

ON VACCINES AND MASK MANDATES: A Message to the Redeemer Community

In lieu of a weekly podcast for this week, I wish to send this message.

One month ago, we at Redeemer began to relax our Covid-19 protocols, stating that 1) that vaccinated members, clergy and laity, should feel free to worship outdoors or indoors without masks; 2) that any member may choose to wear a mask at any time; and 3) that members not fully vaccinated should note the Centers for Disease Control guidance that “if you are not fully vaccinated and aged 2 or older, you should wear a mask in indoor public places” ([June 29](#)).

Over the past weeks, there has been increasing public concern about coronavirus transmission, even among the vaccinated, leading the CDC to advise that “given the spread of the highly transmissible Delta variant, local decision-makers should assess the following factors to inform the need for layered prevention strategies across a range of settings” ([July 30](#)). As of [August 2](#), Allegheny County’s level of Covid-19 was raised from “moderate” to “substantial,” and the Pennsylvania Health Department “recommends” – not mandates – that everyone, vaccinated or not, wear a mask indoors.

My role as a pastor is to bring some biblical and spiritual perspective to this question. So let’s begin with St. Paul’s advice on obedience to the authorities. He says: “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” (Rom 13:1). While we know there are occasions where Christians must “obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29) and while our democracy makes room for freedom of speech and association and for civil disobedience, nevertheless, as I see it, Paul’s general rule stands. So, if the proper governmental authority (in this case the Governor of the Commonwealth or the national or diocesan heads of the Anglican Church in North America) were to *mandate* wearing masks in certain settings, I would comply and urge members to comply as well. Otherwise, a church and its members will need to exercise good judgment in its policies and practices. At this point, I do not think an across-the-board requirement to wear masks indoors or outdoors is warranted.

The second biblical case has to do with Christian conscience. In Corinth, Paul advised his church concerning the matter of eating meat from the market that may have been offered to pagan gods. He states that personally he feels free to eat such meat because “we know that an idol has no real existence and that there is no God but one” (1 Cor 8:4). At the same time, he recognizes that some members don’t share his confidence, and so he advises: “take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the brother for whom Christ died” (cf. 1 Cor

8:8-13). Paul goes on to say, perhaps a bit rhetorically: “if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.”

Taking this biblical example to heart, let me make this statement as your pastor:

First, I would urge all members of Redeemer to get vaccinated, unless you have a specific medical reason not to do so. My own judgment is that the current vaccines have proven safe and highly effective in reducing hospitalizations and deaths and, somewhat less so, in preventing transmission of the virus. If as a matter of prudence or of conscience you choose to remain unvaccinated, I would urge you to be sensitive to the increased risk that you may be infected and transmit it to others.

Secondly, while I myself am vaccinated and feel confident to minister unmasked, I am prepared to return to wearing a mask, outdoors or indoors, during Holy Communion *if any member of the church would feel more secure in my doing so*. Please let me know in this case. Otherwise, I shall continue to follow our revised practice.

We as a church and as a nation have been through a difficult time over the past 18 months. The situation has improved dramatically with the arrival of vaccines, but the crisis is not yet over. Let’s try to finish well, obedient to God and His Word.

Stephen Noll
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