

August 8, 2021

The Sunday View

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus." – John 12:21

Welcome Visitors!

You are our honored guests and we are pleased that you have chosen to visit us today. Our goal is to do everything according to God's word, including respecting its silence. This is a church of Christ; we are not a denomination, not part of anything larger than this local church and we have no earthly "headquarters." The six elders oversee this work and, ultimately, we answer only to Christ. The comments you hear today are primarily aimed at our own members, as we examine Scripture and seek to be built up in our faith in Christ. If you don't understand something, please do not hesitate to ask one of the elders. We welcome and appreciate your comments and questions on any issue and especially if you see or hear anything that you feel does not correspond to God's word. We are here to serve; please help us do that.

Please fill out a visitor's card and put it in the collection plate at the entrance. Thank You

Young Adult Class — Starting next week, August 15th at the building (room 17/18)

This class is for young people that are out of high school and don't have any kids yet. Singles, couples ("20-somethings").

Please contact Dave Byrd: dchbyrd@gmail.com; 916.220.9115

Rich Mowrer: themowrers@sbcglobal.net; 916.221.1084

Schedule

The Lord's Day

9:30 AM

Bible Classes for All Ages

Auditorium: Ephesians

Young Adult Class (begins 8/15)

Assembly: 10:30 AM

Livestream at 10:30 at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCLemwy2IYxrL7ZUGTiZTVqA>

Speaking today: David Posey

To Whom Shall I Go? John 6:60-71

Hebrews class today @ 2 PM at the building

Young People's Class

5 PM Every Sunday

Contact David Posey for information at
(530) 558-5057

The middle school class is held once a month. Contact Dan Stegall for information at (818) 209-9810

Zoom Class: Mondays @ 7PM: The character of Moses

Contact Jack Horak @ jshorak98@gmail.com

Wednesday 7 PM @ Building

Ephesians: in Auditorium

Saturday Men's Breakfast

7 AM, second Saturday of the month.
Contact Tyler Wade @ tyler@ppldev.com

Information

Website & Online Presence

Visit our website at www.folsomchurch.com for updates and material on current and past classes, and recorded sermons and classes. You will also find a directory of churches on page one. If you are a member of the church here at Folsom, see one of the deacons or elders to inquire about access to the password -protected members section. Find us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/folsomchurch>

Classes & Home Studies

We have classes for children from 18 months and up on Wednesday night at 7 PM. Please see the map in the hallway or ask any of the members which room is appropriate for you and/or your child. There are several Bible studies in progress on Sunday afternoon and evening. Check with David Posey if you have questions.

Restrooms

There are two sets of restrooms: one off the first hallway to the right of the lobby and another at the end of the first hallway to the left. Ask anyone and they'll be happy to point you in the right direction.

For Small Children

There is a special room for nursing mothers and a separate "cry room" at the rear of the auditorium. You enter them from the first hallway to the right, across from the restrooms.

View & Junior View

Be sure to pick up a copy of the View and Junior View; both are sent out weekly to our member list and hard copies are printed on Sundays and available in the foyer.

Prayer Requests & News Items

Send to David Posey at dpaulposey@mac.com
or text at 530-558-5057

Masks in the Assembly

BY DAVID POSEY

I engaged in a hot debate within myself about whether to broach this subject. But I decided that it's a healthy exercise to sort through the questions that arise over government control and their various laws and mandates and when and if a church should follow them, or not. I'm trying to see if I can establish a template for determining the right thing — the *scriptural* thing — to do in cases like this. I readily admit, the idea of government mandates that affect how we assemble and worship is something I haven't seen in seven decades of attendance at churches. Anyway, I'm thinking out loud; if I was more certain I was right, I would probably preach on it. But I'm not and I anticipate and welcome dissent. dpaulposey@mac.com

Wearing a mask during a pandemic seems to be a small thing, on its surface. People in Zimbabwe probably think we are spoiled beyond redemption. But there is no doubt that this relatively minor mandate has become a political hot potato and, therefore, potentially divisive for churches. The reason for that has little to do with a piece of cloth over one's face. Yes, it's uncomfortable and probably not very effective if you keep touching it all time (according to early Dr. Fauci), but there is more to it than that.

So what's the issue? Why is it so divisive? The **inconsistency in the messaging** hasn't helped. Dr. Fauci, early on, told us that you could wear a mask if it makes you "feel" safer but they aren't all that effective. He later walked that back claiming he did some strategic lying in order to avoid a run on N-95 masks, but the proverbial cat was out of the bag — that video of Dr. Fauci is still being played whenever it can get past the Facebook and Twitter censors. We were also told at the beginning of all this that wearing a mask without social distancing didn't accomplish much. What has changed?

Moreover, we were assured that when we got vaccinated, then all would be well — no more mandates. Now, we are being told the opposite. Any fair-minded person who has followed all this is scratching their head and wondering what comes next.

It also doesn't help when some who are convinced that masks work are so radical about it that they literally, and ironically, "get in the face" of those who aren't wearing them. Even if we support mask-wearing, we probably don't wear them while alone, outside, or while driving alone in the car (I give the latter a break because I forgot to take my mask off a time or two).

But all that begs the question. If the government tells us to do something, shouldn't we do it? I've argued that and the answer for us *as individuals* is easy, as long as the law does not require that we disobey God. Romans 13:1-7 and I Peter 2:13-14 seems to cover that pretty well. But lately I've been asking, *does that extend to the church?*

Both of those texts seem to be addressed to individuals, not the church, as the church. In other words, another question is this: does the government have any right to tell a *church* (the local *ecclesia*) what it must do when it gathers? I have been exploring our obedience to government from that angle. Romans 13 (etc.) tells us that God

established government and we are, generally, supposed to obey the government. Jesus told us to "render to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God what is God's" (22:21). If we can't render to Caesar without disobeying God, then God's will always trumps Caesar. We all agree with that (Acts 5:29).

But there's another question we need to address: is the doctrine, work and worship of the church within the government's domain to regulate? No one I know teaches that the government can control what we teach from the Bible. But let's think about the rest of it. The premise we've been operating from is this:^{*} *Christians/churches must submit to all government regulations unless there is a clear command/prohibition in Scripture to the contrary.*

Since "clear command" is rather vague, perhaps a more accurate premise is this: *Christians/churches must submit to every government regulation unless it would mean disobeying God (i.e., cause them to sin) or the government is seeking to regulate something outside its sphere of authority.* If we accept that premise, is the doctrine, work and worship within the *sphere of authority* of the government?

We can identify three things that God "instituted": the home (Genesis 2), governments (Romans 13, etc.) and the church (Matthew 16:18). The government has limited authority over the home. But how about the church? Local governments impose rules that must be followed in the building of a house but the way the parents conduct themselves in the privacy of their home is none of the government's business unless there is criminal activity taking place there. Even then, they must get a search warrant to enter the house. The day-to-day activities in the house are outside the scope of the government.

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^{*} I borrowed the language in these two paragraphs from an article by Ben Edwards, at dotes.edu, GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS AND THE GATHERING OF THE CHURCH

Is it different for a church? It's a sincere question and I'm not the only one asking it. All of us would agree that if the government tried to tell us what to teach or how or when to observe the Lord's Supper, they would be exceeding their sphere of authority. Look at our homes again; can the government *require* people to wear masks — or follow any other protocol — while in their own homes? I'm not aware that our ruling class has even seriously attempted to do that (though I'm sure some would love to). The home was instituted by God and is sacrosanct for that reason. The government has no right to intrude. But, God has also established the church as a separate institution from the government and the home. Does the government have any right to dictate what a church does in its assemblies? Where is that right spelled out in scripture? That's the question that I'm asking. To what degree, if any, can the government impose it's rules on what we do in the household of God?

I realize we won't all agree that the government has no right to mandate mask-wearing — or any other rule that affects our assembling of the church and, as I said at the beginning, I'm still thinking through all of this. But even if we *did* agree that government can't order it, we may still choose to wear them. Why? Here are a few reasons that readily come to mind:

- 1) Individual members may decide that wearing a mask in this situation is the most loving thing to do (John 13:34-35)
- 2) If we are convinced that masks are effective against the spread of a disease, the elders may require members to wear them (and take any other precautions to avoid the spread of the disease). Hebrews 13:17

- 3) Other members may determine that the risk is so small that wearing masks is unnecessary and, in fact, negatively affects worship for them so they choose not to wear them.
- 4) Others may choose to wear a mask because they are aware of or concerned that there may be non-members present who could be negatively influenced if we fail to wear a mask, given the government's orders. (I Corinthians 9:17-23)
- 5) We could choose to wear masks because of the possibility that we are offending other brethren. There may be members in the church who will not attend unless everyone wears a mask and cite Romans 14:1ff. in support of their position. This is more difficult to sustain than #4 for a couple of reasons. (1) This could cut both ways; some could say they will not attend if everyone is wearing a mask. (2) Romans 14 is not a club for certain persnickety members to use it to get their way. It simply commands that we accept those who have different views of matters of judgment; it is not a warrant for the any member to run roughshod over the whole group.

Conclusion

I have not come to a conclusion, which is a little frustrating. It's obvious, I think, that I'm *leaning* toward the position that the government has a much more limited role in the life of a church than we get from just tossing out Romans 13 and I Peter 2 as a blanket rule.

Masks are a relatively minor issue to debate but the next time the government orders us out of our building we may need to get much more serious about discussing it. Again, I invite dissent. You won't offend me. And consider Robert F. Turner's missive below.

Who Cares? So What?

Is there a "right" and a "wrong"? Is there "truth" beyond which is "error;" things authorized, beyond which are things unauthorized? Is there a standard by which such is established? We discourage a hasty answer; and suggest some careful soul-searching, before you commit yourself to something you do not really believe, for the consequences are tremendous.

There is the choice between man as his own final authority, and God, his Maker and Superior. At this point it is important to recognize that if God is the final authority, a revelation of truth and right cannot be subject to man's feeling or approval. It must be approached objectively, and we may safely assume that God would make His will understandable to His creatures. (Who made man's "mind"?)

Then, there is the choice between man as a robot, his will, words, and actions pre-determined — so that God is just playing games with Himself; or, man as a free moral agent. Walk with care! Walk with care! For with free will there is responsibility, and there must be final judgment. Ability, responsibility, and accountability; these are inseparable concepts, each supporting and necessitating the others. Even if God is removed from the scene, man must respond and give account of that response to his fellow man, and to him, if, failing this, his existence is utterly without meaning. Put God into the scene — you can't keep Him out — and responsibility becomes awesome.

Not impossible — responsibility is linked with ability; not terrifying — for the "fear" of God is reverence for a loving Father; but awesome nonetheless. Its burden is cushioned by the "good news" of His love, mercy, and sacrifice on our behalf; and by "the recompense of the reward."

So that when one stops to think about it — and brother, I do hope you will stop to think about it — we can ill afford the popular "Who Cares?" or "So What?" attitude. Nor can we allow an emotional "love" to blind us to the realities of divine authority. It is false peace that ignores one's need to know and conscientiously follow the word of God.

—Robert F. Turner, PLAIN TALK, Sept., 1977