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MERCY TRIUMPHS OVER JUDGMENT

As we begin to grow closer to a realistic return date to reopen our public assemblies, it is good for us to reflect on points of wisdom and love in how we not only view our response to the desire to end this period of quarantine, but also the personal judgments and preferences of others around us. I would like to share a great perspective from Gardner Hall, a good brother preaching in the New York/New Jersey area, offered in a post on Facebook recently concerning this. "We see an example of God's wisdom in the current pandemic in the simple fact that he has authorized his congregations to be autonomous (Acts 14:23; 1 Peter 5:2). The Covid 19 virus has obviously struck harder in urban areas such as New York, Chicago and Madrid than in others. Meanwhile, in many rural districts and small towns,

there have been fewer problems. In other words, the level of danger is much higher in some places than in others. Meeting in New York right now would be reckless, almost suicidal for some. It would be akin to Paul entering the theater in Ephesian theater to face the mob (Acts 19:30). If there were some national or international organization giving orders like – 'Do not meet as a church' or 'You must meet as a church,' the result would be chaos, because circumstances vary greatly in different places. However, according to the wisdom of God, each congregation decides how to proceed based on biblical principles and its own particular situation. Unfortunately, many who speak forcefully about autonomy do not practice it. They direct strong criticism towards others in areas where

the situation may be completely different from theirs. I have seen this error on the part of brethren on 'both sides' of this issue. A friend who preaches where there have been thousands of deaths due to the virus and where there are a number of brethren in critical condition, was posting on Facebook about the plans of the brethren to meet in an alternative way. A Christian from a more rural location wrote him a hot letter condemning him for violating Hebrews 10:25 and for not being willing to die for the Lord. When the brother tried to defend the congregation, his critic answered him even more harshly and then immediately unfriended him. I have also seen disciples who have decided to not continue meeting, harshly criticize those who do for 'not obeying the government,' 'not loving their brethren,' etc. Those who criticize severely either way often claim to believe strongly in autonomy. However, they don't practice it. It's essential to follow biblical principles that support the autonomy of congregations not only in word but also in practice. Situations in congregations in other parts of the world are not necessarily the same as ours. Let's not forget

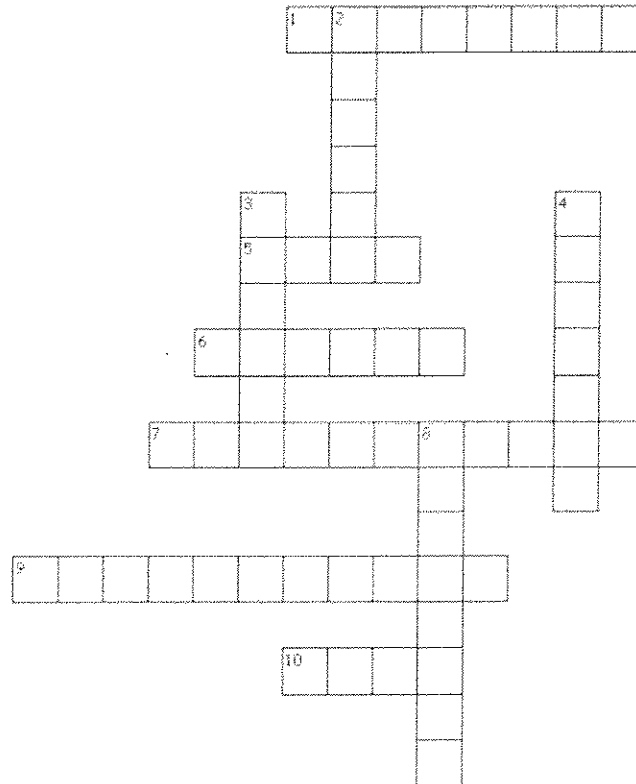
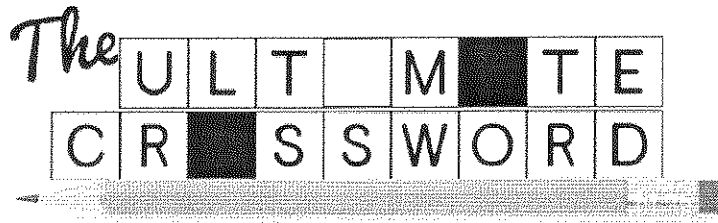
mercy. 'For judgment will be merciless to one who has shown no mercy; mercy triumphs over judgment' (James 2:13)." Amen, brother. We must not only be merciful in judgment and understanding in how other congregations choose to respond to when they feel it is appropriate to begin meeting again, but also with our own brethren within our own autonomous congregations concerning our own varied opinions and preferences. We must also understand that while there will be those who are ready to reconvene and resume our public assemblies very soon, others who remain high risk due to health issues and concerns or even age may still choose to be more conservative and wish to still remain home until a later time. We must remain respectful and sympathetic and understanding to the varied personal choices we are each making regarding this situation. I bring our attention to a situation a few Israelites found themselves in which brought personal conflicts to their responsibility in observing the Passover. "They observed the Passover in the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at twilight, in the wilderness of Sinai; according to all that the

LORD had commanded Moses, so the sons of Israel did. But there were some men who were unclean because of the dead person, so that they could not observe Passover on that day; so they came before Moses and Aaron on that day. Those men said to him, 'Though we are unclean because of the dead person, why are we restrained from presenting the offering of the LORD at its appointed time among the sons of Israel?' Moses therefore said to them, 'Wait, and I will listen to what the LORD will command concerning you.' Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 'Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If any one of you or of your generations becomes unclean because of a dead person, or is on a distant journey, he may, however, observe the Passover to the LORD. In the second month on the fourteenth day at twilight, they shall observe it; they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs,'” Numbers 9:5-11. God has demonstrated a willingness to be flexible and understanding when unforeseen situations occur and when situations arise where the presence of some would put others at risk by spreading some contagious condition. This is also a time of understanding and

patient flexibility, not for rigid harsh criticism or demanding others put themselves at risk to prove their devotion and loyalty to the Lord. Was it not acceptable for Paul to be lowered down over a wall in a basket so as not to be handed over in a casket? Certainly we can understand the personal decisions of those who make the choice to protect their personal health and well-being as well as that of others in unforeseen circumstances and can demonstrate the mercy and understanding the Lord had for those who needed to pull their ox out of a ditch on the Sabbath (Luke 14:5). – Daniel Ruegg



“Now concerning things sacrificed to idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge makes arrogant, but love edifies. If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him.”
1 Cor. 8:1-3



ACROSS

1. In Antioch, it was told how God opened a door of faith to _____. (Acts 14:27)
5. When you _____, go in your inner room and close the door. (Mt. 6:6)
6. Two _____ pulled Lot back into his house and shut the door. (Gen. 19:10,15)
7. Isaiah sung, "Close the doors behind you until _____ passes by." (Is. 26:20)
9. Whoever entered a _____ house became unclean until evening. (Lev. 14:46)
10. Once inside the ark, God closed the _____ behind them. (Gen. 7:16;6:16)

DOWN

2. _____ told a widow to shut the door behind her while pouring oil. (2 Kgs. 4:4)
3. Jesus _____ a door no one could shut in Philadelphia. (Rev. 3:8;7)
4. God knew _____ would say the wilderness had shut Israel in. (Ex. 14:3)
8. The doors were shut where Jesus _____ to the disciples. (Jn. 20:19)