

## Shot or Not: Is There a “Christian” Response to COVID?

John McWilliams  
ThinkingAboutTheBible.com  
Feb 3, 2022

Like most people, my world changed a lot over the past two years. As a biologist, I had visualized what a worldwide epidemic like the Spanish flu or bubonic plague would be like in the modern world. I naively pondered only the health consequences, never really thinking such a situation would send tremors through government and economic systems. I certainly never imagined it would cause conflict in the body of Christ.

Before reading further, please note, *this article is NOT to push one argument over another*. I certainly have my own opinion, but so does everyone. However, this pandemic thing is still new science. There are definitely real scientific truths involved; We may not know them yet. Sincere, Bible-believing Christians can have very different views on the related issues.

My only purpose in the following is to encourage believers to develop **biblically-informed opinions** and not rely on fear, here-say, or deceptive propaganda from *any* source—pro or con. Christians should be prayerfully positioned on the front-line of the discourse, not being led about by the changing currents of social media or well-intentioned leaders. I do not have all the answers to all the pandemic controversies. I hope we have a better view of things as we learn more, but in the meantime, here are some discussion-starters I believe Christians should engage—sooner rather than later...

**1. What does Scripture say about COVID-related issues?** This must be our starting point with any issue. Does God’s Word give *specific* mandates, or do we rely on broader general principles? The only *explicit* statements about COVID issues seem to center on the role of government...

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. (Romans 13:1-2, ESV)

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by Him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. (1 Peter 2:13-14, ESV)

But this command was clarified by Peter and the other Apostles when they were ordered by their government to stop preaching the gospel...

We must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29, ESV)

A straightforward reading of Scripture instructs us to obey leaders unless doing so would cause us to sin by breaking a “higher law” of God. We have seen this principle played out with slavery, abortion, and the holocaust, and it has been debated extensively. Are there differences with COVID issues? Are we justified in disobedience to mandates? If any COVID-related policy

comes in opposition to a command of God, we are certainly obligated to defy it and accept the consequences (as did Peter, Luther, Bonhoeffer, et al.).

*Questions to consider...*

- a) Should churches obey the government mandate not to meet in person?
- b) Do mask and social distancing rules cause me to sin by breaking “higher laws?”
- c) Should churches be involved in legal fights over COVID mandates?
- d) Should I spread any information as long as it fits my opinion?
- e) Am I sinning by taking or not taking the vaccine?
- f) Am I sinning by criticizing those with varying opinions?
- g) Do these verses apply to local governments such as school boards or mayors?
- h) Should we obey leaders we believe to be uninformed or selfishly motivated?
- i) Is it okay to use our democratic system to push for changes in the mandates?

**2. Do the vaccine and other COVID rules harm “God’s temple?”** I am made in God’s image. Because of this, my whole person—soul, spirit, and body—has value and dignity. Furthermore, if I am a believer, my body is the dwelling place of the Spirit...

Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17, ESV)

*Questions to consider...*

- a) Does the vaccine come from aborted human cells?<sup>1</sup>
- b) Is there any risk associated with the vaccine or other mandates?
- c) If something is potentially harmful, do the benefits outweigh the risks?
- d) Can I emphasize mental or emotional harm due to mandates?

---

<sup>1</sup> As far as we know, none of the COVID vaccines contain any substance from fetal cells. However, J&J did use fetal stem cells in one part of its vaccine testing process. In case you are not familiar with this issue, fetal stem cell lines used in research today are from cells collected in the 70s and 80s from aborted fetuses. These cells have been multiplied (in labs) many times over and are standards in many lab procedures. The knowledge gained over the past decades from research involving these lines touches just about every technology used today. Sadly, almost every product we use has a connection somewhere/somehow to some bit of data derived by researchers using fetal stem cells. It might be compared to the knowledge Hitler’s doctors gained (by atrocious methods!) about human physiology. We likely would have learned it eventually, but the fact is, Nazi researchers discovered the dangers of asbestos, DDT, and x-rays. Should we “unknow” all of this useful information? If so, how do we even do that? It has all been absorbed into our common knowledge. *This is by no means the slightest justification for any of this.* But is anyone willing to eliminate every connection to fetal stem cells at this point? I have no good answer for this ethical problem. To be consistent with our beliefs, we would have to go “off the grid” and live with no commercial products whatsoever (food, medicine, fuel, plastic). I think I could personally do that—break all ties with the modern world and start homesteading a plot in an isolated valley—but then the question comes “Is that what God wants me to do?” I certainly think lines need to be drawn, but where?

e) Does the vaccine alter my body, made in God's image?<sup>2</sup>

**3. What is my responsibility with regard to the well-being of others?** This would seem to be a clear teaching throughout the Bible that few would deny. Ministering to others almost always involves sacrifice.

*Questions to consider...*

- a) Is there evidence that masks, vaccines, and other mandates protect the population?
- b) Does the well-being of others outweigh personal freedoms?
- c) Should I comply willingly with unresearched mandates just to avoid controversy?
- d) Should I go along with "best guesses" until more data is in?
- e) Does "herd immunity" work?
- f) Should I comply with mandates in order to ease the minds of those around me?
- g) Is it okay for me to encourage/shame/force others to do something "for their own good?"
- h) Is it the government's (federal or local) responsibility to enforce health standards?
- i) Does the church have a responsibility to protect the community?

**4. Do COVID decisions affect my witness?** This is likely the most important question to ask, but usually the most overlooked. Despite the plethora of government mandates trickling down on us, there are many freedoms we still possess. Depending on the situation and location, most of us can still decide whether or not to get the vaccine, wear a mask, or go here or there. But Scripture teaches that liberty doesn't always translate into license. In the early church, there was disagreement as to whether believers should eat meat that had been offered in idol worship. Paul is quite clear in his response...

But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble. (1 Corinthians 8:9-13)

My freedom to "do or not do" (on either side of the issue) should never have priority over a weaker brother's or an unbeliever's opportunity to see Christ in my life. This also applies to my speech, social media, and my judgment of others' actions unless a direct Bible truth is in question. Once again, Paul expounds on these *implicit* views...

One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. The one who observes

---

<sup>2</sup> Vaccines do not alter DNA as some people think. The COVID vaccine does cause the body to add another molecule to its immune system, but it is not significantly different from changes brought about by any other vaccine.

the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. The one who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God, while the one who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God. (Romans 14:5-6, ESV)

*Questions to consider...*

- a) Should I exercise every right and privilege I am given with regard to COVID?
- b) Should I stand up to pandemic-related free speech challenges?<sup>3</sup>
- c) Can pandemic issues be equated with the holy days in Romans 14?
- d) Which responses would bring greatest honor to God?
- e) To whom am I responsible with my Christian witness?
- f) How much should I sacrifice in order to present my Christian witness?
- g) Is it okay to ask my family to sacrifice for a good testimony?

Many of these questions are very difficult to answer or currently lacking data. That is why, more than ever, it is crucial to thoughtfully sort through the confusing mix of truth, half-truth, and error. This pandemic has not been relegated to the history books yet. Whatever comes, however, we have the assurance that *it did not take God by surprise*. There is no virus, decision, government, or enemy that is outside of His control. God's kingdom will advance in prosperity or peril, but His people must be wise and obedient through both. The world should see God's children treating others with courtesy and respect...

As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another. (John 13:34-35, ESV)

Taking an informed lead in the COVID chaos is important, but it may mean sacrifice. We may have to pray more, study more, think more, and listen more. If ever there was a time in which Christians should be "wise as serpents and innocent as doves," this is it!

---

<sup>3</sup> Although constitutional law is not directly indicated in Scripture, it certainly has been a useful vehicle for the spread of the gospel. Certain pandemic-related policies have obviously pushed the line between free speech and politically correct speech. The Constitution lays out our freedom to offer dissenting views. Are we allowed to be civilly disobedient in this area?