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Dear friends

Recently I was reminded by one of our professors of the profound words of John Calvin which are so relevant to our times: "But in these matters the believer must also look to God's kindness and truly fatherly indulgence. Accordingly, if he sees his house reduced to solitude by the removal of his kinsfolk, he will not indeed even then cease to bless the Lord, but rather will turn his attention to this thought: nevertheless, the grace of the Lord, which dwells in my house, will not leave it desolate. Or, if his crops are blasted by frost, or destroyed by ice, or beaten down with hail, and he sees famine threatening, yet he will not despair or bear a grudge against God, but will remain firm in this trust [cf. Ps. 78:47]: "Nevertheless we are in the Lord's protection, sheep brought up in his pastures" [Ps. 79:13]. The Lord will therefore supply food to us even in extreme barrenness. If he shall be afflicted by disease, he will not even then be so unmanned by the harshness of pain as to break forth into impatience and expostulate with God; but, by considering the righteousness and gentleness of God's chastening, he will recall himself to forbearance. In short, whatever happens, because he will know it is ordained of God, he will undergo it with a peaceful and grateful mind so as not obstinately to resist the command of him into whose power he once for all surrendered himself and his every possession." John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, 3.7.10.

A peaceful and grateful mind even in severe circumstances is a proper Christian response. As Christians in many countries, Ukrainian Christians are also caught up in unfavourable conditions. Although relatively speaking there are not many people infected with coronavirus (12697 cases in Ukraine, 1583 in Kyiv), because of very severe restrictions put on by our authorities, a lot of people have lost their jobs or went on forced unpaid leave. The Ukrainian economy, weakened with war with Russia and corruption in (plus unprofessionalism of) our Government, barely copes with these problems. In our church we try to help those people who have lost their jobs and/or stay unpaid at home.

When so many firms, organisations and institutions went on quarantine and almost stopped their activities, the work of Kyiv Theological Seminary, where I am currently serving, didn't stop. Let me tell you about how the study process at KTS is organised to explain why. The point is that we do not have any more full-time students. All our courses are of a hybrid type. The pattern of any of the courses is as follows: one month of home preparation for the course with different online activities – one week of lectures at the Seminary campus – one month of online homework then the next course begins. So, a substantial piece of work has been already done online. We only needed to move the lecture part of the courses online. We were compelled to add some new functions in our programme for online education. Also, our teachers needed to acquire some new skills in lecturing in such circumstances. A couple of weeks at the very beginning of the quarantine was really hard for me since that was my responsibility to make sure that all courses were opened and run well. We even failed to open a few courses. As we adjusted a little, the work of the Seminary now goes smoothly. I have already taught two courses online and the third one is waiting for its turn later in the academic year.

It's not a surprise that church life has been affected as well. Although almost all churches had no problem with moving sermons online, a high wave of discussions has engulfed our churches as to whether or not we should hold the Lord's Supper online. Some churches postponed conducting the Lord's Supper till the end of quarantine, some – readily conducted it. Anyway, there is plenty of work for church ministers. Most of the church members are now at home for regular Sunday and midweek services and we try to organise some additional activities: different courses, Bible studies, and a series of short video Bible messages. On top of that, our pastor and all his family have been infected with covid-19 (please pray for him and his family – it is

already the fourth week of his illness, but he is slowly recovering). It means that responsibilities which we shared amongst three of us, now another pastor and I share between the two of us.

Our home Bible study group has also moved into cyberspace. Some other church members have even joined us. Our friends Dmytro and Vira faithfully attend our meetings. They are both divorced. When we studied chapter 10 of Mark's gospel (where Mark discloses Jesus' teaching about marriage and divorce) that text had a very great impact on both of them. They were genuinely interested in the way they should build their future family life (they live in a civil marriage now). They have agreed for us to have a special meeting with them concerning this matter. Pray that the Lord might touch their hearts with truth and bring them to conversion and gradually to His church. As you can imagine – work in the Seminary, church and family life (plus children schooling – which is another whole story) takes even more time than before.

Let me just finish with asking you to remember me and my different ministries in your prayers. I hope that the Lord keeps all of you safe! Thank you, dear brothers and sisters for all of your support and love. Praying that our “God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus”.

With love in Christ

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