



# The Harvester

*Preparing Souls  
To Serve The Lord!*

Volume 42

January 2022

Number 6

## Should the Covid-19 Vaccination Be a Test of Fellowship?

Brian R. Kenyon

Not too long ago, a congregation, who was between preachers and using area men to fill-in, asked whether the preacher scheduled for the next Sunday was vaccinated for covid. He was not. A day or so later, the congregation announced they were cancelling services that Sunday. After a later inquiry, a spokesman for the congregation said they cancelled because of rising covid cases in the community. Only God truly knows the hearts of those who make the call to cancel services. Before that later inquiry, however, it sure seemed as if they cancelled services because the visiting preacher was not vaccinated. After hearing that, it occurred to me that even if that were not the case with that particular congregation, the issue could still come up in the future (if it has not already), where brethren use the covid vaccine as a requirement to fellowship with them in worship or other kinds of “in-person” fellowship. Thus, the question in the title of this article is very relevant.

### God’s Standard of Fellowship

One of the main passages on God’s standard of fellowship is found in Ephesians 4:1-6. It is important to note that Christians are to give every effort to “keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3), not to create, or devise, a standard of unity that pleases them. The platform of God’s unity stands as: “one body [i.e., church]” (Eph. 4:4a cf. Eph. 1:23; 2:16; 3:6; 4:25; Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:12-

14; Col. 3:15); “one [Holy] Spirit” (Eph. 4:4b cf. Eph. 2:18; 1 Cor. 12:13; Acts 11:15); “one hope,” which is tied into the Christian’s calling (Eph. 4:4c cf. 1 Cor. 1:9; 2 Thes. 2:14); “one Lord [Jesus Christ]” (Eph. 4:5a cf. Mk. 12:29; 1 Cor. 8:6; 12:3; Rom. 10:9; Col. 3:17); “one faith” (Eph. 4:5b cf. Eph. 4:13; Rom. 10:8; Col. 2:7; Jude 3); “one baptism” (Eph. 4:5c cf. Mt. 28:19; Mk. 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Cor. 12:13; 1 Pet. 3:21); and “one God and Father” (Eph. 4:6a cf. Mk. 12:32; Rom. 3:30; 1 Cor. 8:6; 1 Tim. 2:5). We must allow this God-breathed outline of unity to serve as the one-and-only, objective standard of fellowship!

### Covid’s (Potential) Standards of Fellowship

The first local church of Christ I knew who shut their doors due to covid did so on March 15, 2020. Many others followed suit on March 22, 2020. Numerous congregations “opened their doors” in Spring/Summer 2020 (with limited capacity), while others only recently resumed in-person services. Throughout the whole time, some justified the practice of no public worship, while others questioned even the biblical authority to make such decisions. Throughout all of this, especially over the last few months, some main “covid concerns” have been driving local churches’ response. These concerns have the potential to become tests of fellowship, but should they?

### Media Driven "News"

Has media driven "news" become a standard of fellowship for some? While it is good for Christians to keep up with current events (cf. 1 Chr. 12:32; Est. 1:13), God's people must not be driven by what the news media interprets and promotes, especially that ever growing segment of media that is undeniably driven by an immoral agenda (e.g., acceptance of homosexuality, "transgenderism," etc.). Throughout the covid pandemic, "mainstream media's" reporting has been sensationalized to emphasize the negative and strike fear and irrational response by those accepting it as "gospel truth." Even the *New York Times* (considered by many to fit the description above), in "The Morning" email post, dated March 26, 2021, said that "87 percent of Covid coverage in national U.S. media last year was negative," compared to "51 percent in international media," and "53 percent in U.S. regional media." That report noted:

When Covid cases were rising in the U.S., the news coverage emphasized the increase. When cases were falling, the coverage instead focused on those places where cases were rising ... when vaccine research began showing positive results, the coverage was downplayed.

Although this was almost a year ago, we have seen this same pattern when it comes to reporting the "omicron variant." It is nowhere near lethal as earlier variants, yet most of what is being said about "omicron" is negative and fear invoking!

Rather than being overly swayed by media driven "news," which has often proved misleading on several other issues prior to covid, Christians must be more driven by the good news of the Gospel! Jesus came into the world to save sinners, including those reading this (1 Tim. 1:15). Those who are saved should not allow fear to keep them from living the Gospel (Mt. 10:28; Phil. 1:28-30; Rev. 2:10). Since they serve the only true God, who is Himself invisible (Col. 1:15; 1 Tim. 1:17), they can have confidence in knowing that He can keep them from, or even through, any invisible threat (Rom. 8:35-39; Heb. 11:27)! Yes, we must take precautions to preserve our physical lives (Acts 9:25 cf. 2 Cor. 11:33), but this does not call for us to stop strengthening spiritual lives, whether ours or others! We have learned much about covid and its treatment since March 2020. We have seen "fully vaccinated" people contract the disease as well as non-vaccinated people. A person's individual health, immunity, and exposure to covid seem to be the most important factors in whether the disease is contracted and/or how severe it becomes. During this pandemic, Christians need the spiritual and emotional boost provided by assembling together (cf. Heb. 10:24), now more than ever! Why hinder that by requiring members to be vaccinated before returning to worship assemblies? Why would some even think church leaders have the authority to require something God does not in order to worship and fellowship together?

## The Harvester

Published Monthly  
Florida School of Preaching  
1807 South Florida Avenue  
Lakeland, Florida 33803  
(863) 683-4043

Editor: Brian R. Kenyon, Director

### Board of Directors

Ted Wheeler, Chairman  
Brian Kenyon, Vice-Chairman  
Tim Simmons, Secretary  
Chad Tagtow, Treasurer

Steve Atnip Philip Lancaster  
Terrance Brownlow-Dindy Walter Podein  
Bruce Daugherty Ben Radford, Sr.  
Barry J. Enzor Uleysses Richardson  
George K. French

**Training Preachers Since  
1969**

### Special Thanks To Our Generous Supporters In November 2021

**Florida Churches of Christ:** Apopka (Tenth Street); Auburndale (Orange Street); Bartow (Fifth Avenue, North Jackson Avenue); Callahan (First Coast); Clearwater (Central); Daytona Beach (Beville Road); Dunnellon; Gainesville (Thirty-Ninth Avenue); Haines City (Central); Jacksonville (Normandy, Wesconnett); Kissimmee; Lakeland (North Lakeland, South Florida Avenue); New Port Richey (River Road); Plant City (Laura Street); Poinciana; Port Charlotte; St. Augustine; Stuart; Zephyrhills (Southside).

**Out of State Churches of Christ:** Alabama (Shiloh); Georgia (Forrest Park); Michigan (Grand Blanc); Texas (Highland).

**Individuals:** M/M Rodrigue Aleandre, M/M Blane Anderson, M/M Forest Antemesaris, M/M Roy Beasley, bettye bolding, M/M Manuel Brown, Annie Chambers, M/M William A. Clayton, M/M Reginald Colton, M/M Hollis Cress, M/M Bruce Daugherty, David M. Deal, Christopher Dean, M/M. Guy Dickinson, M/M David Dix, M/M John Donaldson, M/M Wayne Doran, James R. Earnhardt, Sharon Egolf, H. Joyce Foster, M/M James E. Hall, Bryant Johnson, M/M Rick Kenyon, Wadi Khoury, M/M Darnell Kirkland, Carla Lee, John Lewis, Brenda Mask, Carol Moore, M/M Vic Pratt, M/M Uleysses Richardson, Harry P. Roberts, Roger Rosie, James W. Shearer, M/M David Stearsman, Logan Summers, M/M Jimmy Sweeney, Jessie Watson, M/M H Glen Willcut.

**Memorials:** Rembert Allen (Gloria Allen); Libby Littleton (M/M Matthew Faneuf, M/M Brian R. Kenyon, Melton, Janella); Nancy Norton (M/M Matthew Faneuf, M/M Brian R. Kenyon, Johnye C. Sims, Ada Walling); Joyce Slaughter (Deborah Jones); Howard Young (Beverly Young).

**Special Contributions:** Atlantic Christian Fund; Faith West Estate,

\*Our final deposit for the month is usually made on the last Wednesday of the month. All contributions received after that time are reported on the next month's financial statement.

### Civil Law

Are some making questionably derived civil law about covid a standard of fellowship? Clearly, Christians are to obey civil laws (Rom. 13:1-5), unless those laws force them to violate God's will (Acts 5:29). There are at least two factors about American civil law that apply to the current covid situation. First, all state laws are not the same. Florida's laws, for example, are not nearly as strict as New York's. Even in Florida, the assembly restriction "mandates" that were set (and short-lived) were at one point stated by the Governor not to apply to church gatherings. Yet, some church leaders in Florida still felt legally compelled to abide by them. Other states were not so optional. Even now, people, including Christians, from stricter states visiting Florida think Floridians are somehow violating civil law because some citizens in Florida move about unmasked and/or unvaccinated. Whereas Christians in Florida are abiding by civil law when they are unmasked and/or unvaccinated, the unmasked and/or unvaccinated Christians in other states may very well be in violation of those states' civil laws.

Second, American civil laws uniquely contain measures to assure that no American government official has the power of a sovereign king, which is very different from the rulers influencing God's people in Bible times. Thus, the "governing authorities ... rulers ... God's minister" of Romans 13:1-5 for American citizens are the Constitutionally legal laws and enforcers of those laws. Consider, for example, the American constitutional "right to bear arms." Was it not initially set in place so citizens would have the power to rise against tyranny from their public officials? Within American civil law is the option for legal resistance of illegal, unconstitutional laws. While Christians should be cautious in participating in such resistance (cf. Mt. 5:25-26), it is not inherently sinful for them to do so. It is certainly possible to put God first and still stand against man-made civil law (Dan. 3:1-18; 6:10-17; Est. 3:1-6). It is even good to appeal to and defend civil laws that help spread the Gospel (cf. Acts 22:25-29).

Even if American civil government were to mandate everyone to get vaccinated, this would not all of a sudden mean God will then require the vaccine in order for His people to worship Him congregationally and/or fellowship one another. Christians in America presently have a right to resist laws that are unconstitutional. Again, this does not mean Chris-

tians *must* exercise their rights to legally resist unconstitutional mandates (cf. 1 Cor. 9:3-27), nor does it mean that resisting them is inherently sinful. Either way, though, why would church leaders allow the civil government to "mandate" a requirement for public worship and in-person fellowship that God has not required?

### The "Loving Thing to Do"

The appeal has often been made since March 2020 that even if government protocol or mandates do not actually work in slowing the spread of the corona virus, they should still be observed because "It is the loving thing to do for the sake of others" (cf. Phil. 2:3-4). While the "putting others first" principle will always be a part of true Christianity (Rom. 12:10), the question remains: Is it always "loving others" to conform to human-based mandates? At some point, truth must prevail and doing things for show and/or a false sense of security must cease. At some point, representing truth and reality must truly become the "loving thing to do" (cf. Jn. 8:32).

While at the beginning of the pandemic there was a lot more uncertainty about the virus and its treatment, much more has been learned since then about both. At the very least, the research is a "draw" as to whether government mandates actually keep the virus from spreading and whether the vaccine is actually better than a healthy, God-designed human immune system. Of course, the research that most aligns with what has already been known about viruses and consistent with what these same researchers said before covid should carry more weight. It always seems suspicious when we are told that almost everything we were taught about viruses and their mitigation before covid does not apply to covid, as if this virus were supernatural. Additionally, even the most ardent supporters (who are still rational) of the present administration's mandate plans for America must see the political motivation in many of the covid actions taken. The inconsistencies between policy makers and their adherence to their own policies are evident to all who will open their eyes to see.

These things are here stated to show the real possibility that rational, God-fearing people have just as much a right to examine evidence and reject what government "experts" say, and still be pleasing to God, as those who insist that what these same "experts" recommend is the "loving thing to do." While, as stated earlier, Christians do not always *have to*

# Florida School of Preaching



1807 South Florida Avenue  
Lakeland, FL 33803  
**fsop.net fsop@fsop.net**  
863-683-4043 or 800-320-9780

Nonprofit Org.  
US Postage  
PAID  
Lakeland, FL  
PERMIT #235

*Electronic Service Requested*

Please Do Not Re-send  
without affixing  
correct postage!

**The Harvester**

**January 2022**

**Page 4**

exercise their rights (cf. 1 Cor. 9:2-27), it is likewise true they are not always “unloving” when they do! Why would the leadership of a local church make what they interpret as “the loving thing to do” a test of fellowship, when other faithful Christians can true they are not always “unloving” when they do! Why would the leadership of a local church make what they interpret as “the loving thing to do” a test of fellowship, when other faithful Christians can examine research over the same virus and/or vaccine and come to different convictions?

## Conclusion

So do local church leaders have authority to refuse fellowship in congregational worship to those who are not vaccinated against covid-19? The answer, of course, is No. Upon what basis would they do so? What the media reports and interprets? Civil law? Violating what they interpret as “the loving

thing to do”? Where do God’s revealed standards of fellowship come into play? Yes, Christians should put others first by not putting themselves or others in reasonable danger of contracting the corona virus (or any other communicable disease). Yes, Christians must obey civil laws that do not violate God’s law. Yes, Christians must keep up with current events while not “swallowing hook, line, and sinker” what the media interprets. However, since God has nowhere made the covid vaccine a test of fellowship, neither should we! Rather than dissuading church members from worshiping together, church leaders should be doing everything in their power to make worshiping together as safe and as Scripturally persuasive as possible “in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching” (Heb. 10:24-25).



**Thank You, Supporters!** Lord willing, as many of you receive this *Harvester*, our 47th annual lectureship will be well underway. This is a great reminder that we have operated as we have since 1969 with your support! We appreciate our contributors for allowing the Lord to work through you in helping us! —*Brian*