

Biblical Considerations in Regard to the Vaccine

1. Love is the Christian ethic.

Love is to be the permanent ethic of the Christian. We are to love one another as Christ loved us (John 13:34; cf Rom 13:8-10; Gal. 5:13-14; 1 John 3:11-24, 4:7-21). How did Christ love? By giving himself up to death for us. This means that whatever our decision on the vaccine it must be motivated, not by love of ourselves, but by love of others. Just as Christ laid down his life for us, we ought to lay down our lives for others (I John 3:16). Fear of what might happen to us should not be the main consideration, but love of others. The decision whether to take the vaccine or not is a decision each individual must make, but it must be motivated by love.

2. We do all we can to protect the vulnerable and follow good health protocols.

We are fully aware there are people in our church family whose immunity is compromised and because of age or health reasons are at more risk during a pandemic like we find ourselves in.

In the Bible we find some of the harshest criticism falls on those who don't care for the vulnerable in society, the widows and the fatherless. The Bible speaks of protecting and providing for the vulnerable. In a time of a pandemic that means we must protect our people with good health protocols. We would consider the health needs of the congregation and ask people who are sick to stay home to stop spreading sickness to others who might be badly affected from sickness. Some people are more susceptible to things than others. We must consider others and their strengths and weaknesses and take that into consideration in the decisions we make. This is part of loving others.

We may need to consider how we make sure we protect the children who are unvaccinated. So do we make sure the children's ministry leaders are vaccinated?

3. The vaccine cannot spiritually harm you.

Though there are things we can put into our body that might physically harm us, there is nothing that we put into our body that can spiritually harm us. Jesus, when confronted with the traditions of men and what one considered ceremonially clean and unclean, said, "There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him" (Mark 7:15).

I take it, that this means that nothing that goes into the body can harm you spiritually. We know that someone taking drugs or someone who is a glutton and eats unhealthy food all the time is going to be physically unhealthy and therefore will be harmed by the intake of certain things into the body and we must be careful how we treat the body as it is the temple of the Holy Spirit. However, what Jesus is saying is that what goes into the body is not spiritually harmful. What defiles someone in that sense is not what goes into someone's body, but what comes out of a person. What comes out of our heart is an indication of our spiritual health. That being the case, I take it that nothing, including the vaccine, that goes into the body can harm us spiritually.

This is important because some people have concerns that the vaccine may be the mark of the beast and, therefore, Christians should not get it. The vaccine cannot be the mark of the beast because Revelation speaks of the mark of the beast and the mark of Christ as mutually exclusive, you cannot have both. You either have the mark of the beast on your right hand or your forehead (Rev. 13:16) or you have the Lamb's name and his Father's name written on your forehead (Rev. 14:1). And John writes that "all who dwell on earth will worship the beast, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life" (Rev. 13:8). In other words, if you are a believer, your name is in the book of life, and you are therefore marked by God and cannot worship the beast or receive the mark of the beast.

This means that the mark of the beast cannot be received accidentally and it cannot be received by Christians. Therefore, I conclude that the vaccine cannot be the mark of the beast. And Jesus has already said that nothing that enters the body can defile you. So, the vaccine will not damage your relationship with God.

4. The vaccine is a secondary issue over which we can disagree without despising one another or judging one another.

What are we to do when people have strong convictions and disagree on secondary issues? The apostle Paul gives instructions on how we can differ on our opinions on secondary matters in Romans 14:1-23. Paul is speaking to a church full of people who disagree on whether or not a Christian should eat meat sacrificed to idols. Paul references the two camps; those that are weak in faith, or those who refuse to eat the meat, and those who are strong in faith, or those who eat the meat.

Paul says, 14:1, "As for the one who is weak in faith, welcome him, but not to quarrel over opinions."

Paul does not say to the strong in faith, "you are right and so your job is to convince the weak in faith." He tells the strong in faith to welcome the weak in faith, but don't quarrel over opinions on secondary matters.

Then he says, 14:2, "One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables."

We may say, one person believes he may get the vaccine and the other will refrain from getting it.

And now, Paul, in 14:3-4, gives instructions for how the person who eats anything, or we could say in our context, the person who receives the vaccine, is to treat those who refrain and vice versa:

Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

The person who receives the food in faith, or the vaccine, is not to despise those who abstain. But, the one who abstains is not to pass judgment on those who receive it.

As Christians, we are not to despise each other or judge each other for our decisions on secondary matters. We are not to pass judgment, for God is the one who passes judgment.¹

Then he uses another example of another divisive issue in their day, the issue of observance of days. And he says no matter your view on this secondary matter you are to do it in honour of the Lord. Romans 14:5-9:

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. ⁶ The one who observes 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. ⁷ For none of us lives to himself, and none of us dies to himself. ⁸ For if we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord. So then, whether we live or whether we die, we are the Lord's. ⁹ For to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and of the living.

Whatever our conviction on a secondary matter like the vaccine, we should follow our conscience and honour the Lord with our decision. And give thanks to the Lord with our decision.

Instead of arguing about secondary issues and judging one another for their stance on them, we should think of others and how we can make sure we don't make them stumble with our decisions.

Paul continues, in 14:13-18:

Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother. ¹⁴ I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean. ¹⁵ For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died. ¹⁶ So do not let what you regard as good be spoken of as evil. ¹⁷ For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. ¹⁸ Whoever thus serves Christ is acceptable to God and approved by men.

Let us not judge each other for our opinions on secondary matters, instead we should be concerned to love one another despite our differing opinions and to not put a stumbling block before one another or cause someone to go against their conscience. For whatever one decides it must proceed from faith and not from peer pressure. This is the argument Paul closes this section with, 14:23, "But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin."

In the words of verse 17, the kingdom of God is not a matter of vaccine or non-vaccine but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. So, he goes on, in 14:19, to say, "So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding." Whatever your conviction on the matter we must pursue peace and mutual upbuilding.

¹ See also vv. 10-12.

The vaccine is a secondary issue over which we can disagree and not despise each other or judge one another for. We each have a right to individual choice based on our conscience and we should not look down on each other for those decisions, but should be concerned to love each other.

5. We should be willing to give up our rights for the proclamation of the gospel.

As we have seen, secondary issues, like whether one takes the vaccine or not, is a personal choice based on conscience and what one can do in good faith. However, our personal freedoms to choose should also be informed by what is best for the gospel.

Paul was willing to become all things to all men in order to proclaim the gospel and save some. He says, in 1 Cor. 9:22-23, "I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel, that I may share with them in its blessings." Paul was willing to do things that he might not otherwise do in order to have the chance to preach the gospel. He even had Timothy, who had a Gentile father, circumcised (Acts 16:1-3), even though, biblically, there was no requirement for him to be circumcised as Paul had just argued in a Christian council in Acts 15. Why then did he get Timothy circumcised? He had him circumcised because they were going to do ministry to Jews (16:3), whose leaders expected and may well have required circumcision, and to make sure there was no barrier to the gospel being received by Jews, he circumcised him. He was willing to forego his rights in order for the gospel to be proclaimed without hindrance. I think we might say, in our context, he would be willing to receive the vaccine in order that he might proclaim the gospel to people that require the vaccine for entrance.

Paul says he would rather give up his rights than put any obstacle in the way of the gospel. 1 Cor. 9:12b "Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ."

It follows that if rejecting the vaccine, which is a secondary issue, means there is now an obstacle to the gospel, being that we cannot go into the schools or other places to tell people about Jesus, we are putting an obstacle in the way of the gospel and should instead give up our right to refuse the vaccine in order to proclaim Jesus with it.

Paul was willing to give up his rights as an apostle for the benefit of others. Jesus himself was willing to give up his rights, as Philippians 2:6-7 states that, "though he was in very nature God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be used for his own advantage, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant."

To follow Jesus' and Paul's examples, we should be willing to give up our rights and our freedoms for the benefit of others. The decisive factor in decisions we make should not be our own rights or our own safety, but rather the benefit of others. If that means taking the vaccine at risk to myself, knowing that that will enable me to potentially benefit others with the gospel then that is a noble thing to do.

Summary

1. Love is the Christian ethic.
2. We do all we can to protect the vulnerable and follow good health protocols.
3. The vaccine cannot spiritually harm you.

4. The vaccine is a secondary issue over which we can disagree without despising one another or judging one another.
5. We should be willing to give up our rights for the proclamation of the gospel.

Considerations in Regard to the Traffic Light System and Meeting as a Church

6. We are to generally submit to our governing authorities as authorities put there by God.

Paul makes this point very clear in Romans 13:1-7

“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.

Now it must be remembered that Paul is writing to the Romans, the Romans were ruled by the Roman Empire and Caesar. They were not real godly people. Paul himself would be imprisoned by Rome and as church history would tell us, eventually beheaded by the Roman government. They would persecute Christians. Yet Paul says, they have been instituted by God. And it even gets stronger, and for those of us who would be tempted to defy the government, this should cause us pause...

² Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³ For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴ for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. ⁶ For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. ⁷ Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.”

Indeed, unless they are laws that require us to sin, we should submit to them. Peter makes a similar point in 1 Peter 2:13-14 “Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors...”

7. It is not sin to submit to governing authorities when they make laws against your freedoms.

Many Christians I have been hearing have been concerned with the loss of our freedoms. And they have been more vocal about our loss of freedoms than anything else as though our loss of freedom is the biggest issue we are facing in our country right now. How do we think about this Biblically?

Again, remember the situation the New Testament apostles were in. They were persecuted by Jews and by Romans, they had some freedoms at times, but also there were times when freedoms were taken from them. They were beaten for preaching about Jesus and they were put in prison. Yet, they don't write about how disgusting it is that they have lost their

freedoms. Instead, what we find is they remind their churches that they have freedom in Christ, even while losing civil freedoms.

Now this does not mean we shouldn't be concerned about our freedoms at all. Freedom is a good thing if it is on offer. Paul, speaking in the context of slaves securing their freedom, says, if we can secure our freedom we should do so (1 Cor. 7:21). So, if there is opportunity to get freedom or to challenge the government on a certain issue we should do so, but that was never a main priority. It is by no means sin to willingly submit to loss of freedoms. Paul elsewhere told slaves, who were not free, to obey their earthly masters as though working for the Lord and not for men, knowing that our inheritance comes from the Lord, and that the wrongdoer will be paid back for any wrong they do (Col. 3:22-25). This means that if the government make laws that mean the loss of our freedoms, it is not sin for us to submit to those laws, instead, we should be faithful to the Lord while submitting to them, knowing that if we are being unjustly treated we should leave that in the Lord's hands knowing all will face judgment one day.

So, we are generally to submit to governing authorities put there by God even in cases where our freedoms are lost. Indeed, unless they are laws that require us to sin, we should submit to them.

8. When governing authorities make rules that go against God's Word we must obey God.

We have already seen that the posture of the apostles was to submit to governing authorities. However, there are also Scriptural instances in the early church where the apostles deliberately disobeyed the governing authorities. For example, in Acts 4, the rulers and elders and scribes, called Peter and John and charged them not to speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18). But Peter and John said they would obey God rather than men, and they went on and continued to preach in the name of Jesus and again they were arrested and beaten and told to stop teaching and preaching about Jesus Christ (Acts 5:17-42). Again, the apostles said, they must obey God rather than men (v 29) and they continued to preach about Jesus.

Christians are to obey God over the government when God has called us to something that the government prohibits, or when God has prohibited us from doing something the government says must happen. We see a case of the later with Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refusing to bow to the image in Daniel 3. We also see a case of the former when the king makes a law that would stop Daniel praying (Daniel 6).

Jesus said, "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." Taxes are due to government, so we should give them. Do what humanly speaking they ask us to do. But your very lives and your worship belong to God, never give that to the government.

In other words, if the government requires us to sin we must disobey the government in order to obey God.

This requires us to look to see if the traffic light system requires us to sin or not.

In order to answer that question, we must first answer the question, what has God commanded regarding meeting as church?

9. God has commanded that we meet together regularly as the church.

Hebrews 10:24-25 “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

If the government were to say we cannot meet to worship, it would directly go against what God has commanded.

Can we obey Hebrews 10:24-25 by doing church online?

To answer that we must first answer, what is the church and what happens in the church? The local church is the gathering of Christians in a specific place. What happens in the local church gathering? Ever since the inception of the church the local church has devoted themselves to gather for the preaching of the Word, fellowship, communion, and prayer (Acts 2:42), and very soon after congregational singing became the pattern, not only to address God in praise but also to sing to one another in order to teach one another through the form of song (Col. 3:16; Eph. 5:19). These are the things we must do as we meet together as the church to obey Hebrews 10:24-25.

Can we do these things online?

Well, we can listen to preaching and singing and prayer online. But, we cannot address one another by singing songs together online. Communion is also to be done together. Paul chides the Corinthian church for eating the communion meal privately and for not waiting for one another and not being in unity. Is it possible to do this, not privately, but together online?

The church is the physical gathering or assembling of the people of God. Church is not something you listen to, it is participation with the body of Christ in the worship of God and the building up of one another.

Is there a way to do that online?

If not, then we must continue to meet regularly in person.

10. God has said, we must maintain and attain unity visibly.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul is concerned about unity in the church. Christ has broken down the dividing wall of hostility and made Jew and Gentile one in himself, thereby reconciling them (Eph. 2:11-22). Knowing Christ has established objective unity, Paul now gets down to the nitty gritty of how Christians should then act in Ephesians 4:1-6:

I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called,² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love,³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁴ There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call—⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism,⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Knowing that Christ has accomplished our unity, we are to walk worthy of the calling he has placed on our lives. How do we walk worthy of that calling? We are to be eager to maintain unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:3). Unity has already been accomplished in Christ, but Christians also have the responsibility to maintain unity (v. 3) and later he says we are to attain unity (v. 13). If Christ has already obtained unity, for Christians to maintain the unity, must mean to

actively show that unity in practical ways, in other words in visible ways.² To be Christian means that one's life will be characterized by seeking unity with other Christians. The place that this unity is to be sought is in the gathered community of the local church, which is the visible expression of the body of Christ. Christians should be eager to maintain that unity visibly.

In vv. 4-6, Paul lists a sevenfold basis for unity. "There is one body...one Spirit...one hope...one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God." All Christians share the "one body." All Christians share "one Spirit." All Christians share "one hope." All Christians have "one Lord," that is Jesus Christ. All Christians have "one faith." All Christians have "one baptism." All Christians have "one God and Father of all" (v. 6). These common realities that Christians have, including the common oneness of the Trinity, are what constitutes the basis for showing visible unity in the local church. If that is true then we should be eager to show unity visibly in the church.

11. God has said, we are to minister to one another and use our spiritual gifts for the benefit of one another, which means we need to be with each other in order to use our gifts for the benefit of each other.

God has given his church Spiritual gifts and there is a purpose God has given individuals these gifts. Paul says, in 1 Cor. 12:7 "To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." We are to use our gifts for the benefit of others. Because of this, we need to be with one another in order to use our gifts for the purpose for which God gave them. In other words, the rest of the church needs you, for you are part of the body. Paul says, in **12:14-20**,

For the body does not consist of one member but of many.¹⁵ If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶ And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁷ If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? ¹⁸ But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. ¹⁹ If all were a single member, where would the body be?²⁰ As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

Not only does the church need you, you need other people using their gifts for you. Paul continues, **12:21-26**,

The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you," nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." ²² On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, ²³ and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unrepresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, ²⁴ which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed

² Peter O'Brien agrees, when he notes:

To *keep* this unity must mean to maintain it *visibly*. If the unity of the Spirit is real, it must be transparently evident, and believers have a responsibility before God to make sure that this is so. To live in a manner which mars the unity of the Spirit is to do despite to the gracious reconciling work of Christ. It is tantamount to saying that his sacrificial death by which relationships with God and others have been restored, along with the resulting freedom of access to the Father, are of no real consequence to us! (Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1999) 280).

the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, ²⁵ that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ²⁶ If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

We need each other. We cannot do the Christian life by ourselves. We are members of one body and we need to minister to one another with our individual gifts. We need the Spirit of God, which we have when the body comes together to work for the common good. That seems to me to best happen when we come together as a church. This is when we build one another up, which is the purpose of the church gathering as Paul puts it in **1 Corinthians 14:26** “What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.”

We come together to build one another up. Can that happen when we are not physically together to contribute to one another’s lives?


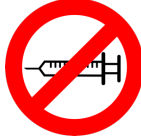



If we are one body and we need one another, and we are to maintain and attain unity, we cannot then discriminate against some members of the body and refuse them entry to maintain and attain that unity without doing damage to the visible unity of the body of Christ.

12. We are to show no partiality when deciding who can enter into the local church.

The government has indicated it will bring in a traffic light system whereby we are encouraged to require vaccine certificates, so that we can allow more people into the church gathering.

Here is the situation as currently given to us:

There is a traffic light system that will come into play soon, in which the government will say which light we will be on, depending on factors such as how many cases there are and how full the hospitals are.

	 ³	 ⁴
	100	10
	Unlimited	50
	Unlimited	100

So, as you can see, if we want to allow vaccinated and unvaccinated people into the church the numbers drop significantly. By doing this the government is trying to encourage us to require vaccine certificates for people to enter the church and to deny unvaccinated people from attending.

³ This indicates, if we only allow the double vaccinated to our services.

⁴ This indicates, if we allow for both vaccinated and unvaccinated people to come to our services.

How are we to think about this Biblically?

James speaks to this issue of showing partiality or showing favouritism in the church gathering. James, in 2:1-9, says,

My brothers, show no partiality as you hold the faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory. ² For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, ³ and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "You sit here in a good place," while you say to the poor man, "You stand over there," or, "Sit down at my feet," ⁴ have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? ⁵ Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? ⁶ But you have dishonored the poor man. Are not the rich the ones who oppress you, and the ones who drag you into court? ⁷ Are they not the ones who blaspheme the honorable name by which you were called?

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

This is a command to show no partiality. In James' context they are showing partiality toward the rich over the poor, allowing the rich into places of the church that the poor were not given. James says, this is sin. We cannot show favour towards some over others. The question for us in our context is, is requiring a vaccine passport before you are allowed in worship, showing favouritism or partiality? We are not to judge somebody by their outward appearance. We must not show favouritism to some based on their views on something secondary or a vaccine passport. We are not to make a distinction. James is explicit, showing favour in this way to some over others in the worship gathering you are committing sin (v 9).

We cannot then split the church of God by allowing some to gather as the body (the vaccinated) and not others (the unvaccinated). It seems to me, that this rules out the possibility of requiring vaccine passports for entry as it means turning some members away. God is not partial and we should not be either.

The way things are going, it seems like we might have a marginalised group, those who can't do certain things in society because they don't have the vaccine certificate. There is an option some are thinking about that requires two Separate Services, one for the vaccinated and one for the unvaccinated. But the Bible clearly says we are to be united in one body as the body of Christ. As Paul says, "The eye cannot say to the hand I have no need of you." Rather, we need each other as members of the same body. We cannot separate the vaccinated and unvaccinated as we are united in Christ, as his body. We belong together with Christ as our head. In the words of Jesus, "What God has joined together let no man separate" (Matt. 19:6).

We are to love others as Christ loved the church. How do we love our unvaccinated brothers and sisters? By allowing them to worship God the way God wants them to worship him without discrimination or partiality. Jesus turns no one away who comes to him, except only those living in defiant sin, who are to be disciplined in the hope that they may be saved (see 1 Corinthians 5). If being unvaccinated is not defiant sin then we cannot turn them away, who want to come to Jesus in the church. Therefore, we cannot require vaccine certificates for

entry to the church. This means we must look at how to include any who want to join in worship.

Summary

6. We are to generally submit to our governing authorities as authorities put there by God.
7. It is not sin to submit to governing authorities when they make laws against your freedoms.
8. When governing authorities make rules that go against God's Word we must obey God.
9. God has commanded that we meet together regularly as the church.
10. God has said, we must maintain and attain unity visibly.
11. God has said, we are to minister to one another and use our spiritual gifts for the benefit of one another, which means we need to be with each other in order to use our gifts for the benefit of each other.
12. We are to show no partiality when deciding who can enter into the local church.

Conclusion

We must not discriminate between vaccinated and unvaccinated people desiring to enter the church to worship God. This means we cannot require a vaccine certificate for entry to church. We must also find ways to meet regularly in person as a church. We must look at ways we can obey the government when it does not require us to sin., But when it does require us to sin, we must disobey the government in order to obey God.

Is the traffic Light system then requiring us to sin?

It is sin if we go with the vaccine certificate route. But the government does not require us to do that. So the question then becomes, can we meet under the traffic light system without requiring vaccine certificates? Yes, but the numbers are hugely reduced. We could therefore meet as a church depending on what colour light we are on. The following is the numbers we are allowed for having vaccinated and unvaccinated together under the different light colours.

Green Light: 100

Orange Light: 50

Red Light: 10

Under green light we can still meet as a church, as we are under the 100 threshold.

Under orange light it is possible, although not everybody could come, which could be problematic.

Under red we cannot meet as we normally do.

This leaves us with three options under the red light.

1. We plant smaller churches so that we can meet as much smaller churches.
2. We disobey the government in order to meet.
3. We do online services.

If what has been said above is true, then option 3 is not doing what God has commanded us to do regularly, in showing visible unity and participating together in using our spiritual gifts

for the benefit of others and singing together etc. If it were short-term we could make it work. But how long might this be in place for?

Option 2, we do not want to do unless they are forcing us to disobey God. But this may need to happen at some stage in the future.

Option 1 creates all kinds of logistical problems.

Is there a way to combine options 1 and 3?

Where to from here?

It is my understanding that the government will confirm our move to the traffic light system on November 29th. And Auckland and regions with low vax rates will move directly to red light. So I'm not sure what the government thinks is low vax rate, but if it is anything below 90%, I don't think the Waikato will be there by December which means we may well be put in the red light to begin with. So, and please know that rules and guidelines may well change and so we will have to be flexible with how we respond, but as it is currently laid out, if we are to go into the red light here is what we are thinking:

We will not mandate vaccines, neither will we meet as we normally do. Instead, we can do homegroups of 10 or less to allow room for growth, and watch the same sermon online, and sing in our small groups. So it becomes kind of a satellite church. And if people feel vulnerable or if someone is sick they can stay home and still tune in from home. This way we can obey our government and still participate in smaller groups in hearing the preaching of the Word together, fellowshiping together, taking communion together, praying together, singing together, and showing visible unity as much as we can. We acknowledge this is not ideal, as we want to show unity with the whole local church and do these things together, but we hope this is only a temporary fix, and we will be able to meet together as a whole local church soon.

Let me conclude with both a prayer and an exhortation from the apostle Paul in Romans 14:5-7:

⁵ May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, ⁶ that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁷ Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God.

We are members of one another (Rom. 12:5; Eph. 4:25). We are family. Christ has welcomed us because he died for us, and he did this while we were filthy sinners and he washed us and cleansed us and has brought us into his family so that we are all united in him. Therefore, we are to welcome one another just as Christ has welcomed us. And together we, with one voice, glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

May God grant us to live in such harmony.

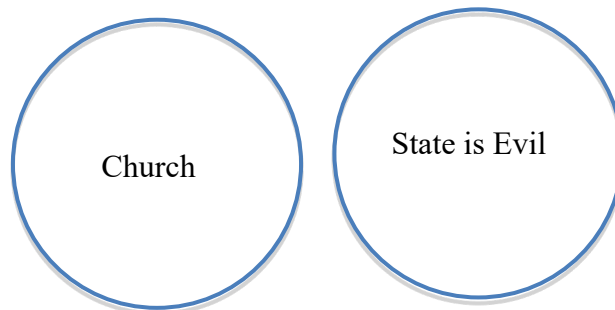
Amen.

Appendix
The nature of Church vs. State

There are three main views of how the church and the state interact. These three views are best shown by the three different views of churches during the Reformation era: An inactive pessimism, as shown by the Anabaptists; an active pessimism, as shown by Martin Luther; an optimism, as shown by Reformed churches.

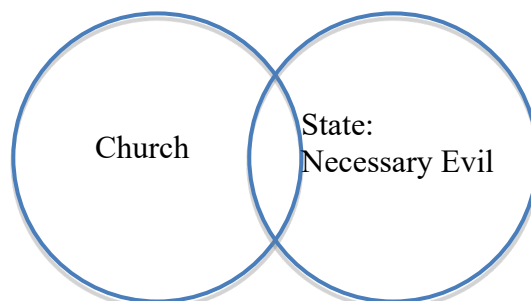
An Inactive Pessimism

The Anabaptists argued that church must be separate from culture. Christians must choose to leave their culture and join the church; it is an anti-state view. Christians with this view do not engage the culture and they are not optimistic they can change the culture. For them, it is not the church's job to change the culture. Instead, we should focus on the church. The culture/government is evil.



An Active Pessimism

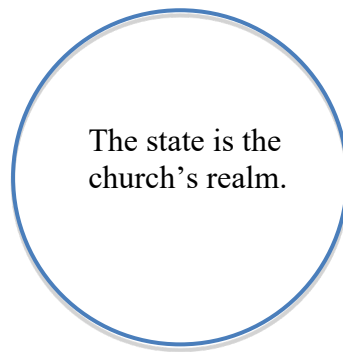
Martin Luther argued for tension between the church and the state. There is an overlap between the state and church. Luther argued that you cannot totally divorce yourself from culture. You have a dual allegiance to the state and the church. Christians with this view have an active pessimism. They engage it but do not think they will change it. The Spirit works more in the church than in the state. We must not raise our hand against God's elect, the government, but we should speak prophetically to it. In this view culture/government is a necessary evil.



An Optimism

The Reformed tradition is more optimistic and they saw the culture and government as good. Christians must actively try to change and transform or reform the state. This is an active optimism. For Calvin and Luther government is God's gift and is established before the fall. Paul says in Colossians 1:18, "Take all things under submission." The purpose of government

is to promote righteousness. The Reformed church would take up arms because the government is promoting righteousness and we must protect that; Luther would not. The Reformed view of the state lends itself to a post-millennial perspective.



Your view on the relationship between church and state will determine how one views the role the church has to play in shaping the culture and government mandates.

I take the second view, that the government is necessary, but since it is filled with sinners we can be pessimistic that it will change the culture for the church's good. Therefore we can expect the government to legislate against the church at times and still be active to proclaim biblical truth to it.

Instead of fighting tooth and nail against the government when it legislates something wrong, we should ask, how can we live faithfully and proclaim what is good within this evil culture. Instead of asking how can we pour all our energy into changing the government and telling them why they are wrong, we should spend our energy being faithful Christians and proclaiming the gospel.