

Editorial: Is COVID-19 a hoax? Who do you believe? Who do you trust?

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It's no secret. Not everyone believes the coronavirus pandemic is what some government officials and media outlets say it is.

Many question the need for social restrictions called for by medical experts. Some have gone so far as to claim the novel coronavirus is a [hoax](#) or a [conspiracy](#), adding the charge that it is an effort to harm Donald Trump and the American economy in some way. Others are spreading false information about preventatives and cures in order [to profit off of coronavirus](#).

It's difficult to respond directly to whether or not the coronavirus pandemic and COVID-19 are a hoax because our trust is so low. Some are convinced someone somewhere is out to take advantage of us, to crush our economy, to destroy our way of life. Some are so convinced by this notion that they refuse to believe anything that doesn't support it.

This profound lack of trust is creeping into our churches and is affecting relationships between brothers and sisters in Christ. It is infecting relationships between congregations and their pastors. Such lack of trust is not sustainable in society at large and it cannot stand among the body of Christ.

In our efforts to deal with what President Trump has termed an "[Invisible Enemy](#)," we must be diligent in guarding against a different enemy—any spirit of division among us. We can diligently guard against such division by taking stock of what we know.

Some things we know

We know instinctively if the coronavirus pandemic is everything medical experts say it is, then it is beyond the lived experience and expertise of the vast majority of us. And let's be honest, that's disconcerting. My generation can ask our parents and grandparents for guidance because they experienced the [polio epidemic](#) in the 1950s. As serious as that was, however, it didn't lead to worldwide restrictions like the current pandemic.

We know if the current pandemic is a hoax, it is one of the most well-orchestrated hoodwinks of all time. The degree of coordination it would take for medical experts, governments, coroners and others the world over to convince billions of people and powerful multi-national corporations that coronavirus is real and should be taken seriously and to hold that story together for at least three months without anyone among the co-conspirators breaking under intense pressure truly would be impressive.

For myself, I know I haven't encountered a single physician, nurse, hospital administrator or other healthcare worker who thinks coronavirus and COVID-19 are made up or blown out of proportion. They are putting themselves in harm's way, many having become ill themselves, and I can't see them doing that for a hoax. These are the same medical experts we turn to for our heart disease, cancer, knee replacements and plastic surgeries.

We know various numbers have been put forth to compare the seriousness of the novel coronavirus and [COVID-19 by comparison to other illnesses](#) and causes of death. You've likely seen claims on social media that influenza is more lethal than COVID-19, but the source of those numbers is not always clear. It's difficult to know [which numbers are correct](#) because of different methods of comparison and publication dates. Science learns in real time, and scientists adjust the numbers as they learn, which can be difficult to track. Even so, we know implicitly that we have to rely on

someone to put those numbers together and to verify their accuracy because most of us don't have the expertise to do that.

We also know—even if subconsciously—we are placing our trust in someone to tell us the truth. While we may not trust certain health organizations, political parties or government officials, do we know why we trust the ones we do?

Who can we trust?

I've been asked a number of times over the last few weeks where to get reliable information. This is a way of asking, "Who can we trust?"

For straight news with very little commentary—["The facts, ma'am. Just the facts."](#)—I read the [Associated Press](#) and Reuters.

For commentary with balance, I consider PBS Newshour.

Beyond those, I take what I read with a grain of salt.

"Really," you might ask. "You don't trust more than those three sources?"

What can I say? I'm a skeptic.

I also would add *The Texas Tribune*, because of its transparency, as a source those in Texas should consider.

Something else I tell people is: "Don't take any one source's word for it. Compare it against other sources."

I also tell people: "Pay attention to who and what a source praises and criticizes. Pay attention to how often that source praises and criticizes a particular person or thing. That tells you that source's slant or bias. And bias toward one direction simultaneously is bias against another direction, which cuts across the reliability of the information."

And all of this advice is applicable to the *Baptist Standard*, too. As hard as we try to give the news straight and fair and to publish a balance of opinions, we are human beings. And like all human beings, we have holes in our perception, our knowledge, our recollection. We have biases we can't see, but you can. This is a truth we have to accept about each other. And it's a truth making our deliberations about how to address coronavirus so contentious.

Is COVID-19 a hoax? That's really not the question. The question is more fundamental. The question is who do we trust?

Should you trust me? Not any more than I deserve.

But you will have to trust someone, and you need to ask yourself who that someone is and what that person gains from your trust.

UPDATED: Beyond which person or people we will trust, followers of Christ must trust in him. Martin Nyhuis pointed out that truth in [a letter to the editor](#), in which he wrote: "We must unite as brothers in Christ and not quarrel with one another as the rest of the world sees fit to do. We must not trust in any man alone but trust in the Lord. We must trust that our God, in all things, even this, has the control in his hands and that no problem here in this world is too great for him."

Thank you, Martin.

For current medical information related to coronavirus and COVID-19, visit the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) and the [National Institutes for Health](#) websites.

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