

Cost/Benefit Analysis in the Church



Law scales on table on dark background

I would like to share with you an article and video that encourages us to consider all of the effects of COVID, not just the direct deaths. To it, I would add the massive increase in mental health problems (93%) including suicides. The article linked below explicitly states that, "this is not an argument in favor of or against any particular policy undertaken in the name of fighting COVID. What it is, instead, is an attempt to highlight the pervasive and deeply misguided refusal to assign any costs to the harms caused by anti-COVID policies themselves." It's worth your read:

[The Bizarre Refusal to Apply Cost-Benefit Analysis to COVID Debates](#)

Whether you agree with the article or not is beside the point however. For as your pastor I see the issue quite differently. There is a cost/benefit analysis that is done by each of us when we decide what to do about church on Sunday morning.

There has always been a cost involved, a risk, and I'm not suggesting that there's never a reason to miss a Church

service. There are times when we *should* stay home. For example, if we're struggling with symptoms of something we fear may be contagious, or if we physically cannot make it for one reason or another. In those situations, I would argue, the cost is too great and hindering. Here we rely upon the Grace of God in His Son Jesus Christ. But that Grace should not be used as a reason to stay away from the place where such Grace is bestowed.

More than that, there seems to be a loss of the comparison of cost with benefit, specifically the benefit of attending the Divine Service. Do not take this lightly. Here, I will let Luther speak for us as he does in the Large Catechism:

Since we have now the true understanding and doctrine of the Sacrament, there is indeed need of some admonition and exhortation, that men may not let so great a treasure which is daily administered and distributed among Christians pass by unheeded, that is, that those who would be Christians make ready to receive this venerable Sacrament often.

For we see that men seem weary and lazy with respect to it; and there is a great multitude of such as hear the Gospel, and, because the nonsense of the Pope has been abolished, and we are freed from his laws and coercion, go one, two, three years, or even longer without the Sacrament, as though they were such strong Christians that they have no need of it;

and some allow themselves to be prevented and deterred by the pretense that we have taught that no one should approach it except those who feel hunger and thirst, which urge them to it. Some pretend that it is a matter of liberty and not necessary, and that it is sufficient to believe without it; and thus for the most part they go so far that they become quite brutish, and finally despise both the Sacrament and the Word of God.

Now, it is true, as we have said, that no one should by any

means be coerced or compelled, lest we institute a new murdering of souls. Nevertheless, it must be known that such people as deprive themselves of, and withdraw from, the Sacrament so long a time are not to be considered Christians. For Christ has not instituted it to be treated as a show, but has commanded His Christians to eat and drink it, and thereby remember Him.

And, indeed, those who are true Christians and esteem the Sacrament precious and holy will urge and impel themselves unto it...

For here stand the kind and precious words: This is My body, given for you. This is My blood, shed for you, for the remission of sins.

These words, I have said, are not preached to wood and stone, but to me and you; else He might just as well be silent and not institute a Sacrament. Therefore consider, and put yourself into this You, that He may not speak to you in vain.

For here He offers to us the entire treasure which He has brought for us from heaven, and to which He invites us also in other places with the greatest kindness, as when He says in St. [Matthew 11:28](#): Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Now it is surely a sin and a shame that He so cordially and faithfully summons and exhorts us to our highest and greatest good, and we act so distantly with regard to it, and permit so long a time to pass [without partaking of the Sacrament] that we grow quite cold and hardened, so that we have no inclination or love for it.

We must never regard the Sacrament as something injurious from which we had better flee, but as a pure, wholesome, comforting remedy imparting salvation and comfort, which will cure you and give you life both in soul and body. For where the soul has recovered, the body also is relieved. Why, then,

is it that we act as if it were a poison, the eating of which would bring death?

To be sure, it is true that those who despise it and live in an unchristian manner receive it to their hurt and damnation; for nothing shall be good or wholesome to them, just as with a sick person who from caprice eats and drinks what is forbidden him by the physician.

But those who are sensible of their weakness, desire to be rid of it and long for help, should regard and use it only as a precious antidote against the poison which they have in them. For here in the Sacrament you are to receive from the lips of Christ forgiveness of sin, which contains and brings with it the grace of God and the Spirit with all His gifts, protection, shelter, and power against death and the devil and all misfortune.

– Martin Luther, Large Catechism, Part V:39-43, 64-70

If you are willing to risk going to the doctor for the benefit of your bodily health, figure out a way to go to the Great Physician of your soul. If you're willing to set a good example for others by means of recommended health procedures, set a better one by your Christian witness of attending worship. If you are willing to risk going to the restaurant or grocery store to feed your body, find a way to feed your soul upon Heavenly Food and Drink in Christ's Body and Blood. If you are willing to risk attending some event or visiting your family members, make it a priority to visit with your Church family, your brothers and sisters in Christ. The benefit is too great not to!

*Here may we gain from heav'n
The grace which we implore,
And may that grace, once giv'n,
Be with us evermore
Until that day*

*When all the
Blest To endless rest
Are called away!*

TLH 465:4