Circle family, December 29, 2021

We have been weathering the Corona Virus storm for two years now. Knowing the best approach to deal with it is complicated and even medical experts do not all agree with the best steps to take. To make the whole subject even harder to grasp, we need to take into account political issues as well as the fact that this has gone on so long that we are seeing many become mentally and psychologically exhausted. Some want stricter face covering guidelines while others want all mandates removed. So, what do we do?

We see many different levels of vaccine and face covering mandates throughout our country. As Americans, we are accustomed to questioning authority and often even view that attitude as being a good citizen since we are protecting our individual personal rights. I know that when we travel to different states we often see little to no restrictions. I completely understand that it is very nice to be able to shed the face coverings and get back to a more normal living experience. I also know that there are many churches that are forgoing the face covering mandates when they meet as a group. Often the explanation I have been told for this is that “the government does not have the right or power to tell churches what to do”. After all, “following God and worshipping Him is more important than following a government rule that makes me uncomfortable”.

Is this a proper use of using civil disobedience for Biblical purposes? When will we stop requiring face coverings at Circle? I can assure you that I too am tired of the face covering requirements but is it a proper decision to stop requiring face coverings because other churches have already made that move? While the Bible doesn’t specifically mention face coverings, it DOES give us a specific guideline that applies to this situation.

I can not control government actions. I can not control what other congregations do. Honestly, even as an Elder, I can not control what each of the members at Circle do. My focus here is to try to give a Biblical perspective to what I feel should be Circle’s response. Then, each of us needs to answer for themselves; “Do I trust God?”, “Do I believe in the teachings in the Bible?”, “Will I follow God’s Word, even when it is not comfortable?”.

**Romans 13: 1 – 7 (please read this passage twice)**

**Submission to Governing Authorities**

**1** Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. **2**Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.**3**For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. **4**For the one in authority is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God’s servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. **5**Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.**6**This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God’s servants, who give their full time to governing.**7**Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.

Okay, so I don’t like the face coverings. Should I find a church that lets me feel comfortable or should I follow how God teaches us to deal with the situation? Simply put, each of us is responsible for our own decisions of following God’s teachings so you have to answer for yourself “Am I going to follow God’s teachings or not?”

I agree that the government does not have the authority to specifically tell churches how they run or follow God. If the government were making policies/laws which directly affected our beliefs or salvation then, yes, we should resist it and stand with God. However, since the face covering mandate does not affect our beliefs or salvation then God calls us to submit to their authority because He has established it.

For this reason the Elders of Circle have decided that, in order to follow God’s guidelines for us, we will continue requiring face coverings until our government removes the mandate.

Admittedly, I am anxious that this decision will see some members pull back. Personally, I feel that rather than pulling back we should actually see more members returning to meeting together because that is also what we are called to do and not allow this virus to draw you away from the fellowship. I understand that each family has different health experiences to account for, and that is valid, but there is a reason God wants us to meet together. Our online presence is a great tool to reach people but it simply is not the same as meeting in person.

**Hebrews 10:25** Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

We are not called to be comfortable. We are called to take up our crosses and follow Jesus.

If you have any questions, concerns or comments about this decision or anything in the letter, please contact either one of the Elders. We welcome your input.

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