblies if we do not show understanding for each other's opinions!

We should be careful not immediately to impute fear to those who follow hygiene and distance rules very conscientiously. There may be completely different reasons for this. For example, people who work in a company that has much stricter Corona rules than those prescribed by law sometimes find themselves in a very tense situation: on the one hand, extremely strict rules in the professional environment and, on the other hand, perhaps people in their private environment who see everything very casually and may have little understanding. Others personally adhere very closely to these rules because they show consideration for relatives or good friends who are at high risk.

Sometimes we have to give up certain freedoms and opportunities in order to be considerate of more sensitive brothers and sisters. Are we willing to do this? If we do not want to forego certain critical contacts, we may leave others no choice but to (temporarily) give up contact with us because they are concerned that otherwise they will put themselves in danger. In contrast, on the other hand, there is a willingness to forego contacts so that others can enjoy greater freedom. A lot of love and consideration is needed from both sides here.

## Closing words

Surely, we need a lot of grace for the Christian behaviors outlined above. Even the writers of this article have been slow to come to the thoughts expressed above and know from their own experience how difficult it can often be to live a Christ-centered life that wants to walk the path charted above with joy. So we need a lot of patience with each other. But there is no alternative to a life in the power of the Holy Spirit, who is always seeking to reveal Christ in us. As Christians, we should come to a spiritual way of dealing with this issue and not open up rifts and promote discord and quarrels in families and assemblies.

## Footnotes

[1] Some will argue that this number of corona deaths is much too high, because it includes people who already had certain pre-existing conditions and might have died without covid-19; in reality, the number of people who actually died from covid-19 is much lower. But we should consider: In many countries, there is not half as good an information process in counting the dead as there is in highly developed countries, so the unreported number of Covid-19 deaths will be much higher after all. In other countries, for political reasons, not all corona deaths may be counted at all, so that the number of corona deaths there is probably even much higher than officially presented. Another problem is that it is often said that only a certain risk group with pre-existing conditions is at risk, i.e. a relatively small proportion of the population. But this should be borne in mind: In Germany, millions of people suffer from diabetes, high blood pressure or cancer or its consequences. It is simply not as if the vast majority of Germans were in perfect health and as if only a small group of the population were at risk due to pre-existing conditions; no, it is not just a minority that is at risk, but a large proportion of the population. The point of these questions is not who is right, but that it is very difficult to really judge the situation with a sense of proportion.