



## *Members Section SPECIAL*

### *Health Update*

SEE James 5:13-15

February 2020

#### **Forget Face Masks. Wash Your Hands.** By [Indi Samarajiva](#) “opinion”

The hottest new coronavirus accessory may also be the most ineffective. Face masks are claustrophobic and people are constantly taking them on and off. With their hands. It's the hands that are the problem.

Think about your average day on public transport. You are not often in anyone's face, breathing in their coughs and sneezes. You are, however, touching everything. Seats, doors, turnstiles, money. And everyone else is touching everything. And everyone is touching their face, constantly. By some estimates, the average person touches their face over 20 times an hour. This is the dangerous vector, one we don't think about. **Our own hands to our own face.**

One benefit of a face mask is that it can prevent this. Because you have a mask over your face. But having a mask over one's face sucks, and people often take it off to breathe, talk, or just. Are they washing their hands before and after? Are they checking for a negative and positive seal? **Probably not.**

Another benefit of a face mask is that they're good if you are sick. Because it keeps all your coughs and sneezes inside. Surgeons wear them largely so that they don't cough or sneeze *into* open wounds, not to protect themselves.

.But this isn't why people wear them, they wear them to protect themselves. For that purpose, especially given how badly they are applied, **face masks are well nigh useless.**

If you do this often, and avoid directly inhaling sneezes and coughs, you should be well protected from not only the novel coronavirus (if you're in China) but the more deadly flus that are going around everywhere.

The best protective measure is the one you probably learned in pre-school. Wash your hands. But this is not a cursory wash.

The WHO recommends an extensive, 20–30 second process covering each finger, thumb and front and back of your hands. This can be done with hand sanitizer or soap and water if your hands are visibly soiled. And then you need to avoid touching the tap and the door you came in by.

Handwashing isn't the most visible protective measure, but it is the best. And it leaves more face masks for the medical professionals who do have to get into people's faces. For the rest of us, it's enough to just wash our hands. <https://medium.com/@indica/forget-face-masks-wash-your-hands-de03fea452fd>

#### ***In light of the news of the Corona virus:***

“In 1527, less than 200 years after the Black Death killed about half the population of Europe, the plague re-emerged in Luther's own town of Wittenberg and neighboring cities. In his letter “Whether One May Flee from a Deadly Plague,” the famous reformer weighs the responsibilities of ordinary citizens during contagion. **His advice serves as a practical guide for Christians confronting infectious disease outbreaks today.**

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First, Luther argued that anyone who stands in a relationship of service to another has a vocational commitment not to flee. Those in ministry, he wrote, “must remain steadfast before the peril of death.” The sick and dying need a good shepherd who will strengthen and comfort them and administer the sacraments—lest they be denied the Eucharist before their passing. Public officials, including mayors and judges, are to stay and maintain civic order. Public servants, including city-sponsored physicians and police officers, must continue their professional duties. Even parents and guardians have vocational duties toward their children.

Luther did not limit tending the sick to health care professionals. In a time when Wuhan faces a shortage of hospital beds and personnel, his counsel is especially relevant. The city, one of China’s largest with a population of about 11 million, is in the process of rapidly constructing two new hospitals to accommodate growing crowds of coronavirus patients. Lay citizens, without any medical training, may find themselves in a position of providing care to the sick. Luther challenges Christians to see opportunities to tend to the sick as tending to Christ himself (**Matt. 25:41–46**). Out of love for God emerges the practice of love for neighbor.

But Luther does not encourage his readers to expose themselves recklessly to danger. His letter constantly straddles two competing goods: honoring the sanctity of one’s own life, and honoring the sanctity of those in need. Luther makes it clear that God gives humans a tendency toward self-protection and trusts that they will take care of their bodies (**Eph. 5:29; 1 Cor. 12:21–26**). He defends public health measures such as quarantines and seeking medical attention when available. In fact, Luther proposes that not to do so is to act recklessly. Just as God has gifted humans with their bodies, so too he has gifted the medicines of the earth.

What if a Christian still desires to flee? Luther affirms that this may, in fact, be the believer’s faithful response, provided that no emergency exists and that they arrange substitutes who will “take care of the sick in their stead and nurse them.”

Notably, Luther also reminds readers that salvation is independent of these good works. He ultimately tasks them to decide whether to flee or to stay during plagues, trusting that they will arrive at a faithful decision through prayer and meditation on the Scriptures. Participation in aiding the sick arises out of grace not obligation.

However, Luther himself was not afraid. Despite the exhortations of his university colleagues, he stayed behind to minister to the sick and dying. He urged his readers not to be afraid of “some small boils” in the service of neighbors.”

*-Author Emmy Yang.*

**Note from ssopko:** *It always amazes me, as issues spring up in the world, how the reformers and the words of Scripture guide us in worldly direction.*