

THE GRAPEVINE – Issue 23:20th Aug 2020

Dear Friends,

I don't know about you, but I have never really been one for conspiracy theories. However, I can remember a number over my lifetime. Two that come to mind are: man never landed on the moon and Princess Diana's death wasn't a fatal accident. More recently I have heard people say that Michelle Obama is really a man. During the Covid 19 pandemic there seem to have been a whole lot more. It seems that when science doesn't have the immediate answers others fill the vacuum. Here is a number I have read about Covid recently: The Covid 19 virus was made in a laboratory, death and infection figures have been manipulated by the authorities, symptoms are linked to 5G radiation, there is no evidence the virus exists and Boris Johnson wasn't really ill with the virus.

Apparently, those who believe such conspiracies are significantly more likely to get their news from social media. Fiftysix percent of people who believe that there's no hard evidence Covid 19 exists get a lot of their information from Facebook, compared with twenty percent of those who reject the conspiracy theory. Sixty percent of those who believe there is a link between 5G and Covid-19 get their information on the virus from YouTube. Only fourteen percent of those who reject the theory are regular YouTube users.

What has troubled me all the more is the number of conspiracy theories coming from Western Christian circles. Sadly, Christians seem to be disproportionately fooled by conspiracy theories. I have a neighbour deeply concerned that the vaccines being developed for Covid 19 are the mark of the beast, and another says that the church is suffering *persecution* thanks to the authorities denying us the opportunity to gather for worship and forcing us to wear face masks as a way of control. It's as though Jesus once said 'Blessed are the privileged inconvenienced.' He actually said, 'Blessed are the persecuted for righteousness sake.' We really have no idea of what it's like for Christians around the world who suffer real persecution, and we have little idea of what it's like during this global pandemic for countries where healthcare is so poor.

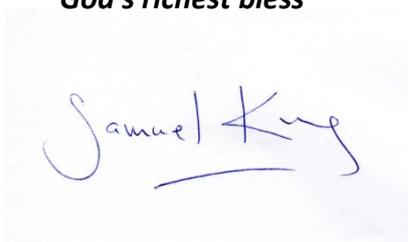
Gullibility is not a spiritual gift or a Christian virtue. As followers of Jesus, we are people of the truth. Falling for, and spreading conspiracy theories isn't honouring to God, but it does cause people to question our judgment. Sharing fake news makes us look foolish and harms our reputation and witness.

When we come across such conspiracy theories we need to speak up and lovingly encourage people to go to trusted sources for their information. Social media news feeds are not trusted sources. God has not called us to be easily fooled. God calls us to be "wise, not unwise" (Eph. 5:15). We need to be discerning and thoughtful in our beliefs and in what we share with others.

Jesus' last earthly words in Acts 1:8 promised us that we would receive the Spirit's power and we would bear witness to Jesus. We don't need the power of the Holy Spirit to be undiscerning, and we aren't bearing witness to the rescuing work of Jesus by spreading conspiracies.

***Let us continue to provoke one another to love and good works,
to hold to what is true, and refuse that which is false.***

God's richest bless



Samuel King