

Christian Life Resources

Position Statement on Vaccination

PREAMBLE

A Christian demonstrates thankfulness to a loving and forgiving God by doing what is good and avoiding what is evil. The Holy Scriptures proclaim God's will for what is to be done and what is to be avoided.

That same Word of God compels Christians and Christian agencies to spread the Gospel and perform charitable work for the care of others. Christians and Christian agencies are also compelled to commend faithful living and point out error by proclaiming God's Word. The purpose of this statement is to glorify God by proclaiming his truth, speaking against error, and advocating expressions of love for the benefit of others.

ABSTRACT

Human life is a blessing from God. In our role as stewards of his blessings, Christians act first to protect and care for the lives of others, and then to protect and care for their own lives. Viewing a lifespan as a time of grace to come to faith, grow in faith, share the faith, and live the faith, a Christian will act in the best interest of serving those goals. Under the freedom purchased by the blood of Christ, Christians enjoy a wide assortment of options to be faithful stewards of the blessing of life. The correctness of choosing to be vaccinated or choosing not to be vaccinated is measured by motive rooted in faith and the truths of God's Word.

BACKGROUND

Vaccines were first developed to fight smallpox and then rabies. As the science has matured, vaccines have been developed for treating more than two dozen diseases and their variants, and responsible institutions of society have widely advocated for their use. Most schools require vaccination records. Governments around the world, which oversee immunization efforts against infectious childhood and other diseases, have now called for mass vaccinations to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. Congregations have urged members to live safely during a pandemic, including encouragements related to vaccination.

The case for vaccination begins with science and the prevailing assertion of government health agencies that vaccines are the most effective means of fighting infectious diseases that are harmful or fatal. The World Health Organization estimates 2.5 million lives are saved annually around the world because of vaccines.

The case against vaccinations can be summarized in three statements:

- They are dangerous.
- They were unethically developed.
- Their use or non-use is an *adiaphoron* and therefore only a matter of conscience, to be decided independently by each person or family.

This statement will examine the issues in the light of God's Word.

The Issues

SECTION 1: THE INTRINSIC VALUE OF HUMAN LIFE

Scripture teaches that human life has an intrinsic value. Human life is valuable because God created it and he redeemed it by the sacrifice of his own Son, Jesus Christ:

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. (Psalm 139:13–14)

Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13)

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19–20)

This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. (1 John 4:10)

The objective nature of God's love for all human life supersedes any qualitative judgment on the value of human life. This is sometimes called an inherent value of life or a "quantitative" view of life—all life is valuable regardless of its differing qualities from person to person.

SECTION 2: THE INSPIRATION FOR CHRISTIAN LIVING

The distinctive nature of the Christian faith is that salvation is neither earned nor deserved.

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. (Ephesians 2:8–9)

We appreciate the preciousness of grace through understanding our unworthiness for it. Our gratitude begins by appreciating the providence of God. The psalmist writes:

When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? (Psalm 8:3–4)

In the Old Testament, Job sees hardship in his own life and questions God. When God responds, he is compelled to consider the magnificence of God and the comparable helplessness of his own existence. Job humbly replies:

"I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted. You asked, 'Who is this that obscures my plans without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. "You said, 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.'

My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes.” (Job 42:1–6)

Sinful human pride, however, still presumes to think that we have and create magnificence of our own. We are inclined to demonstrate this to others; the Apostle Paul knew and wrote about this:

*If someone else thinks they have reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for righteousness based on the law, faultless.
(Philippians 3:4b–6)*

Jesus also wanted to make clear that it is not what is on the outside that ultimately matters but what is inside that really indicates our character and drives our actions. He put it this way:

“What comes out of a person is what defiles them. For it is from within, out of a person’s heart, that evil thoughts come—sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and defile a person.”(Mark 7:20-23)

But even for Christians there are conflicts between their sinful nature and their new nature in Christ. Paul describes the struggle in personal terms:

I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me. For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it. So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. For in my inner being I delight in God’s law; but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? (Romans 7:15–24)

The guilt Paul describes mirrors our own lives. We are powerless to meet God’s standard of righteousness (Romans 3:10). The prophet Isaiah, however, proposed a divine solution:

Surely he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (Isaiah 53:4–6)

Jesus willingly submitted to all that pain and suffering for our salvation. He refused to fight those who came to arrest him (Matthew 26:53). He accepted the nails in his hands and feet for us. He experienced abandonment by God (Matthew 27:46) in order that it might never happen to us. It changed our destiny.

Christ's atonement makes a difference to us, and we want, in words and actions, to respond with heartfelt appreciation and affection. Just as we learn what pleases those who mean the most to us in life so we might do those things, we do the same as an appropriate expression of gratitude to God who saved us.

This is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome, (1 John 5:3)

Knowing Christ's sacrifice for us changes our lives. It is a metamorphosis: we go from living like and for the world, to living like and for God.

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2)

A Christian, therefore, seeks out the will of God by digging deeper into his Word to better understand right from wrong and good from evil.

Anyone who lives on milk, being still an infant, is not acquainted with the teaching about righteousness. But solid food is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity. (Hebrews 5:13–6:1a)

As these truths are learned Christians display this knowledge with their actions (James 2:18).

SECTION 3: THE SOLID FOOD OF CHRISTIAN LIVING

The Scriptures do not contain specific directives for every ethical challenge in life. Instead, we find guiding principles, applications, and narratives to guide us in drawing conclusions on how to live for God.

Jesus established the supreme principles for us to follow in answer to the question, "Which is the greatest commandment in the law?":

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37–40)

These broad mandates to love God and love others do not only put the entire Old Testament (the Law and Prophets) into proper context. They also provide the foundation for a Christian's life of sanctification: motivated by Christ's love, a Christian imitates that love with actions towards God, and towards others.

Scripture reiterates the supreme principles in other ways to communicate clarity. The Apostle Paul tells us what loving God with all we are and have will mean for all our daily lives and decision-making:

*So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.
(1 Corinthians 10:31)*

As for loving others as we love ourselves, Paul establishes Jesus as the perfect standard:

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: (Philippians 2:3–5)

Loving others is to place their interests ahead of our own.

When applying these principles to various life challenges, the Christian will strive to assure that love for God and love for others would be foremost in the considerations. This is easier said than done. In fact, for sinful creatures it is impossible. Even before considering the merits of any action, the premier consideration is what is in the heart. The Scriptures testify to the inability of human judgment to make the right choices without the right motive:

*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.
(Proverbs 14:12)*

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. (Isaiah 64:6)

The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. (Romans 8:7)

The writer to the Hebrews states the powerful and necessary role that faith in God plays in Christian deciding and acting:

And without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6a)

Even the most praiseworthy of good deeds is useless without faith. Faith (Hebrews 11:1) puts and keeps us in a right relationship with God and then drives us forward, compelling us to love and to be sacrificial. It enables us to do things the world will not naturally understand (1 Corinthians 1:25), as we put trust in the promises of God ahead of our personal interests and concerns.

John leaves little doubt about what having love for God in the preeminent place means for one's relationship with the world:

This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. (1 John 5:2)

Likewise, Christ illustrates loving others before ourselves with examples that are clearly contrary to our natural human impulses:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matthew 5:38–44)

The world, however, does not always accept the self-effacing demeanor of those who love God and love others ahead of themselves. Peter reminds and encourages believers:

Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. (1 Peter 3:13–17)

SECTION 4: THE BLESSING, PRIVILEGE, AND PRIORITY OF SHARING THE GOSPEL

The Gospel message of salvation through Christ alone is an enduring treasure (Matthew 6:19-20). It is the hope that the world cannot give. It is the message given to Christians to share with others so that all might know the story of their deliverance, and it is God’s will that all should believe it and be saved (1 Timothy 2:4). God has assigned the task of gospel proclamation to Christians (Matthew 28:19-20), yet Scripture also acknowledges the irony of flawed humans being entrusted with such an important responsibility:

But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. (2 Corinthians 4:7)

As faith grows, Christians increasingly seek opportunities to share that message. This is a source of great joy.

I will give thanks to you, LORD, with all my heart; I will tell of all your wonderful deeds. I will be glad and rejoice in you; I will sing the praises of your name, O Most High. (Psalm 9:1–2)

For this reason, Christians do good to others both for goodness’ sake and for the opportunities this presents for sharing the Gospel. In the way believers let their light shine, they invite conversations about God (Matthew 5:16). In their demeanor of hope in hopeless situations, it prompts curiosity from others (1 Peter 3:15).

Proclaiming the Gospel was so important that the Apostle Paul wrote:

I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. (1 Corinthians 9:22)

Jesus used a powerful, rhetorical question to highlight the importance of sharing the Gospel when he said:

*What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?
(Mark 8:36)*

So not only will Christians be concerned for and make sacrifices for the health and well-being of others (Matthew 25:35-36); they will also demonstrate an eager, active, and unselfish consideration for others' souls and the saving message of the Gospel.

SECTION 5: THE AUTHORITY OF GOVERNMENT

Our 21st century experience in the United States (and other Western nations) tends to color our sense of what government is and should be like. The government of the Roman Empire in the first century was substantially different and more adversarial. That reality gives further depth to the insight that Christ and the apostles provided on how to view those who govern and how Christians are to act towards them.

Government Authority Is Established by God

Government is not a human invention; it did not come to exist because people thought it up. Despite the godless theories of social scientists and the convictions of certain Christians that governments and officials tainted by evil do not need to be obeyed, Scripture clearly teaches a divine origin for their powers and prerogatives.

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. (Romans 13:1)

The form of operation of each governing authority may differ. Some permit great autonomy to subordinate countries, states, territories, cities, and citizens; others are more restrictive, limiting the rights of subordinate elements and their citizens. Scripture does not define the "acceptable" or "ideal" form of government. Scripture, however, does make it clear that even a government as contrary to the Christian faith as during the apostolic era was still an authority established by God.

All People Are to Obey the Governing Authorities

As an authority established by God, the inspired Apostle went on to say:

*Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.
(Romans 13:2)*

These words are extraordinary in view of Rome's treatment of Christians. Biblical and secular writings note that trials were not always fair, and the punishment was often extreme. Even in this anti-Christian environment the Apostle declares that rebellion against the government is in essence rebellion against God.

The Governing Authorities Deserve Respect and Honor

As we honor and respect God, we are to honor and respect those he established to govern us.

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. (Romans 13:7)

These were not instructions only for members of the Roman congregation. Paul told Titus:

Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good. (Titus 3:1)

The Apostle Peter wrote:

Show proper respect to everyone, love the family of believers, fear God, honor the emperor. (1 Peter 2:17)

When religious leaders tested Christ's allegiances with a question about paying taxes, he said:

"Give back to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's." (Mark 12:17)

Defining Those Who Govern

On issues like vaccination, experts will disagree, sometimes even within supporting governing agencies. A Christian will ask whom we should obey when there are such differences.

Tensions between government representatives existed also in biblical times. Pontius Pilate was at odds with Herod. Secular history records substantial disagreements among various parties and powers within the Roman Empire. Still, the existence of such differences did not change the applicable principle for Christians then or now: We are to honor, respect, and obey those who govern. Practically speaking, this usually means that we obey that authority which has direct and actual supervision over us (as opposed to any office or official whose authority over us is more nominal or theoretical). Regrettably, there may be times when uncertainty prevails among citizens who are confronted by differing authorities.

But even those who govern us are governed. When the Sanhedrin sentenced Jesus to death, they had to take him to the Roman governor, Pilate, for that sentence to be carried out. When the Apostle Paul subjected himself to local authorities and experienced what he perceived to be injustice, he appealed to a higher authority: Caesar (Acts 25:11).

Agencies funded by the government have authority only to the extent that it is granted to them by those who govern. For example, if the governing authorities regard and present the work of the Centers for Disease Control as authoritative, then it is so. On the other hand, if the governing authorities choose to reject the counsel of such agencies, then the agencies do not have authority over us.

Government Doing Evil

When Christ and the apostles spoke about obeying, honoring, and respecting the authorities, those governments were known for evil acts and the evil character of their rulers and officials. This should not surprise us because those who govern have the same evil inclinations as all of us (Genesis 8:21). They will be no more perfect or pure in performance than we are. Yet, since God established government for orderliness, not holiness, rebellion against even an evil regime is not permitted.

Government is Limited

This does not, however, give the authorities free rein to do evil or simply act as they please. Since their authority is an extension of God's, the government is not permitted to command its subjects to act contrary to his will (Acts 5:29), and Christians are guiltless when they disobey such contradictory commands. The obligation is to obey God's clear word.

The Government and a Clear Conscience

But how do we know when government has gone too far? While Scripture forbids Christians from obeying a government instruction that is contrary to God's expressed will, in matters of Christian freedom it directs us again to examine our motivation.

Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience. (Romans 13:5)

When Scripture speaks of "conscience" it does so with the goal of clarity and certainty. The directive to obey, honor, and respect is clear. When we choose to not obey, we begin by examining our motive, or conscience. Because only God can read the heart, this involves soul-searching. A choice to disobey in some way against a governing authority requires us to measure that choice against the directive to honor, serve, and obey those who govern.

Our sinful nature tempts us to be overly broad in comparing a government directive to the Word of God. We do well to consider the example of Christ. When he was challenged about paying taxes, he was aware of how Rome used tax money. He knew it was often unjustly collected and immorally used. Yet, Jesus did not consider those things to be compelling reasons to disobey, dishonor, or disrespect the governing authorities.

Scripture also makes it clear that living as followers of Christ will not always be easy in a world of sin (Matthew 10:22; 1 Peter 3:17; 1 John 3:13). Disobeying the governing authorities to ease one's personal suffering or eliminate inconvenience does not fit the "obey God rather than human beings" exception; any exception, according to the Bible, is a narrow one. Should the government prevent the church from preaching and teaching (i.e., prohibit us from carrying out the Great Commission), that would be grounds to obey God rather than men. Going beyond that, once we consider the words and examples of Christ and the apostles, raises concerns about the purity of one's motives.

Governing and Alternatives

Just as the Apostle Paul appealed to a higher authority when he faced injustice (Acts 25:11), so also Christians should leverage opportunities within a governing system to seek justice, freedom, and goodness for all people. The paths to those things may vary as widely as Christians vary. Where a form of government which permits a great deal of citizen participation exists, believers are invited to get involved so that we might find ways to show love to God (protect religious freedom) and show love to others (protect lives, care for the needy, etc.).

Sadly, citizens often engage in the political processes for selfish reasons. They might argue to reduce their own tax burden, create protective zoning in their neighborhoods, or improve schooling only for their children. Christians, however, see participation in governance as a

greater opportunity to place the needs of others ahead of their own and thus show God's love to their neighbors.

SECTION 6: APPLICATION TO THE MATTER OF VACCINATIONS

Government Endorsement

Governments often favor particular paths to ensure the health of its citizens. Those paths include establishing dietary standards, fluoridating water, and mandating food and restaurant inspections, school immunizations, quarantine measures, masking requirements, social isolation guidelines, etc. The fact that the government has instituted these measures does not necessarily make them correct or beneficial. It is, however, as God's governing authority that it has established these measures. As such, it should receive our obedience, honor, and respect.

While we might disagree with our government, whatever its form, we leverage the opportunities in our civil system to express our disagreements and to work for change for the good of others. To create change the Christian will not violate a clear conscience or speak and act in a dishonorable or disrespectful way. We seek to correct the error of others as we would want to be corrected for our own errors—with great patience, careful instruction, gentleness, and respect (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Peter 3:15-16).

Objection to Vaccination: Vaccines Are Dangerous

Any attempt on our part to serve God is tainted with sin and its consequences. We are imperfect people with imperfect resources, trying to do perfect things to express gratitude to our perfect God. It is because of imperfection that there are risks in all areas of life.

We walk or drive to church to worship God. We volunteer time to help others. We offer up portions of our resources to serve God and others. All these activities carry with them degrees of danger. As stewards of God's blessings, we seek to do his will while mitigating the risks that we can. We will never be 100% successful in eliminating all of them.

Various vaccines present various levels of risk. Even the most robust vaccine, with the highest percentage of success, may still bring unintended consequences if successful and added risks if not successful.

Still, going without a vaccine against some disease can be dangerous for the person who chooses not to be vaccinated, and especially dangerous for others that could be exposed to a disease that is spread by an unvaccinated person. To mitigate risk Christians will need to weigh these and other considerations.

Loving God and loving others are the first criteria by which we measure the degree of risk we are willing to accept. If we choose to be vaccinated and suffer danger because of it, we have the added assurance that God will work it for our good (Romans 8:28). Even in the most extreme circumstance where death results from a vaccine, the Christian again has an eternal perspective, understanding that death has lost its sting.

If we choose not to be vaccinated, we will make that decision because it demonstrates love for God and love for others. In making decisions, Christians will want to be sure that those decisions do not in any way inhibit our prime directive to proclaim the Gospel.

Objection to Vaccination: Vaccines Were Unethically Developed

Some oppose the use of some or all vaccines because of the way those treatments were developed. The use of fetal cells in their development is, indeed, a troublesome consideration.

The production or testing of many vaccines in use today involved cultures derived from cells extracted from children who were aborted decades ago. The cells have been replicated many times over since they were first extracted.

Fetal cells were used to develop a pure culture. When animal cells were used, impurities could get through, as was the case with the “Monkey Virus¹” experience in the polio vaccine. A purer culture therefore speeds the development and testing of a vaccine.

For years, many in the pro-life community have objected to using cells extracted from aborted children in any form of research. They maintain that using anything developed from fetal cells lends support to the despicable act of abortion.² It is a legitimate concern, but it asserts a connection that Scripture does not support.

Since the fall into sin, evil permeates life. We cannot avoid it. Experimentation using fetal cells goes back to the 1930s, and the information gathered from it fills modern medical research, going far beyond the science of vaccine development. Many fields of science have used the fetal cell cultures to discover and develop new treatments for a wide assortment of conditions. If we reason that we must reject vaccines because of their connection to fetal cells, we must also reject a field of medical research much wider than just vaccines.

The logic that is used to reject vaccines developed or tested using fetal cells does not hold up in other areas of living. For example, the car we drive was likely manufactured by employees whose employer-provided insurance paid for abortions. We do not support abortion when we buy a car, even though some of the money we paid for the car went towards paying for abortion.

¹ Also called SV40. The acronym stands for simian virus and it is also called the Monkey Virus. When the polio vaccine was being developed it did not involve human cell cultures. Instead, the cells used to create the culture for vaccine development were extracted from monkey kidney cells. Later, between 10 and 30% of polio vaccine recipients from 1955-1963 were contaminated with the Monkey Virus. At the time it appeared to cause no harm, though some more recent research has suggested it causes cancer in some animal studies and may be harmful to humans. The discovery of the Monkey Virus was the catalyst for earnest research into the purest cell culture for vaccine development, which turned out to be cells extracted from the lungs of an aborted child.

² The cells are referred to as WI-38, the name of the fetal lung cells for [from] an aborted child, first used to create the purest cell culture for research and vaccine development. WI stands for the Wistar Institute in Philadelphia. This culture, and other fetal cell cultures before it, were shared with researchers around the world engaged in a variety of studies going back to the 1930s. In the 1960s, in the aftermath of the Monkey Virus discovery in the polio vaccine, this culture was used in the development of the rubella vaccine and other vaccines. Today other similar cell cultures exist.

The same logic suggests that Christ's directive to "give to Caesar what is Caesar's" was an endorsement of how that tax money was used. This would be what some call "conceptual overreach."

We must remember that in a world of sin, we cannot engage in any commerce or any activity without the tarnish of sin. Even our sincerest of tears of repentance are tainted with sin.

Where, then, do we draw the line? This line is determined by complicity. For instance, a patient who receives the heart of a murder victim is not guilty of the murder, though he benefits from it, unless he was complicit in the crime.

The fetal cells used in vaccine development and other research were derived from aborted children whose bodies were destined to go out with hospital waste. The mother was not informed that cells would be extracted, she did not provide permission, and she was not paid for them. It is reasonable to assert, therefore, that the recipient of a vaccine is not morally complicit in the commission of abortion.

If we were to discover that using a vaccine, or any product, caused abortions, then we would rightly reject it. We would refuse to be complicit in something so clearly sinful and abhorrent. That is not the case with the vaccines that are being objected to because their production involved fetal cells.

Objection to Vaccination: This Is Adiaphoron and Therefore Only a Matter of Conscience

One person considers one day more sacred than another; another considers every day alike. Each of them should be fully convinced in their own mind. Whoever regards one day as special does so to the Lord. Whoever eats meat does so to the Lord, for they give thanks to God; and whoever abstains does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. For none of us lives for ourselves alone, and none of us dies for ourselves alone. If we live, we live for the Lord; and if we die, we die for the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we will all stand before God's judgment seat. It is written: "'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.'" So then, each of us will give an account of ourselves to God. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. (Romans 14:5–13)

There is no mandate to consider one day more sacred than the rest or to consider all days as equally sacred. There is no mandate to eat meat, and there is no mandate to never eat meat. There is no mandate in Scripture to be vaccinated, and there is no mandate to not be vaccinated.

We might be inclined to leave the matter there and dismiss it all with the Greek word, *adiaphoron*, which is loosely interpreted to mean that a thing is neither commanded nor forbidden, so it is a matter of personal choice. A closer reading of Paul's words, however, reveals that there is a qualifier to the kinds of decisions we make in this regard. The decisions and activities are defined as fruits of one's faith and done to the Lord.

When Paul talks about sacred days, he has in mind wrestling with *adiaphora* within the Christian community and doing or not doing something "to the Lord." He does the same regarding meat eating. These are truly morally neutral acts whether done or not done "to the Lord."

The writer to the Hebrews puts it another way:

And without faith it is impossible to please God. (Hebrews 11:6a)

Vaccination primarily for self-serving reasons is sin. Refusing vaccinations primarily for self-serving reasons is sin. Even vaccination primarily for the benefit of others or refusing vaccination primarily for the benefit of others can be sin. Scripture is clear that we begin our decision-making with hearts of faith. We act out of love for God, and then out of love for others. To confuse the order — God first, others next, and ourselves last — is sin.

When Paul — and Christian love — call us to respect the consciences of others, it is within the context of them having "weak" consciences: consciences that have been erroneously conditioned to see as sin that which is not sin. We are not to accommodate the weak conscience without first acknowledging that it is a conscience in error and needing correction. We then chart a course to correct that error with loving patience and careful instruction.

No argument can be made that our church body should mandate a conscientious objection to vaccinations. No argument can be made that our church body should tell its members that they are obligated to be vaccinated either. We acknowledge freedom of choice in the matter, so long as a believer's choices reflect a motive of God first, others second, and ourselves last. Because we cannot read hearts, we trust such decisions to rest between the Christian and his Maker.

There is, however, a final and important consideration regarding the suggestion that to vaccinate or not vaccinate is an *adiaphoron*. Both doctrinally and historically, designating something *adiaphoron* was never to declare the discussion over, as if to say, "God doesn't explicitly command or prohibit it, so move on — there's nothing to talk about." Instead, to identify a matter as *adiaphoron* is to recognize that precisely since the Lord has not specifically addressed it, it is now up to Christians to thoroughly study the issue, weighing Scripture and all relevant concerns and data to make the best, wisest, and most loving decision possible. Naturally, since such decisions affect both our brothers and sisters in faith and our unbelieving neighbors, we will be exceptionally careful to not make them as though we were completely independent actors, free to choose without regard for how our choices affect other people.

SUMMARY STATEMENT

God's Word teaches that it is his will for us to spread the Gospel and to practice love as he has loved us. In matters of health and well-being we are stewards of God's blessing of life. Our concern is first for the health of our neighbors ahead of ourselves: what we choose to do and not to do should be of primary benefit to others. We choose next to do what we can to preserve and protect our own lives. We do both within the context of honoring and loving God above all things.

Therefore, as redeemed children of God, we reject disrespect and dishonoring of government. We reject being vaccinated for self-serving reasons, and we reject refusing vaccination for self-serving reasons.

We see in Christ's life and sacrifice a model of honor for God and love for others. As Christians wrestle with questions about vaccinations, as with all things, they do so as imitators of Christ. Our preeminent concern, then, is that our choices honor his name, and our actions provide opportunities to demonstrate love and to share the Gospel of salvation through Christ. Our prayer is that believers do exactly that as they wrestle with these real and challenging issues surrounding vaccinations.

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