

## The Overarching Issues at hand

### *The Lordship of Christ*

You may have seen a number articles recently reminding believers that Jesus is Lord over the entire created world and He, alone, is head of the church. Colossians 1:15-18 reads, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn [King] over all creation... For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

In one sense, this text reminds us that Christ *has* supremacy in all things. He is already supreme right now. He is currently in control of all the happenings on earth. He set the norms. He set the boundaries. He now actively holds together all the necessities for life. Nothing is out of his scope of sight or authority, and there is nothing to which His word does not sufficiently give counsel. Like a king who deals with lawful and unlawful citizens alike, in due course of their lives in the kingdom, Jesus has given the citizens of the world a place to live and thrive, with wise counsel, wise law, due process of life, an offer of mercy for the guilty, and He will unquestionably bring about final justice to all.

In another sense, however, Col 1:18 means that Christ *should have* supremacy in all things. We do “not yet” see all things placed under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25–28; Heb. 2:8; cf. Phil. 2:11). This text is a purpose clause, expressing God’s intention to ultimately bring all of creation under His rule through Christ.<sup>1</sup> Even though rebellion still persists at this time, Christ rules the church with the purpose of transforming her and He is also able to transform other institutions if they would turn to him as well. Not all kings, emperors, or governments submit to Christ now, but they should. Not all the powerful CEOs, school administrators, or entertainers submit to Christ now, but they should. Not all judicial authorities submit themselves to Christ now, but they should. In other words, we should expect to see our Christian witness and evangelistic efforts affect the social and moral character of individuals, families, and society-at-large as we draw them to Christ.<sup>2</sup> The more the church influences a nation to repent of their sin and accept Christ as Lord, the more the entire nation lives as it *should* be.

So, how do we Christians live with Christ as Lord, because we know that He *is* Lord, and at the same time call everyone around us to trust Him His because He *should* be their Lord too? And even more difficult, how do we Christians live with Christ as our Lord when our secular culture (secular ideas externalized<sup>3</sup>) is actively trying to compel us to do the opposite?

### *The Church’s Consecration to Christ*

More and more we Christians in the West are now living as exiles within our secular and pluralistic lands. This may not mean we face extreme difficulty now, but more and more we

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2008), 130.

<sup>2</sup> Boot, Joseph. *The Mission of God: A Manifesto of Hope for Society*. Wilberforce Publications Ltd.. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Boot, Joseph. *The Mission of God: A Manifesto of Hope for Society*. Wilberforce Publications Ltd.. Kindle Edition.

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share the experiences of Bible characters like Esther and Paul when they were accused of doing evil for not following their culture's customs.

Haman was the Jews' accuser in Esther's time. He said, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them" (Es 3:8). Local business men accused Paul and Silas of similar behaviours in the Roman world. "They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice (Ac 16:20-21)."" In each situation, the accusers were motivated by personal anger and personal gain, but the mud they slung still stuck, somewhat. The people of God have and will always stand out morally and practically when Christ's commands differ from popular cultural customs.

For example, we live in a time when people trust "social science." This means we seek to project and manage most social outcomes by studying behaviour patterns. Statistics, charts, and questionnaires rule our decision making processes. Furthermore, we live in a time where it is common for people to believe "If everyone is doing it, it must be right." We've become comfortable with the idea of appealing to individuals as being predictable. We attempt to predict what they want and align our purposes with those desires. We ask, "what if, what if, what if," more than we ask "what." As well, our culture has moved distinctly agnostic and atheistic. This means people commonly reject God and elevate the hard sciences to be able to answer all of life's ultimate questions. Questions of origins, purpose, ethics and morality, and final destination are all expected to reside in the material world alone.

In this climate, we must consecrate ourselves to God despite all the luring and bullying from other rebellious global citizens. Consecration is the act of choosing to do something sacred by aligning ones actions with God's revealed purposes, embodying His laws, and at the same time declaring it to be sacred by recognizing God publicly and proclaiming the Word of God out loud. When we are tempted to trust statistics, we must do what God says. When we are tempted to people please, we must do what God says. When we are sidelined by those who presume God is not in control, we must do what God says.

We don't know the outcomes concerning all of life's difficulties, but we do what God says.

### **Our Plan for Peaceful Sacred Assembly<sup>4</sup>**

***We are called by God to hold sacred assemblies and gather weekly for public worship. Therefore, we will not submit to a government-imposed closure on our weekly worship or other sacred gatherings.***

Compliance to closure would be disobedience to our Lord's clear commands (Ex 12:16, Lev 8:1-4, Deut 31:11-14, Acts 20:28, Jn 21:15-17, Heb 10:24-25, Acts 2:42). Some will think such a firm statement is erroneously in conflict with the command to be subject to governing authorities laid out in Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. Scripture does mandate careful obedience to governing authorities, "Not only to those who are good and gentle, but also to those who are unreasonable" (1 Peter 2:18).

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<sup>4</sup> Much of this section was informed by <https://www.gracechurch.org/news/posts/1988>. John MacArthur's leadership, and that of his elders', have been helpful in this area. Where he and his elders' wording was well crafted it was used in this section.

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In response, we assert that God has established three institutions within human society: the family, the state, and the church. Each institution has a sphere of authority with jurisdictional limits that must be respected (Gen. 2:21-25; 9:5-6; 1 Sam. 13:10-14; 1 Kgs. 21:1-16; Matt 28:18; Mark 12:13-17; John 19:5-12; Acts 5:22-32; Col. 1:15-20; Eph. 1:20-23; 1 Tim. 3:14-16; Rev. 1:5).

The church does not have the right to control the affairs of individual families and ignore parental authority. Parents do not have authority to manage civil matters to circumvent the judicial system's treatment of a child. And similarly, government officials have no right to interfere in the church's worship in a way that undermines or disregards the God-given authority of pastors, elders, and Christian parents.

While civil government is invested with divine authority to enforce a righteous criminal code within the boundaries of a nation or community, God has not granted civic rulers authority over all things. They cannot limit or redefine God's Word. They cannot redefine the doctrines, practices, or polity of the church. Nor should they ever rob families of their ability to earn, manage, and distribute private funds as instructed by God when he commanded the family (not the state) to "be fruitful and multiply." In fact, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms was established to protect us from such previously precedented governmental overreach.

Everyone has the following fundamental freedoms:

- (a) freedom of conscience and religion;
- (b) freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication;
- (c) freedom of peaceful assembly; and
- (d) freedom of association.

If these freedoms are threatened or abolished, we meet a totalitarian and absolutistic state with no guarantees for any form of religious freedom.<sup>5</sup> If and when a closure on weekly worship is imposed in the future, our peaceful sacred assembly will become an act of peaceful protest as supported by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. We believe that when any one of the three institutions exceeds the bounds of its jurisdiction it is the duty of Christians to help curtail that overreach (Matthew 16:18-19; 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2, Acts 5:29). We respectfully say with the apostles, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge."

***We are told by our Lord to have courage when faced with danger, yet each of us faces his own situation. Therefore, we will let people's eyes, faith, and consciences guide their own health and sanitation practices.***

Through examples, such as Moses passing leadership to Joshua, we learn to trust God in terrifying times: "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" (Dt 31:5-6). Upon reflecting on the faith of his forefathers, Paul teaches Timothy truth by saying, "I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did... For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline" (2 Ti 1:7). We, the people of God, are not supposed to fear or mourn the same way that other non-believers fear. We have hope that God is in complete control, even if we get sick and die. For we call others to believe in God who will raise us from the dead. We preach the greatest hope to all of the earth — the resurrection!

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<sup>5</sup> Joe Boot, <https://www.ezrainstitute.ca/resource-library/articles/freedom-the-church-and-state-absolutism>.

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On August 2, 1527, the bubonic plague struck Wittenberg, Germany. Fearing for the safety of Luther and the other professors at the university, on August 10 Elector John ordered Luther to leave for Jena. Five days later the university moved to Jena, then to Schlieben near Wittenberg, where it remained until April of the following year. Unmoved by the elector's letter or by the pleas of his friends, Luther, along with Bugenhagen, stayed to minister to the sick and frightened people. During that time of ministry, Luther wrote an open letter:

“To begin with, some people are of the firm opinion that one need not and should not run away from a deadly plague. Rather, since death is God's punishment, which he sends upon us for our sins, we must submit to God and with a true and firm faith patiently await our punishment. They look upon running away as an outright wrong and as lack of belief in God. Others take the position that one may properly flee, particularly if one holds no public office.”

“I cannot censure the former for their excellent decision. They uphold a good cause, namely, a strong faith in God, and deserve commendation because they desire every Christian to hold to a strong, firm faith. It takes more than a milk faith to await a death before which most of the saints themselves have been and still are in dread. Who would not acclaim these earnest people to whom death is a little thing? They willingly accept God's chastisement, doing so without tempting God, as we shall hear later on... But let him not condemn those who will not or cannot do the same. Examples in Holy Scripture abundantly prove that to flee from death is not wrong in itself... This is what we think and conclude on this subject of fleeing from death by the plague. If you are of a different opinion, may God enlighten you. Amen.<sup>6</sup>

For the sake of information, we will post what the government recommends, but we will not enforce those recommendations or restrict any of our member's or adherent's ability to worship God with a clear conscience when they join us at a meeting. For the sake of unity, we encourage each person to use God's wisdom to mitigate risk as they see fit. To flee from death is not wrong.

However, we expect believers to desire to worship God as he commanded. We expect people to be filled with faith and hope in Christ. We expect people to be courageous as they offer their bodies as living sacrifices. Thus, we encourage people to join us for weekly worship while making their own preparations for safety and taking their own precautions as their consciences bear.

The church is not like a man driving down the highway at 180 kms an hour, while drinking, vaping, and texting. That kind of risk is reckless. The church is more like a fire fighter, who observes each situation as it currently is, calculates and thinks for himself in consultation with his unit, and then moves cautiously to fulfill his calling. We have a similar calling that is risky. It is the calling to tell people to put their hope in Jesus Christ. We have observed, calculated, and consulted. Now we are moving forward cautiously to announce hope in the resurrection.

***Christ's law Compels Us Not to Give False Witness. We have assessed the situation as it currently is and will not be complicit any more in propagating an exaggerated situation.***

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<sup>6</sup> Martin Luther, Luther's Works, Vol. 43: Devotional Writings II, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 43 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1999), 115-123.

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Some will think such a firm stance is erroneously in conflict with the expert opinions of trusted and respected epidemiologists.

In response we assert that the closures, health advisements, and bylaw fines do not reflect the severity of the virus in anyway that we can see with our own eyes.

The elders of Grace Alliston initially consented to the original government orders. We stopped meeting in person, then we met outside as much as possible — following the recommendations as much as possible. We could not possibly have known the true severity of the virus, and because we care about the people God has entrusted to us, we believed a short shut down might be helpful to slow the spread of serious contagions. We voluntarily followed the initial recommendations of our government, in the same way as it is legitimate for Christians to abstain from the assembly of saints temporarily in the face of illness.

However, when the devastating lockdown began, it was supposed to be a short-term stopgap measure, with the goal to “flatten the curve” — meaning they wanted to slow the rate of infection to ensure that hospitals weren't overwhelmed. There were horrific projections of death and there was significant pressure to comply from our “health experts.” We didn't like the measures. Most of us were skeptical within a few weeks of the lockdown when we didn't see any serious illness in our community.

Now more than six months into the restrictions, it is apparent that the original projections of death were inaccurate and no longer viable.

In Canada, scenarios went from 350,000 deaths, to 44,000 deaths, to 22,000 deaths, to 11,000 deaths, to now 9,146. Now both the CDC in the US and Public Health England report that Covid-19 death rates are inflated numbers. The CDC reported that in only 6% of all deaths was Covid-19 the only cause mentioned. That means 94% of US deaths had serious co-morbidities (such as old age, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and respiratory illness). The Department of Health in England says, “You could have been tested positive in February, have had no symptoms, then be hit by a bus in July and you'd now be recorded as a Covid death.”<sup>7</sup>

71.4% of all deaths across Canada are those who are 80+, often within the confines of institutional settings, like long-term care facilities. In all of Simcoe County, a population of 307,000 people, two people are currently in the hospital with Covid-19. 37 have died with Covid-19 (remember 35 would have had co-morbidities). Comparatively, 21 people died in Simcoe County with influenza in 2017.

The virus is nowhere near as dangerous as originally feared. Still, fifty percent of the year has passed with our church essentially unable to gather in a normal way. Pastors' ability to shepherd their flocks has been severely curtailed. The unity and influence of the church has been threatened. Division in the church still rips deep. Opportunities for believers to serve and minister to one another have been missed. This has been magnified beyond anything that could reasonably be considered just or necessary.

Statism is when a government manages every sphere of life. In Canada, our government is already comfortable with this kind of overreach regarding many social policies. Covid-19 has been a more difficult case to discern overreach, but we have now observed our Prime Minister ignoring social distancing in order to protest with BLM. We have also observed our Ontario

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/21/analysis-why-englands-covid-19-death-toll-is-wrong-but-not-by-much>.

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Premier ignoring his own gathering limitations by saying, “just use common sense.” Lastly we have observed the mayor of Brampton playing hockey throughout the pandemic while fining others in his city for doing similar things.<sup>8</sup> On three levels of government, the elected officials are not consistent with their own recommendations.

Furthermore, major public events that were planned for 2021 are already being canceled, signalling that officials are preparing to keep restrictions in place into next year and beyond. Bill 195. That forces churches to choose between the clear command of our Lord and the government officials.

Therefore, following the authority of our Lord Jesus Christ, both for the promotion of worship and the family, we are putting these exaggerations behind us and we gladly choose to obey Him rather than propagate socialist policies and Draconian measures.

### ***For those who want to worship socially distant, we will accommodate them in the prayer room.***

Grace is to have a culture of respect for individuals and families. This culture is characterized by commitments to mutual support, and effective practical care for each other in all circumstances. This attitude is clearly taught in Scripture, Phil 2:3-4. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.” Eph. 4:32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you”. These basic biblical principles are to be practiced and applied in these “new” circumstances as they always have been. We are to be known by our love for one another.

In applying these biblical principles in a practical manner we are adopting the following practices.

The prayer room will be for the exclusive use of those who wish to wear masks.

Those using the prayer room may arrive in a manner in which they do not have to be close to other worshippers.

The seating in the prayer room may be arranged so the family group, couples or individuals can sit observing social distancing

Persons not wearing masks are to respect and support those wishing to worship in the prayer room and are not to enter the prayer room or engage those using the room in conversations.

These reasonable accommodations are expressions of our care, concern and love for those who choose to worship God in our services. It would be inconsistent with biblical principles to have a judgemental or critical attitude to persons who have come to different conclusion concerning how they determined their personal risk factors and are responding to Covid - 19 circumstances differently.

Rom. 12:10, “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.”

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<sup>8</sup> The Brampton actually redefined a public space to being “non-public” because it wasn’t “open to the public” so that they could ignore this Mayoral violation. [https://www.rebelnews.com/brampton\\_ontario\\_mayor\\_patrick\\_brown\\_caught\\_breaking\\_pandemic\\_rules\\_closed\\_hockey\\_arena](https://www.rebelnews.com/brampton_ontario_mayor_patrick_brown_caught_breaking_pandemic_rules_closed_hockey_arena)