

# UNMASKING

— A FUTURE LOCKDOWN —

**21 TRUTHS FOR CHURCH LEADERS  
TO REMEMBER**



ARMEN THOMASSIAN

To the surprise of no one, Merriam-Webster has just announced that their Word of the Year for 2020 is pandemic.<sup>1</sup> We didn't even manage to get through January before the word pandemic began to be upon the minds and tongues of people across the world. This new strain of coronavirus, commonly referred to as COVID-19, began to be talked about as images aired showing Chinese authorities fumigating the streets of Wuhan. Personally, I mostly ignored the news until it became evident that something odd was going on. By March, everything was put on hold. Huge events were dropping like dominoes, international travel was restricted, the stock market was going crazy, and very soon all but "essential workers" would be ordered to work from home. On March 15, anticipating possible fear in hearts, I preached from Isaiah 8:12-14, "God's Word to the Fearful." The next day, the Imperial College of London published research with the following warning:

"In total, in an unmitigated epidemic, we would predict approximately 510,000 deaths in GB and 2.2 million in the US, not accounting for the potential negative effects of health systems being overwhelmed on mortality."<sup>2</sup>

That publication dictated how nations should respond to the virus, and two days later I called a special meeting with my elders to decide what to do in light of the correspondence received from our denomination's Executive Committee recommending that our churches suspend their services until at least April 4.

So, suspend our public worship services we did. I understood why, but felt extremely conflicted. Not that I was in opposition to my elders, only that I just did not feel comfortable as a church officer deciding to suspend all public worship. The fact that nearly every other church was doing the same brought me no comfort, but admittedly—and lamentably—the intention to close for just two weeks helped with the decision. But two weeks turned into seven before we recommenced gathering. It was a heart-searching time, and despite how others might have felt, to me it was as if God had taken extra weeks from us because we so willingly and easily surrendered two weeks, as if abandoning corporate worship for two weeks was no big deal. Having said that, it was a time that was also extremely instructive in teaching me the essential nature of the gathering of the saints in one geographical location, and cementing in my mind that no video conferencing or webcasting could function as a substitute. I turned to the Word of God for strength and guidance, and came to the conviction that if there's an outbreak of disease that threatens to close the church again, I will do everything I can to mitigate risk without actually closing the doors of the church.

I say all this as a confession. I was struggling, and I believe many other pastors, elders, and Christians were, and are, also struggling. But the vast majority of what has been written and said has supported the very view that unsettles us. Why are we unsettled? Are we simply contentious? In writing this, therefore, I am seeking to meet a need that explains that the heart

---

<sup>1</sup> Merriam Webster, *Word of the Year 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/word-of-the-year/pandemic>.

<sup>2</sup> Imperial College London, *Report 9: Impact of non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) to reduce COVID-19 mortality and healthcare demand*. Retrieved from <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/media/imperial-college/medicine/sph/ide/gida-fellowships/Imperial-College-COVID19-NPI-modelling-16-03-2020.pdf>

which has been unsettled by various events of 2020, is not necessarily a quarrelsome one. There are reasons why you may feel unsettled, even if you've struggled to build a case for it. So with the deepest of respect to Christians of a different persuasion, I put forth these considerations. It is very likely that many regions, states, and nations will either continue in a state of lockdown, or return to a state lockdown at some point in the future. My hope is that this will help guide those into whose hands it is found. Solomon said that "A prudent man foreseeth the evil" (Prov. 27:12). It is my hope that this will help you prepare for whatever might be in the future. The last thing we must do is do whatever everyone else is doing just because everyone else is doing it. We are commanded by God, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil" (Ex. 23:2).

Even if it's determined that my zeal is misplaced, be assured that my desire is the Lord's honor. Our Saviour showed great concern in matters which relate to the public worship of God, and seeing His passion His disciples did not criticize His activity, but called to remembrance the text, "The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up" (Ps. 69:9; John 2:17). My distress may be misunderstood by some, but I contend that the worship of God is essential, and of all the worship we render, arguably the most important is corporate worship, "The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob" (Ps. 87:2). This makes sense when we recognize that Christ not only views us as individuals, but as a collective body, His bride. Each faithful congregation is a microcosm of all for whom Christ died, and when the saints gather to give God the glory due to His name, it exalts His name like few other things we do. It also foreshadows an eschatological significance, for there is coming a day when everyone for whom Christ died will assemble in one place. As sinners, redeemed by the blood of Christ, we say with the psalmist, "What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefits toward me? I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord now *in the presence of all his people*" (Ps. 116:12-14).

As the subtitle makes plain, I have written this to church leaders. If you're not a church elder and you're wondering if you should leave your church because of its response to the current circumstances, I am not attempting to answer that for you. I would simply encourage you to bear as long as you can with the infirmities of your elders. Church elders are those—under Christ—appointed by God to issue the call to worship to the saints. My hope is that these considerations may help ministers and elders think through their decision, even if they come to a different conclusion.

There were two primary issues I found myself wrestling with: worship and authority, with some additional miscellaneous matters. Thus, there are three sections: Lawful Worship, Limited Authority, and Legitimate Considerations. In order to make each consideration as evergreen as possible, I have attempted to approach this with as little reference to the immediate circumstances as I could, but inevitably some matters are very specific to what this year's pandemic has brought upon the Church. These months have raised concerns which I will attempt to address, primarily:

1. I have a concern that we are undermining the physical gathering of the saints dictated to us by God's providence in where we live.
2. I have a concern that we are misunderstanding the authority Christ has given to the civil magistrate and the authority Christ has placed into the hands of church elders.

## Unmasking A Future Lockdown

3. I have a concern that we are not providing a necessary voice to our civil magistrates on other matters that relate to the economy and the general welfare of society.

I intreat the Lord to make these considerations a blessing to His bride, and to equip her during a challenging season. "Bless ye God in the congregations" (Ps. 68:26).

## Lawful Worship

### **1. We must remember that it is a mark of the true Israel that they gather together to identify with and worship God with Jesus Christ as their Mediator.**

When I speak of the worship of the Church, I mean every aspect of worship required by a properly functioning church. This includes the reading of the Scriptures (1 Tim. 4:13), preaching from the Scriptures (2 Tim. 4:2), prayer (1 Tim. 2:8), and congregational praise (Col. 3:16). There ought also to be, at appropriate times, the associated ordinances of Baptism and the Lord's Supper. Saints and assemblies that ignore any of these or act like they are unimportant, are probably not Christians, and definitely not churches.

Our persecuted brethren around the world understand this, since they refuse to accept any alternative to gathering together in one place. Virtual assemblies will not do. Why? Because no honest reading of Scripture results in a Church that keeps people isolated from one another in their own homes. They participate in the preaching, prayer, and singing God's praise along with the congregation as was done in Old Testament times (Ps. 26:12, 35:18, 40:10, 68:26, 111:1, 149:1), in the first century (Acts 2:46; 5:42, 12:12, 20:20; Philemon 1:2), and in glory (Rev. 5:11-12). It's a distortion of biblical orthopraxy and a falsehood to substitute saints gathering with other saints in a shared geographical location with something other than what the Church has always done. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians about worship and said on four occasions, "when ye come together" (1 Cor. 11:17, 11:18, 11:20, 11:33), we cannot affix 'online' to his words and continue as if we're honoring the Lord as He intended.

The importance of gathering in the same geographical location has never had to be argued except when dealing with spiritual nomads that want to stay separate from the gathered church. But technology is presenting a new and faulty conception of what it means for the Church to gather. It seems that we no longer see the significance of the Church's visible expression of unity and devotion to Christ as they assemble publicly before a perishing world. And never mind the world. What about the angels? Have we given much thought to the angels that attend when the saints gather (1 Cor. 11:10)? John Gill says they, "attend the assemblies of the saints, and observe the air and behaviour of the worshippers."<sup>3</sup> Do we imagine them watching over our virtual services with the same interest? They are not omnipresent like God, so to which home do they go? Indeed, I wonder if Christ sends them to attend such worship at all. Church elders must clearly understand what it means for people to gather publicly before the world and identify with and worship God together. If we will accept webcasting and video conferencing as substitutes rather than supplements, then why not permanently institute virtual church? Are we ready to dismiss the importance of corporate interactions, joined Amens, congregational singing, and the significance of the non-verbal communication that is shared between preacher and congregants, as well as between congregants themselves?

---

<sup>3</sup> Gill, *Exposition of the Whole Bible*. Retrieved from <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/geb/1-corinthians-11.html>

## **2. We must remember that Jesus Christ calls His people to assemble together in a holy convocation with special importance on the Lord's Day.**

While our days, months, and years are dictated largely by the natural order of our world by God and our best assessment of how to order them, the week is a structured period of time dictated by God, and within it is included one day in which men are called to cease from their labors and celebrate God's work of redemption.

Leviticus 23:3 commands, "Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest, an holy convocation" (Leviticus 23:3). A convocation is an official calling together of people into one place. A holy convocation is a sacred calling together of God's people for the worship of God. According to this text, God expected the spiritual leaders of the community to call His people together at least one day of the week to worship Him. We find this practice continuing in the New Testament on the first day of the week (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:2).

This has continued through the ages. Of course, the Church is not restricted to meeting on the Lord's Day, and in times of awakening, such as just after Pentecost, the Lord's people appear to have gathered much more regularly. But at the very least, God's people have always met one day in seven. Indeed, there is not just a historical precedent of gathering on the Lord's Day, but a scriptural example. According to Hebrews 2:12, it is the desire of the risen Christ to acknowledge His gathered people as brethren. In this verse, the apostle quotes from Psalm 22:22. This is a well-known Messianic psalm and is almost universally acknowledged as such. What is particularly interesting is that the verse appears to be a pivotal point from which the psalm turns from the *sufferings* of the Messiah to the expressions of a *risen* Messiah. It was after the resurrection when Christ first acknowledged his disciples as brethren (John 20:17) and gathered with them (John 20:19). Many commentators note this transition, but Thomas Coke helpfully remarks,

"Our Saviour here passes from the mournful view of his death to the comfortable prospect of his resurrection. He intimates, that after God should have delivered him from the power of death by a glorious resurrection, he would more fully publish his gospel, by which the adorable perfections of God, and especially his wisdom and mercy, would be more eminently displayed among his apostles, and among the rest of his disciples and followers, whom He is not ashamed to call his brethren."<sup>4</sup>

The writer to the Hebrews quotes the psalm which prophesied of an event that was fulfilled on the first resurrection day, the Lord's Day, when Christ met with His fearful disciples and encouraged and comforted them. But it wasn't just the first Lord's Day. The next record of the risen Christ appearing is also in John 20 and it occurs on the following Lord's Day. A careful reading will show that the one disciple that did not gather on the first Lord's Day, Thomas, was permitted by Christ to continue in his doubt and misery for an entire week *until* he assembled with the saints the following Lord's Day. At that point he met with the risen Christ and heard the medicinal Word that our Saviour had for his soul, healing his unbelief. This is a pattern that

---

<sup>4</sup> Coke, *Commentary on the Holy Bible*. Retrieved from <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/tcc/psalms-22.html>

Christ has continued to do for two millennia. He meets with saints that gather in the same geographical location on a particular day of the week so that He may comfort them. Do you believe that the impact would have been the same for the disciples and for Thomas if our Lord had met with them on a Zoom call? Is there not something experienced when we physically meet that a virtual meeting cannot replace? Just as we want family to visit us in person (and not just a lifetime of FaceTime calls), so our Lord Jesus calls us to gather once a week. As I have said before, if you think marriage can work over Zoom, then you don't understand marriage. And if you think Church can be replaced by Zoom, then you don't understand the Church.

I have read some argue to the point that God's Word does not specifically *command* us to gather on the Lord's Day. I imagine the same people would have told Daniel that the Bible does not specifically command us to pray three times a day, so why provoke the authorities? The truth is, reading the longing of saints to be in the public worship of God (Ps. 23:6; 26:8; 27:4; 84:1-12), there is good reason to believe that Christ reserves peculiar blessings for saints that assemble together weekly. Church leaders withhold such blessings when they do not issue a call to worship on one day a week.

**3. We must remember that Jesus Christ calls His people to assemble on the Lord's Day so He can do what He never did during His earthly ministry, namely, sing with the Gentiles (Rom. 15:8-12).**

Romans 15:8-12 reflects the fact that while Jesus Christ primarily ministered to the Jews; it was always God's intention to gather unto Him the Gentiles. Robert Haldane says,

“In the passage referred to, Christ is represented as confessing or acknowledging God among the Gentiles, and singing to the praise of His name. Christ did not appear personally among the Gentile nations. This prediction, then, must be fulfilled of Him in His people, as one with Him. Than this nothing more clearly proves the unity of Christ and His people.”<sup>5</sup>

Although Haldane rightly points out that Christ did not appear personally among Gentile nations, yet as he suggests, Christ *does* come into the Gentile nations through the ministry of His people. Ephesians 2:17 presents the case that Christ preached in Ephesus, yet we know this must be seen as through the ministry of the Lord's people. The point is, Paul argues in Romans 15 for the importance of the Gentiles singing (v. 9), and doing so with the Jews (vv. 10-11) in a corporate fashion, and when they do so, Christ is with the Gentiles as they confess and sing. This *must* be done when gathered in the same location and *cannot* be done via webcasting or video conferencing. Thus, this is a particular blessing of corporate assembly, as Jesus Christ stands in the midst of biblical and penitent churches (Rev. 1:13). Every time church leaders do not issue the call for God's people to worship together in the same location without good reason, Christ's will in this matter is denied. As we will see later, 'because the civil magistrate says so' is not a valid reason.

---

<sup>5</sup> Haldane, *Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans*. Retrieved from <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/hal/romans-15.html>

**4. We must remember that Jesus Christ calls His people to assemble on the Lord's Day to preserve souls from apostasy (Heb. 10:23-25).**

John Owen is worth reading on this passage. Among many helpful comments he says,

“That those assemblies, those comings together in one place, were *the only way* whereby the church, as a church, made its profession of subjection unto the authority of Christ in the performance of all those duties of sacred worship whereby God was to be glorified under the gospel.”<sup>6</sup>

Caring for souls is difficult at the best of times. Without seeing saints in the flesh as they gather in the same location, it becomes even more difficult. Furthermore, Owen's argument that the only way the Church prevents apostasy and shows itself as the Church in its subjection to Christ, is by physically gathering together in the same geographical location. Are souls in danger of drifting from Christ? Always. What is the Lord's answer? The assembly of the saints and their interactions with one another in their corporate worship and conversations. Christians must do this, not just for their own sakes, but more for the sake of others that need their presence and encouragement. This is the Lord's will.

Moreover, we should be concerned about the inertia that builds as churches refuse to meet. Bad habits are easily formed. What if it's discovered that with every month of closure a certain percentage of the congregation will never return to worship? In a recent interview with NPR, David Kinnaman, president of the prominent Christian research organization Barna Group, revealed that as many as one in five churches (possibly more) could permanently close within the next 18 months as a direct result of the shutdowns associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

**5. We must remember that Jesus Christ calls His people together to observe the Lord's Table (1 Cor. 11:23-26) and fulfill various "one another" passages of Scripture (Gal. 5:13, 6:2; 1 Thes. 5:11; 1 Pet. 4:9-10) until He returns.**

We do not deny that there may be seasons in which the Church is unable to function as it normally would. But we should be careful not to overstate the blessings that come from alternative methods. It has been a grief to hear language of blessing in relation to webcasting that equates it with the blessings of the collective gathering of the saints. Whatever good that may come from alternative means, it is often despite them, not because of them. There is no doubt that during such a season in which the Church does not meet physically in person, God is still working by His Spirit. But that does not take away from the fact that there are innumerable acts of love and ministry that would be performed and are prevented by not physically meeting with one another. Saints are robbed of eternal reward when they are commanded to shut themselves inside, avoid other people, and not gather for public worship.

---

<sup>6</sup> Owen, *Exposition of Hebrews*. Retrieved from <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/joc/hebrews-10.html>

<sup>7</sup> NPR, *1 In 5 Churches May Not Survive The Pandemic. One Pastor Says His Congregation Isn't Giving Up*. <https://www.wbur.org/hereandnow/2020/08/24/church-giving-covid-19-pandemic>

Furthermore, we have observed over recent months, a mockery of the Lord's Table as it is served by individuals to themselves at home. Other churches seem happy to suspend it indefinitely, as if that in itself will have no ramifications on the spiritual warmth of believers. We must be sure that such decisions are justified.

**6. We must remember that Jesus Christ permits God's people to gather together in *any* geographical location.**

The Church has always been creative during times of duress. When God's people possess the conviction that they must meet together, they always think of ways to do so when they are forbidden from doing it as they normally would. The Church may have to give up its comfortable surroundings and accompanying instruments. Due to disease, it may have to suspend greetings with handshakes, hugs, and kisses. But prayer, praises, and the preaching of the Word will continue, even if it's under the immediate canopy of the heavens.

However, as already noted, it is a stretch to extend this creativity to an online gathering, as if it can improve upon or substitute the assembly of saints in one geographical place. Even if one declares that they are reaching more people, it is guesswork. When the minister can scope his entire congregation at a glance, he can get a good idea if people are actually engaging in the service or not. This is impossible via webcasting, and not much better via video conferencing. Additionally, one of the early concerns I faced from those in my congregation related to how children interact (or should I say, fail to interact) with virtual services. While adults may engage online with a measure of discipline, it is much more difficult for children. Are we in danger of offending some little ones (Matt. 18:6), and the most vulnerable within the Church? Children are much more transparent than adults. If children that normally sit up and listen to the preaching of God's Word are struggling to engage with online sermons, there's a reason. We need to consider their souls and wellbeing. Webcasting is a wonderful tool for the housebound, but it is no substitute for saints assembling together in one location, whether it is outside or inside.

**7. We must remember that the command to worship the Lord in an assembled fashion is still issued during times of persecution or pestilence.**

As an individual, there are many instances that would keep someone from the public worship of God in the Old Testament era. Leprosy, having an issue of blood, touching a corpse, etc, would have rendered someone ceremonially unclean. Additionally, we acknowledge that we need not respond to the command to publicly worship God when providence calls us to give place to "works of necessity and mercy."<sup>8</sup> On this basis, we have Christians that work in good conscience on the Lord's Day, doing what must be done because not to do so would be unmerciful. But such Christians are in an either/or scenario. To them it is sacrifice *or* mercy. But what if they could sacrifice *and* show mercy, what should they do then? Jesus answered that question in Matt. 23:23. Jesus did not call the religious leaders to pit acts of mercy against the tithing of mint. He called upon them to do both. If it was a question of either or, mercy takes precedent. But the preference is to do both.

---

<sup>8</sup> *Westminster Shorter Catechism*, Question 60. Retrieved from <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-shorter-catechism/>

But none of the above scenarios address the spiritual leaders and the call to worship. The fact that people may be ceremonially unclean did not call off public worship for everyone. The fact that someone may be prevented due to responsibilities of necessity and mercy, does not call off public worship.

Even during persecution or pestilence, every effort must be made by church leaders to issue a call to worship, even if it must be conducted outside, spaced out, and for a restricted period of time. I believe that if we did not have access to technology, more churches would make the effort to meet outside or in larger venues.

Considering that

1. God commands that His people gather together to identify with Him
2. That He commands a holy convocation of His people one day a week
3. That when gathered saints meet to sing Christ sings with them
4. That God has appointed this gathering together as a primary means to preserve souls from spiritual apostasy
5. That without coming together it is impossible to observe the Lord's Table and we restrict the performance of the one another passages of Scripture.
6. That we are at liberty to meet in any location, including outside in a safe manner
7. That the call to worship does not go away in times of persecution and pestilence

It is incumbent upon church leaders to consider seriously that when an ungodly society willingly diverges en mass from these Scriptural matters, they may be guilty of the condemnation of Exodus 23:2, "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil."

The question church leaders must ask is not; do we cancel our meetings? The question is; is there a way to facilitate an assembly of God's people for those willing to gather in the same geographical location, while giving consideration to the circumstances? Too many church elders have not framed their consideration of church closures correctly, making it either/or rather than both/and. It is very likely that most could continue to call saints to gather together every Lord's Day while still permitting the vulnerable (and those that live with the vulnerable) to take precautions and act according to conscience.

Of course, what we have considered so far does not address the difficulty faced when the civil magistrate makes no allowance for any gathering whatsoever. This brings us to the matter of authority, and whether the civil magistrate can take the decision to assemble out of the hands of ministers and elders.

## Limited Authority

**1. We must remember that all authority is delegated by God (Prov. 8:15-16; Ps. 75:6-7; Dan. 2:20-21, v37; Dan. 4:16-17; v31-32), and Jesus Christ is sovereign over all authorities in heaven and earth (Matt. 28:18).**

God alone has unlimited and complete authority. The authority given to other realms is limited to their sphere, whether it's the head of a household, the oversight of a church, or the civil authorities. I have heard it said that God has appointed the family for the ministry of education, the Church for the ministry of grace, and the civil government for the ministry of justice. Whether you view them so specifically or not, these are spheres of authority. This is not to say that sphere's of authority never overlap. For example, the civil magistrate may have something to say about a divorce proceeding, as may a local church if those involved are members. But one does not utterly subjugate the other. We don't accept a husband's authority over his children when he uses that authority to tempt them to neglect what God has commanded. We don't accept a church's authority over God's people when it is used to tempt them to neglect what God has commanded. And we should not accept the civil government's authority when it is used to tempt them to neglect what God has commanded. Civil governments throughout history have a tendency to view themselves as sovereign, but they are not. God has ultimate authority over men, and all other authority is delegated and meant to be conducted within the limits of the authority given in faithfulness to God. It is important to remember this before proceeding any further.

**2. We must remember that Jesus Christ has given lawfully ordained elders and ministers authority over the Church, to open her doors and close her doors to souls (Matt. 16:15-19).**

Elders are given the responsibility under God of calling men to worship the living God. In the words of the Larger Catechism, "What is commanded to others, we are bound, according to our places and callings, to be helpful to them."<sup>9</sup> Are others commanded to worship? It is the duty of the elders, then, to call for congregational worship and by the preaching of the gospel, open the kingdom to the penitent and close it to the unrepentant. The civil government *does not* possess authority in this realm and has *no* jurisdiction to say to a lawfully ordained body of elders that they cannot call sinners to worship God and hear the gospel.

Unsurprisingly, Christians have differed on the extent to which the state can get involved in Church matters. Some have gone as far as to embrace Erastianism, which removes from the Church the right to excommunicate, essentially giving the state superior power in ecclesiastical matters. Roman Catholicism goes the other way, perceiving its powers to exceed that of the state, feeling at liberty to threaten civil authorities.<sup>10</sup> Presbyterians, however, respect the ordinance of the civil magistrate, while maintaining a strict boundary around the Church. One

---

<sup>9</sup> *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 99. Retrieved from <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-larger-catechism/>

<sup>10</sup> *Fourth Council of the Lateran*, Canon 3. Retrieved from <https://www.papalencyclicals.net/councils/ecum12-2.htm#3>

such Presbyterian, James Bannerman, makes the extent and limitations of Church and state powers very clear. He said,

“There is one fundamental condition, then, essential to an alliance between the Church and state, and on which both parties in the alliance have equally a right to insist: the condition, namely, that the Church and the state, as distinct societies, shall be recognised as mutually independent in their existence and entire offices and functions... **The exclusion of the civil magistrate from the whole province that can possibly belong to the Church is absolute and complete;** for all that province is included within the twofold description of power implied in the two expressions, “the administration of the Word and Sacraments,” and “the power of the keys of the kingdom of heaven.” Within this entire territory the civil magistrate cannot enter, and the Church claims jurisdiction over none other.”<sup>11</sup>

You may note this clear distinction under Jehoshaphat’s reign, “And, behold, Amariah the chief priest is over you in all matters of the Lord; and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the ruler of the house of Judah, for all the king’s matters.” (2 Chron. 19:11). The matters of the Lord are given to church office bearers, and the matters of the king are in the hands of the civil magistrate. During times of warfare, pestilence, or animosity towards the Church, civil authorities may order the closure of church buildings or confiscate the property, but they cannot stop the weekly corporate worship of God. It is up to church leaders, according to their understanding of the Scriptures, to determine *how* the church worships, *when* the church worships, and *who* is a member of the visible Church. They may take the advice of the civil authorities into consideration, but they are not obligated to obey if they determine it is opposed to the mind of God. This distinction must be maintained. We should remember that the state did not imprison John Bunyan because he preached Christ, but because he preached without a license. In doing this, the state assumed more authority than God gives it.

Those church leaders that make appeals to the authorities not to issue orders that close their church, yet submit to those same orders and refuse to assemble because the magistrate says so (not because they believe their assemblies are unsafe), are completely misunderstanding the distinction outlined by the Word of God. Indeed, some have attempted to liken laws forbidding the Church from assembling for a season as akin to a parent that may withhold food from a child for a season. The parent, they say, ought not to stop the child from eating, but can dictate *when* the child eats. Aside from this being an act of discipline—which the state cannot exercise over the Church—we must object to such reasoning on the grounds that the state simply has no jurisdiction over *when* the Church is to meet. That’s for church elders to decide as they determine God’s mind as it is revealed in the Word.

Let me say it again. Church leaders that express their disappointment at the civil government when they seek to restrict the gathering of saints—but submit to the order—are surrendering their divinely appointed authority. Imagine for a moment that someone lives in a place that forbids the corporal punishment of children, and a Christian father is employed in a job that takes him away from his family for a couple of weeks at a time. He tells his wife that during his

---

<sup>11</sup> Bannerman, *The Church of Christ* Vol. I, 111, 176.

absence she ought to discipline the children in his stead. What would he say if she responded that she agrees with the idea in principle, but she will not obey because the state forbids it? We might imagine him saying, 'I don't care what the state says.' Indeed, for the state has no right to forbid the reasonable and measured discipline of children. The same could be said when the state demands that you cannot tell your sons that they are boys, and your daughters that they are girls. You will disobey. The state has no jurisdiction in this area. So it is with the Church.

Does this mean a local church ought never to listen to the civil magistrate? No. Does this mean churches must meet at all times and in all circumstances, despite dangers and warnings? No. All this means is that there should be respect between the authority of the civil magistrate and the authority of the Church. As Bannerman noted, there is an independence in their offices and functions, and neither has power to run roughshod over the other. If local church oversight determines that the risk in meeting is not great enough to suspend the call to worship, they are free to issue that call despite the voice of the civil magistrate. Times of persecution may require strategies to circumvent risk, and in times of pestilence we may have to gather outdoors and distanced. But the civil magistrate does not issue, nor can it restrict, the call to worship. To stop public worship simply because the state says so, when you're in opposition to their reasons, is a surrender of duty. Though it may be unintentional, it is a form of disobedience and sin.

Any exception to this delineation of authority will (not may) result in abuse. The current circumstances are a perfect example of how this occurs. If we lived in a time when civil magistrates alone had access to data and expertise, then church leaders would have to be extremely cautious in contradicting their evaluations. As such, if church leaders were told any gathering of any kind will lead to mass deaths, they would be foolish to ignore it. But this is not our world. Any civil magistrate making a decision on public health, is doing so not because he or she is trained in matters of public health, but because they have been advised by experts. But we are living in such a time when relevant data is accessible to all and other trained professionals and experts can quickly publish their expertise as freely (though not as broadly) as those advising the civil magistrates. The number of high-ranking experts strongly opposed to current lockdown policies is not minor. To ignore this is *literally* to ignore the science.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Christ spares His people the tyranny of a civil magistrate more concerned about public opinion than plain facts, by investing all authority to issue the call to worship in men ordained in the fear of God to issue that call.

**3. We must remember that Jesus Christ has given civil authorities power to be a terror to workers of evil and given them a divine right to to execute wrath upon him that does evil (Rom. 13:1-4).**

Civil authorities must assign their energies to legitimate evildoers. When Christians choose to gather during times of persecution and are fined, arrested, or put to death for doing so, they are not suffering as evildoers, but as Christians (1 Pet. 4:14-16). Similarly, when Christians choose to gather during a time of pestilence, and take all reasonable precautions and suffer for it, they are not suffering as evildoers, but as Christians. When the magistrate seeks to punish those that suffer as Christians, that magistrate is guilty of tyranny and ought not to be obeyed. The notes

---

<sup>12</sup> See <https://gbdeclaration.org> as one example of a coalition of experts repudiating the lockdown measures.

of the Geneva Bible taught this as well. Speaking of the rebellion of the Hebrew midwives, it remarks, "Their disobedience in this was lawful."<sup>13</sup> At the same time, we must exercise the need to disobey with extreme care. John Calvin, commenting on 1 Peter 2:14, warns,

"It may, however, be objected here and said, that kings and magistrates often abuse their power, and exercise tyrannical cruelty rather than justice. Such were almost all the magistrates, when this Epistle was written. To this I answer, that tyrants and those like them, do not produce such effects by their abuse, but that the ordinance of God ever remains in force, as the institution of marriage is not subverted though the wife and the husband were to act in a way not becoming them. However, therefore, men may go astray, yet the end fixed by God cannot be changed."<sup>14</sup>

To that we could ask, what is to be tolerated by a tyrant in marriage before one might consider loyalty an act of disobedience to God? It is not easy to answer. There is a recognized difference between sinful commands and commanding sin. Most of us obey sinful commands by magistrates all the time. We pay property tax as if the state has some claim on our property. It's a sinful command, but we're not sinning when we exercise a material obedience (material obedience is mere compliance whilst formal obedience is a genuine, heartfelt embracing of the command) to that command because God does not explicitly call us to do something contrary. Furthermore, as much as it may be difficult for some to accept, the magistrate *may* command that our worship is not inside a building, or they *may* demand we wear masks in certain places. There is no way around this without breaking the fifth commandment. But what they cannot command is that Christians do not meet at all. Again, that is a) beyond their jurisdiction; and b) commanding sin if church elders make a reasonable assessment that Christians ought to meet.

**4. We must remember that since God gives civil authorities the same title as church authorities, i.e. ministers of God (Rom. 13:4; 1 Thes. 3:2), they ought to be held to a similar standard.**

Obeying unjust laws because they come from unjust men, does not make our submission to them acceptable to God. We would not expect God's people to listen to a teaching elder if he was explicitly contradicting the will of God. Why then should we expect citizens to submit to laws that contradict the will of God? If, then, ministers and elders are determined that they must continue to meet in some fashion each week, they ought to disobey the magistrate and leave the consequences to God (Dan. 3:17-18). On this matter, it is helpful to read Samuel Rutherford's *Lex Rex*. He argues,

"What violence, what injustice and excess of passion the king mixeth in with his acts of government, are merely accidental to a king as king; for, because men by their own innate goodness will not, yea, morally cannot do that which is lawful and just one to another, and do naturally, since the fall of man, violence one to another; therefore, if there had not been sin, there should not have been need of a king, more than there

---

<sup>13</sup> Geneva Bible, notes on Exodus 1:19.

<sup>14</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Bible*. Retrieved from <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/cal/1-peter-2.html>

should have been need of a tutor to defend the child whose father is not dead, or of a physician to cure sickness where there is health; for, remove sin, and there is neither death nor sickness; but because sin is entered into the world, God devised, as a remedy of violence and injustice, a living, rational, breathing law, called a king, a judge, a father. Now the aberrations, violence, and oppression of this thing which is the living, rational, breathing law, is no medium, no mean intended by God and nature to remove violence. How shall violence remove violence? Therefore an unjust king, as unjust, is not that genuine ordinance of God, appointed to remove injustice, but accidental to a king. So we may resist the injustice of the king, and not resist the king. 8. If, then, any cast off the nature of a king, and become habitually a tyrant, in so far he is not from God, nor any ordinance which God doth own. If the office of a tyrant (to speak so) be contrary to a king's offices, it is not from God, and so neither is the power from God."<sup>15</sup>

In other words, as the physician only exists because sin has brought sickness, so civil authorities only exist because of sin. Their responsibilities are the same, to suppress and heal the effects of sin. When they contradict their purpose, they oppose the will of God. Aside from the fact the civil government has no jurisdiction to control the activity of the Church, if their laws oppose the will of God they ought not just to be ignored, but rightfully disobeyed.

**5. We must remember that God's Word teaches that the civil government exists primarily to provide an environment of individual liberty.**

The government is neither permitted to serve its own ends, or to fulfill the responsibilities God gives to individuals and families. They punish evildoers, and protect the citizens from enemies within and without so they can be fruitful, multiply, and subdue the earth (Gen. 1:28) to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). It was biblical thinking that provided the liberties many nations in the West take for granted, and the Church—which was so influential in fighting for these liberties in the past—must not sin by its silence and inaction, dishonoring our spiritual forefathers who fought for our individual freedoms. We have been spared many ideologies that suppress the individual and favor the collective, like Communism. Johannes Vos said,

"Communism assumes that the individual person exists for the sake of the mass, of society; but this is contrary to God's Word, which teaches us that society and all social institutions exist for the sake of the individual, in order that the individual may attain the divine purpose of his life and thus glorify God...any system which regards the individual human being as unimportant and seeks to merge him in the mass for the supposed welfare of "society" is basically wrong and anti-Christian."<sup>16</sup>

This does not mean there is not a collective responsibility for the vulnerable in society. But, there must be great care in prioritizing social needs in such a way that destroys individual liberties, and the churches must be a leading voice in warning the people and the magistrate against the temptation to legislate in ways that are unbiblical. There are some that would like the

---

<sup>15</sup> Rutherford, *Lex, Rex*. Retrieved from <https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/rutherford/Lex,%20Rex%20-%20Samuel%20Rutherford.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> Vos, *Commentary on the Westminster Larger Catechism*, 378.

government to approach national troubles like Joseph in Egypt (Gen. 47). They see Joseph's strategy as a form of economic centralization, placing most of the means of production under the state. However, it's important to note that Joseph did not burden the present or future generations with debt (as modern nations are inclined with their Keynesian economic philosophies), nor did he take from the people by force (Communism). The people were free to barter with him for their own survival, and when they had given up their lands, they were taxed one fifth (a much smaller tax than the combined taxes on civilians in most nations today). Moreover, when we step back and look at the history of Israel, the policies enacted by God for His people never invited what Joseph did in Egypt. While the Egyptians were accustomed to kings and priests owning the land, when God ordered Israel's affairs, neither the kings nor the priests were to control the means of production. This made the people more free, but also more vulnerable to outside attacks from great kingdoms where the king controlled the means of production and built his armies. By this form of governing, the Israelites were encouraged not to put their trust in princes (Ps. 146:3), and times of famine were not times for them to look to an earthly king, but to trust God. Consider Elimelech, who panicked in a time of famine and left Bethlehem to go to Moab. He and his sons died despite the precautions taken. Contrast that with Boaz, who stayed in Bethlehem during the famine, trusted God and prospered (Ruth 1-2). The purpose of the civil government is to deal with evildoers and create an environment for individual liberty. It is not to be our saviour. This is statism, and the Church should be the first voice raised against it in order to encourage a free society.

**6. We must remember that matters of public health make no difference to the jurisdiction of the civil authorities in relation to the Church.**

Statements from the likes of Richard Baxter have been used extensively to give credence to churches suspending corporate worship. Baxter does say that during a pestilence we may "omit some assemblies for a time, that we may thereby have opportunity for more."<sup>17</sup> i.e. by the preservation of life, people will enjoy more opportunities to worship once the time of pestilence passes. But, although Baxter was not an Erastian, he wasn't a Presbyterian either.<sup>18</sup> I'd argue that his willingness to give the state power over the Church in a time of pestilence is inconsistent, open to abuse—and for those that care—not Presbyterian. As noted earlier, Bannerman argues that civil authorities simply cannot enter into that which is the jurisdiction of churches. If the officers of the Church sought to force people to commit a crime that is against the law of God, then yes, at that point the civil magistrate should intervene. But seldom does that occur, and if it did, it's difficult to imagine the civil magistrate being slow to exercise justice. The great danger at the present time is not in the overreach of the Church, but the overreach of the state. Civil authorities may issue recommendations, and those recommendations must be considered in light of the sixth commandment, loving our neighbor, and our call to be bastions of mercy. But the leaders of each local church must determine the risks and their duties. Local church leaders may determine to suspend corporate gatherings, especially when the details of the dangers are uncertain. But obedience to the magistrate is unnecessary if there is evidence that there are ways God's people can meet safely. The alternative to this would give the civil

---

<sup>17</sup> Baxter, *Christian Ecclesiastics*. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/44655/44655-h/44655-h.htm>

<sup>18</sup> Preface, *The Practical Works of Richard Baxter*. Retrieved from <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/41633/41633-h/41633-h.htm>

## Unmasking A Future Lockdown

authorities the right to shut down churches and businesses every time there's a bad flu season. As extreme as this may seem, it's not beyond the realm of possibility if the state decides to idolize safety. That's why the body that issues a call to worship to the saints is the oversight of the church, not the magistrate.

## Legitimate Considerations

### **1. We must remember to make a strong link between the right to a peaceful assembly and freedom of speech.**

It has been common to argue that churches are not being hindered in the preaching of the gospel. Every Christian is aware that when commanded by authorities not to preach Christ, the apostles replied, "We ought to obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). But for imagine for a moment that rather than being commanded not to preach Christ, what if the authorities had banned the apostles and the people from assembling? Being forbidden to assemble, to whom do they preach? Would they have obeyed? It is easy to see that they would have disobeyed. If a people have the right of free speech, then they must also have the right of peaceful assembly. If the authorities remove the Church's right to assemble, they have robbed from the Church the right to preach the gospel. On this point, it seems like many are happy to give away their freedom rather than have it taken from them.

### **2. We must remember that technology should never be used as a crutch to relinquish fundamental rights and the God-ordained means of building the church, namely, preaching to assembled peoples.**

It is easier for governments to take away the technology that permits live streaming than it is to take away the right to assemble. Just as all international travel is funneled through government controlled ports, so it is with the internet. It is relatively simple for governments to blacklist websites and control internet access, and some governments are unashamedly doing so.<sup>19</sup> Whether that's in our future we don't know, but the point is, if we give up the God-given right to assemble for the preaching of the gospel, it will be even easier to take away the platforms used to communicate online. The time to oppose tyranny is not when it gains momentum, but to nip it in the bud. Tomorrow's church will thank us.

### **3. We must remember that while government restrictions during a time of emergency are not imposed exclusively upon the Church, this is no guarantee it is not an attack on the Church, nor is it an argument for the Church to hand over its authority to decide.**

When someone declares that the Church is not being targeted, that was also the case when Caesar demanded everyone call him Lord. In our own day, legislation about who can be married also isn't a direct attack on the Church. However, in both cases the Church understands that while the legislation doesn't directly attack Christians, the Church must not simply follow the inertia of society, but form its own understanding and respond accordingly. Satan has one primary goal, and that is to hinder the preaching of the gospel and the entity given responsibility for bringing the gospel to the ends of the earth, namely, the Church. Obviously there are seasons of legitimate emergency, but is it possible that a season of emergency could be used by Satan to hinder the gospel? His attacks are not always with surgical precision. When he

---

<sup>19</sup> Leetaru, *Internet Blacklisting Is Taking Off Across The World*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kalevleetaru/2019/03/21/internet-blacklisting-is-taking-off-across-the-world/?sh=35d6701b50cc>

worked through Herod, he did not just go after Jesus; he slaughtered every boy two years old and under (Matt. 2:16). Evidently, Satan would happily destroy everything if it resulted in the destruction of the Church and hinder the gospel. Let's not be ignorant of his devices (2 Cor. 2:11), and his primary objective to blind and damn souls.

But even if the Church suffers less under the civil magistrate than others, that has no bearing on the authority of church office bearers. They *still* have the final decision on the matter of *how* the Church worships, *when* the Church worships, and *who* is a member of the visible Church.

**4. We must remember that the restrictions on business owners, many of which are run by Christians, are unprecedented and unlawful.**

Apart from seasons of just warfare, lawful forms of slavery, and quarantining those with diseases that come under the branch of leprosy, there are no reasons in God's Word to prevent a free man from conducting lawful forms of commerce. The Bible even counsels us on circumstances such as the pandemic of 2020:

- Like COVID-19, the leprosy of which the Bible speaks appears to be contagious.
- Like COVID-19, you would have biblical leprosy before you knew you had it (asymptomatic).
- Like COVID-19, there was no cure for biblical leprosy.
- Like COVID-19, since there was no treatment, they quarantined the sick.

In other words, there may—in some instances—be reasons that authorities would demand the sick be quarantined, but they *only* have the right to quarantine those proven to be sick. There is no biblical or reasonable precedent for isolating and quarantining those that have no evidence of sickness. What is being asked of the populace at present, whatever the arguments of its merits, has no grounds in Scripture.

Additionally, Deuteronomy 24:6 presents a law that was designed to protect families from having the mechanisms whereby they provide for themselves taken from them. The millstone is illustrative of the means given to a family to put food on the table, and God sought to regulate Israel to protect that right and prevent needy families from being taken advantage of. Commenting on this text, Matthew Poole said,

“Under this one kind he understands all other things necessary to get a livelihood, the taking away whereof is against the laws both of charity and prudence, seeing by those things alone he can be enabled both to subsist and to pay his debts.”<sup>20</sup>

John Gill said,

---

<sup>20</sup> Poole, *English Annotations on the Holy Bible*. Retrieved from <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mpc/deuteronomy-24.html#18>

“this takes in any other thing whatever, on which a man's living depends, or by which he gets his bread.”<sup>21</sup>

Such restrictions on families and measures have plunged untold millions across the world into deeper poverty, debt, and death. Possibly more death than from COVID-19, and more impactful upon women and children. The measures taken are inhumane, unlawful, and therefore, tyrannical. And the Church, as a light to the world, ought to be the first to oppose unjust laws.

**5. We must remember that the Church is called to uphold the Ten Commandments and apply them to individuals and the magistrate, providing a better society for all, even in the important realm of economics.**

In obedience to the fourth commandment, we have preached and appealed to the government to restrict unnecessary businesses from being conducted. In obedience to the sixth commandment, we have preached and appealed to the government to abolish abortion laws. This is our duty. And although economics is a subject primarily of nature and not grace, yet, similar to marriage, it obtains its best and most honorable expression when it is guided by the Word of God. Ministers of the Word must give direction in the area of economics at every level. When the civil government forbids conducting lawful business, as it has done under many governments throughout 2020, it ought to be declared from the pulpit that it is wrong, especially when it is predicated on borrowing absurd amounts of money that will enslave future generations. This debt burden to future generations is tyrannical. Has the pulpit nothing to say in the face of tyranny? God forbid.

Consider the commandments being broken. They break the first commandment which, according to the Larger Catechism, forbids us from “making men the lords of our faith and conscience.”<sup>22</sup> For if a man believes God has called him to work and that the Word of God requires it of him, the state is calling him to submit to something other than what God requires when, really, they have no divine jurisdiction to do so. The magistrate also breaks the fifth commandment which forbids superiors from “commanding things unlawful.”<sup>23</sup> They also break the sixth commandment which forbids “the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life.”<sup>24</sup> And finally, they also break the eighth commandment which requires us to have “a lawful calling, and diligence in it”<sup>25</sup> and requires us “to procure, preserve, and further the wealth and outward estate of others, as well as our own.”<sup>26</sup> When the Church fails to apply the law of God and shape the minds of men, she fails to be the pillar and

---

<sup>21</sup> Gill, *Exposition of the Whole Bible*. Retrieved from <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/geb/deuteronomy-24.html>

<sup>22</sup> *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 105. Retrieved from <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/westminster-larger-catechism/>

<sup>23</sup> *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 130. Retrieved from Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 136. Retrieved from Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> *Westminster Larger Catechism*, Question 141. Retrieved from Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

ground of the truth in the community. When it is argued that such restrictions are necessary to preserve life, reasonable men must ask, 'to which life do you refer?' Is a man expected to let his family starve and lose their home in order to save hypothetical individuals that might die by the spreading of a virus? Is the Church to turn a blind eye to the economic impoverishment of society and, by her silence, drive citizens into the arms of the state for economic provision? Surely not. God's Word does not say that if man does not work, he should run to the state. But if a man does not work, he should not eat (2 Thes. 3:10). We must take passages like the aforementioned Deuteronomy 24:6 to heart and apply the law of God to our circumstances.

To these considerations I hear some ask, but what difference will it make? While church leaders have jurisdiction over their churches, they have no jurisdiction over the economy. This is true. But the benefit of instructing God's people on the sins of bad economic policies is that, in most of our nations, they have a vote. If they know their leaders advocate for that which is against the Word of God, they can choose whether to vote such people in again. Furthermore, we may have before us in the church, politicians, judges, and other people of influence that could be persuaded by the Word of God on these matters and make a difference. Such people, including police officers, may also feel compelled to not implement unjust laws as they are applied to the citizenry, acting similarly to the Hebrew midwives (Ex. 1:17), interposing as lesser magistrates to protect citizens. The notes of the Geneva Bible argue, "the obedience we owe is such that it is not only due to the highest magistrate himself, but also even to the lowest, who has any office under him."<sup>27</sup> In other words, if a lesser magistrate calls us to do that which is more in line with God's Word, we can obey them rather than the tyrannical superior magistrate. For this reason, Christians ought to put much pressure on their local judges, politicians, police officers, and others, to resist tyrannical laws on their behalf. This pressure often germinates from the pulpit, as God's faithful preachers inform the minds and hearts of His people.

**6. We must remember that whatever the civil government is permitted to regulate, it seldom gives up that permission, and bad precedents are often used to implement abusive and oppressive protocols.**

This can be seen in Scripture in relation to divorce. (Matt. 19:7-8). Matthew Poole, commenting on this text, said,

"Indeed possibly this bill of divorce was sometimes judicially granted upon irregular causes, and Moses might connive at it for the preventing of greater evils, because you were always a hard hearted and stiff necked people; and you by your traditions have expounded that law beyond Moses's intention, and made a bill of divorce grantable in cases which he never thought of, nor intended in that law."<sup>28</sup>

Governments and their laws tend to encroach on civil liberties more and more over time, and it seems nothing is as effective to remove liberties as threats upon public safety, whether it is the

---

<sup>27</sup> Geneva Bible, notes on Romans 13:1.

<sup>28</sup> Poole, *English Annotations on the Holy Bible*. Retrieved from <https://www.studydrive.net/commentaries/mpc/matthew-19.html>

threat of war or disease. The American scholar Richard Weaver (1910-1963), is often quoted as having said,

“The past shows unvaryingly that when a people’s freedom disappears, it goes not with a bang, but in silence amid the comfort of being cared for. That is the dire peril in the present trend toward statism. If freedom is not found accompanied by a willingness to resist, and to reject favors, rather than to give up what is intangible but precarious, it will not long be found at all.”<sup>29</sup>

Should we not include those financial favors that come from the government, promising to help businesses through economic difficulties brought upon the people by oppressive restrictions? Are we so accustomed to such bribery that we support it? God forbid.

### **7. We must remember that disobeying civil authorities is sometimes necessary for the Lord’s people.**

Elijah was a fugitive and refused to turn himself in (1 Kings 18:10). He also disobeyed the civil authorities when the king’s men were sent to fetch him (2 Kings 1:9-15). Moses was hidden in disobedience to the king’s commandment (Ex. 2:1-2; Heb. 11:23). And the apostles refused to submit to the authorities when they commanded them to stop preaching (Acts 5:17-20). We must be prepared to disobey if the civil authorities are asking us to do something that is in direct opposition to the will of our God.

Commenting on Daniel 6:22, John Calvin says:

“Since, therefore, Daniel could not obey the king’s edict without denying God, as we have previously seen, he did not transgress against the king by constantly persevering in that exercise of piety to which he had been accustomed, and by calling on his God three times a-day. To make this the more evident, we must remember that passage of Peter, “Fear God, honor the king.” (1 Peter 2:17.) The two commands are connected together, and cannot be separated from one another. The fear of God ought to precede, that kings may obtain their authority. For if any one begins his reverence of an earthly prince by rejecting that of God, he will act preposterously, since this is a complete perversion of the order of nature. Then let God be feared in the first place, and earthly princes will obtain their authority, if only God shines forth, as I have already said. Daniel, therefore, here defends himself with justice, since he had not committed any crime against the king; for he was compelled to obey the command of God, and he neglected what the king had ordered in opposition to it. For earthly princes lay aside all their power when they rise up against God, and are unworthy of being reckoned in the number of mankind. We ought rather utterly to defy than to obey them whenever they are so restive and wish to spoil God of his rights, and, as it were, to seize upon his throne and draw him down from heaven.”<sup>30</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> Weaver. Retrieved from <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2006/9/the-consequences-of-richard-weaver>

<sup>30</sup> Calvin, *Commentary on the Bible*. Retrieved from <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/cal/daniel-6.html>

Since it has been our practice to meet as gathered assemblies as a habit every Lord's Day, just as with Daniel, any church living with civil authorities that seek to forbid them from meeting, may rightly determine to do otherwise.

**8. We must remember that lockdowns, self-isolating, and shielding is not the only barometer of love to our neighbor.**

This is a myopic perspective that is neither supported by statistics or common sense. For anyone interested in knowing the truth on this matter, experts are studying the impact of lockdowns on mental health, physical health, social health, education, and the economy.<sup>31</sup> Granted, correlation is not causation, but given the broad picture analysis of what's happening in our community, is it overstating the matter to suggest that support for lockdowns could be hatred of our neighbor? Time will tell. To date, over 13,000 medical and public health scientists and over 39,000 medical practitioners have signed what is called the Great Barrington Declaration,<sup>32</sup> which is calling for focused protection rather than widespread lockdowns. Many of these scientists and doctors are experts in epidemiology, infectious disease, clinical microbiology and immunology, vaccine development, efficacy, and safety, etc, etc. So if our argument is that the science tells us to lock down, that's only the case if you choose to close your ears to thousands of expert voices. However, the God's Word is ahead of the curve. It supports quarantining the sick, but to isolate and restrict the healthy is not love. There's nothing loving about it. Many of us may not have understood this in March 2020, but enough time has passed to reevaluate assumptions. Church elders have an obligation before God to think through these matters before suggesting that what is being done is because of love for our neighbor.

---

<sup>31</sup> See <https://collateralglobal.org>

<sup>32</sup> See <https://gbdeclaration.org>

## Final Remarks

The year 2020 has undoubtedly brought challenges for which few were ready. Politicians, doctors, nurses, researchers, teachers, students, parents, business owners, employees, the elderly, etc. I do not seek to minimize the ramifications in each of those areas. But I am a minister of the gospel, and so my chief concern is that for which I am responsible, i.e. I need to know how to give guidance to the Church. It has not been my intention to make other church leaders feel guilty, but to a) give support to those who feel the same discomfort I felt in March, and b) to help those that are genuinely looking for answers. However, similar to other subjects, such as Christian baptism and the second advent of Christ, many will remain resolved to continue in the course they have already chosen. To that I say, "Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind" (Rom. 14:5). If you are part of a denomination, resist the temptation to force every congregation to follow your perspective and encourage local oversight to evaluate the issue. They know best the circumstances and needs of their own congregation and community, and it is their responsibility to issue the call to worship, not the presbytery or synod.

Rarely a Lord's Day passes in which I do not pray publicly for our civil authorities. I am deeply concerned at the trajectory of Western nations, and with many other saints I pray for another spiritual awakening. While I pray and preach with expectation that we shall yet see a move of the Holy Ghost, yet I am also preparing for difficult days in which there will be more conflict with civil magistrates. Any circumstance in which we are called upon to disobey the magistrate ought to be met with tears of concern and firm resolve. We should take no delight in it. They are called by God to be nursing fathers (Is. 49:23), and we ought to intercede for them and mourn for them as Samuel did for Saul (1 Sam. 15:35). Regardless of your views on these matters, this is a day that must be faced with courage. So I leave you with King Alfred's War Song.

When the enemy comes in a-roaring like a flood  
Coveting the kingdom and hungering for blood,  
The Lord will raise a standard up and lead His people on  
The Lord of Hosts will go before defeating every foe; defeating every foe.

*Refrain:*

For the Lord is our defense, Jesu defend us;  
For the Lord is our defense, Jesu defend.

Some men trust in chariots, some trust in the horse  
But we will depend upon the Name of Christ our Lord  
The Lord has made my hands to war and my fingers to fight  
The Lord lays low our enemies but raises us upright; He raises us upright.

A thousand fall on my left hand, ten thousand to the right,  
And yet He will defend us from the arrow in the night  
Protect us from the terrors of the teeth of the devourer  
Imbue us with your Spirit, Lord, encompass us with power; encompass us with power.