

HEARTBEATS- Staying Connected 9/27/2021

Dear Friends in Christ,

ONE AT ONE – Every day this week beginning on Tuesday, September 28 you are encouraged to pray for one minute at one o'clock. This week, pray for those with the COVID-19 virus and health care providers who are struggling to care for those affected by the virus. Pray for hospitals that seek to care, not just for COVID patients, but all who are in need of medical care. Pray for medical solutions to help our world combat this pandemic.

As discussion/debate about getting the vaccine for the COVID-19 virus continues, I'm hearing and reading things that raise questions about this issue from a biblical or theological perspective. Two things in particular have come to my attention that perhaps it would be helpful to address. Those are, first, can/should Christians be able to claim a Religious Exemption from taking the vaccine, and second, is the vaccine the sign of the beast from the Book of Revelation?

Pastor Keith Marshall, pastor a Hope Lutheran Church in Enumclaw, WA had some good thoughts about whether a Christian should claim a Religious Exemption in a time when public health is at risk. He framed his response by sort of reversing the question and asking, "What does my faith in Jesus Christ exempt me from?" These are the things he listed:

- Putting my wants above the needs of others. "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others." - Philippians 2:3-4
- Claiming freedom in Christ as liberty to act without responsibility. "You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" – Galatians 5:13-14
- Refusing to protect the most vulnerable in our midst. "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of Mine, you did for Me." – Matthew 25:40

Vaccinations and wearing masks are the way we care for our neighbors. To claim a "Christian Exemption" violates the guidance of scripture that calls us to place a priority on putting the needs of others first. Certainly, some may have political or personal reasons not to get vaccinated, but Christians should not claim that their faith in Jesus Christ justifies avoiding vaccination.

Those that claim vaccines are the "mark of the beast" are referring to Revelation 13:16-18, which says, "It also forced all people, great and small, rich and poor, free and slave, to receive a mark on their right hands or on their foreheads, so that they could not buy or sell unless they had the mark which is the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom. Let the person who has insight calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man.

That number is 666.” There are those who claim that the vaccine is a conspiracy of governmental control or that the vaccine contains some sort of marking agent that allows the government to identify or trace those who receive the vaccine. Lack of trust in the government and medical profession is contributing to this conspiracy.

The Book of Revelation was written during a time of great persecution of Christians in the first century after Christ. It was written in a sort of code that Christians would understand but others would not, in order to encourage Christians to remain strong in their faith and commitment to the Lord. Numerology is a particularly strong characteristic in Revelation. The number 3 represents God (Trinity) and the number 4 represents the world (four seasons, four points of the compass, four weeks in a month, etc.) God (3) created the world (4) in seven days, including the sabbath. When the world cooperates with God (4+3) you have perfection—seven. Four times three also represents perfection and we see it in the Bible in the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve disciples. But the closer you come to perfection, the greater the imperfection. Think of the dissonance of two musical instruments who are almost in tune, but not quite. So, the number six represents imperfection or evil and when there are three of them, you have divine imperfection—666—the antichrist. The mark of the beast in Revelation refers to a pledge of loyalty to the antichrist. Claims of the vaccine being the mark of the beast originate with social media where people interpret the Bible incorrectly and that false interpretation of Scripture spreads and people believe it is true.

God cares about creation and people. God does not want to see people sick, suffering, or dying. We are working for what God desires for all people when we take steps to protect our neighbors and follow the example of Jesus (I know He didn't get vaccinated) by taking actions that lift up, help, and support all.

In Christ's love,
Pastor Jeffrey