



RE: COVID VACCINATION
To be reproduced only in its entirety.

Hello HDC,

I want to address the subject of COVID vaccinations and the interest some of you have in securing an exemption for "religious reasons."

Our pastors have discussed this quandary at length. We understand the challenge many of you are facing in the next few weeks. Jesus designed the Church, His body, in such a way that "if one part suffers, every part suffers." We love you, want to encourage you and, most of all, want to be here for you in the days ahead. We are concerned especially for those of you whose future employment could be affected by such a requirement and want to help you craft a strategic biblical response.

There have been so many voices that have factored into all of our decisions these days.

The voices of science have been deafening.

I don't have to tell you that the "science" is all over the map on COVID. Let's face it, most of us don't have the scientific acumen to know which research is most reliable.

COVID has not presented us the first medical quandary we've ever faced. Years ago, I advised our church family to create their own personal "board of directors," people you trust who have expertise in areas where you're over your head (which, for me, is a lot of areas). My "board" includes an automotive expert for when a car breaks down, a financial expert for when I need some investment guidance, and a medical expert for times like this.

For over a decade, I've been blessed to know a wonderful Christian doctor with impeccable credentials whom I've turned to often for medical advice. He has always been willing to tell me what he believed about medications and treatments and what he thought I should do. And I've always done it, for better or for worse. COVID's given me no reason to change advisors. He still represents God's voice

to me about medicine. His counsel has always been apolitical. In fact, political ideology has never come up once in ten years! His insights have helped me make many decisions regarding my health, which medication to trust, and which to avoid. My entire "board" have helped me avoid the crippling confusion generated by the cacophony of voices out there who, in this case, all claim to be expert researchers.

Turn down the voices of politics.

Every issue that has political overtones inevitably brings out our dark side. Because we all have passionate political views, our disagreements can quickly turn into angry exchanges.

Recognize the crippling power of fear.

We all struggle with fear. That's why we sometimes can't figure out what to do. We're afraid we'll do the wrong thing. Just remember, every decision includes a downside, a series of negative repercussions from the decision we made. If we had chosen differently, we wouldn't have had to deal with those negative repercussions, but we would have to deal with a different set of negative repercussions. There are no good choices, only better and worse choices.

Because others are so loud, the voice of Jesus is hard to hear sometimes.

But we would all agree that His is the voice we want to hear most clearly. When confusion, anger, and fear are louder than Jesus, we never make good decisions. So, if those things have created an impossible burden, one you're having a difficult time carrying, turn down the volume on those things and fix your ears on Jesus. He told us a long time ago that "His yoke was easy and His burden was light." So, let's show some discipline, set our desires, our ideologies, and our fears aside, and ask Jesus for simple and clear direction. His promise was that, in every crisis, we "would find rest for our souls."

It is not my intention to give you advice on what you should do regarding a COVID vaccine. HDC has never had an official opinion about vaccination. Our church family reflects many diverse views, both on vaccination in general and specifically related to the COVID crisis. We maintain that any vaccination is a personal or parental decision. HDC does not support efforts to coerce people to be vaccinated. Neither do we support efforts to coerce people to remain unvaccinated. Some of

HDC's leaders have chosen to be vaccinated, some have chosen to postpone their decision until more data is available, and some may never be vaccinated.

I'm neither a doctor nor a cultural architect. But, as a pastor, I've found many of the arguments on every side of the debate have been built on either theological quicksand or simple intellectual dishonesty. I know desperate times call for desperate measures but, when this is all over, we all need to be able to say our Christian integrity remained intact.

"My prolife position will not allow me to take any medications that required fetal cell cultures for their development."

HDC strongly condemns abortion. We always have. If you don't believe that life begins at conception, then you're not following the science, because 96% of biologists believe that human life begins at conception. But elevating our prolife position to claim a religious exemption for the COVID vaccine requires that we apply that view consistently. Can you say that you would decline any medication that, at some point, required fetal cell cultures for its development, even if you or a loved-one's life could only be saved by receiving it? Can you say that you would decline an organ donation for yourself or a loved one if the donor had been killed at the hands of another?

A Christian conviction is not something that suddenly emerges when it's convenient to have it. It's one thing to have a Christian conviction, but it's quite another thing to try to leverage the Bible to get what we want.

"As a Christian, I believe that we should trust God for our physical safety, not medicine."

That defense would probably make a hypocrite out of most of us. Especially if we had ever taken meds, had ever gone to a doctor, had ever locked our cars, had ever installed a home alarm system, or had ever purchased a weapon.

We believe God loves us and is capable of caring for us, but we also know how our lives are enriched by using our God-given gifts and creativity to fulfill His will. We are confident that God's will cannot be thwarted, yet we still vote in elections. There were times when God delivered Israel from their enemies without one arrow being fired. But there were many more times when He delivered Israel through military

campaigns that required taking up swords and shields. That's why we support the American military.

Most of us would applaud a government's efforts to protect their citizens from this virus, but I think all of us are at least a bit skeptical of some of our leaders' good will. But, before you submit your request for a religious exemption from the COVID vaccine, just make sure your protest is because of your Christian conviction. We are willing to go to the wall for our convictions. We are willing to lose a job for our convictions. A Christian conviction comes out of Scripture.

If it's a political conviction, you may still be willing to put your job on the line, but just not for biblical reasons. We just celebrated Labor Day. That's what the labor movement was about, organizing like-minded employees and threatening a work-stoppage if their employer didn't meet their demands. All the while, they knew they could lose their jobs if things didn't go their way, but they were resolute because of their conviction. Just make sure your convictions will still be in play, should your request be denied. If you submit for a "religious exemption" and are turned down, but then go ahead and get the vaccine because you don't want to lose your job, then your request reflected a personal opinion, not a Christian conviction. There is a difference.

To date, no employer has requested a letter either written or signed by one of our pastors. At this point, we have no plans to do so, since the religious exemption you might request would be based on your personal Christian conviction, not HDC's doctrinal statement.

We are happy to confirm for any employer that you are either an attender or member of HDC, based on our records.

We are doing everything we can, in line with Scriptures, to help you keep your job, maintain your witness, and encourage you to trust God regarding your future. As you prayerfully define your convictions as a Jesus-follower, and then pursue your course in the days ahead, just know that we are praying for you, whatever your decision might be, that God would be your refuge, regardless of the outcome.



Pastor Tom Mercer