

A Biblical Perspective on Quarantining & Social Distancing

by Tim Davis, Bethel Baptist Church

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While a global viral pandemic certainly seems like a new challenge for God's people, the idea of quarantining and social distancing is divine, and predates the scientific discovery of bacteria by thousands of years. In 1683, Dutch businessman & lens-maker, Antonie Philips van Leeuwenhoek first observed bacteria with the help of a single-lens microscope of his own making. Long before Leeuwenhoek's observations, scientists were theorizing about the existence of microorganisms that could cause such things as the decay of organic materials, and the spread of disease. Interestingly, the Creator of all organisms, macro and micro, warned His people about the dangers of proximity, especially physical contact, with regard to disease and the dead. *Numbers 5:1-4 (HCSB)* "1 The Lord instructed Moses: 2 "Command the Israelites to send away anyone from the camp who is afflicted with a skin disease, anyone who has a [bodily] discharge, or anyone who is defiled because of a corpse. 3 You must send away both male or female; send them outside the camp, so that they will not defile their camps where I dwell among them." 4 The Israelites did this, sending them outside the camp. The Israelites did as the Lord instructed Moses."

Leviticus chapters 12-15 give divine instructions to the people of God concerning quarantining and social distancing for a variety of medical reasons, and with a variety of observed times. Though the Biblical texts do not expressly mention the existence of microbes, they do convey an understanding that contagious dangers exist among those who have demonstrated obvious symptoms (such as leprous spots or bodily discharges) and even those who, though seemingly symptom-free, may have been exposed to dangerous contagions (such as those who have had contact with a corpse). The Lord's commands concerning such issues are not intended to incite panic nor paranoia, quite the opposite. The Lord's instructions are meant to provide careful guidelines for healthy behavior, including instructions as they

pertain directly to the physical gathering for worship. Levitical priests were given the duty of assessing illnesses and prescribing behavior modifications based on the Lord's codified guidelines.

These practices were still observed during the days of Jesus' earthly ministry. On multiple occasions offered in the gospels, Jesus attended to the needs of those who were under priestly-prescribed quarantine. In some instances, Jesus broke quarantine to physically heal those who were sick (Matthew 8:1-4). Other times He observed social distancing and simply verbally pronounced their healing (Luke 17:11-14). Still other times, Christ allowed Himself to be touched by those who should have observed social distancing under the Law (Luke 8:43-48). In all of these examples, we are reminded that Christ is the Healer, the Great Physician, God with us. Jesus was not afraid of illness, just as His followers are not to be afraid. Jesus was not afraid of death, just as His followers are not to be afraid. The variety of examples from Jesus' ministry reveal the obvious about Him, that He is God. They also reveal another important lesson for all who follow Him, Jesus loved the sick. By going to them, Jesus was not nullifying the Levitical instructions concerning distancing, but He was sending a clear message, not only concerning His divine power over illness, but also His divine love for all people, healthy and sick: All people are to be loved. It is important to note that Jesus' acts of physical healings were also signs that He alone has authority to provide spiritual healing, the forgiveness of sin (Mark 2:1-12).

What should those who follow Christ learn from this? We can always trust the Lord. His wisdom found in His Word is timeless. His people do not need to fear the known nor the unknown (2 Timothy 1:7). In times of illness, and in times of health, the Lord reigns as King. We are to love people at all times. Death comes for all of us, and trusting in Christ ensures healing from sin during this life, and resurrection from death in the next (John 3:16, 11:25-26). The time for social distancing will certainly come to an end, but the time for trusting in the Lord and loving our neighbors is eternal (Matthew 22:37-40).

May the Lord bless you and keep you as you seek Him, His Kingdom, and His righteousness.