



18-24 Isa St, Mount Isa, Qld, 4825  
postal: P O Box 634  
ph: 07-47435515  
email: office@mountisabaptist.com.au  
web: www.mountisabaptist.com.au  
Pastor: Timothy Grant

Hi Church Family,

Many of the issues surrounding COVID are difficult to discuss because of the various perspectives surrounding government policy and mandates. However, the state government has announced that on the 17 December 2021, unvaccinated people will not be able to enter certain facilities. As the state has brought this issue to the forefront, I thought it prudent to pen a statement that I hope is scripturally sound, so that we can bear with one another through a particularly tense and divisive period.

For the sake of how I believe we should view and treat one another, I would like to draw your attention to the passage that has provided me with guidance through this issue of vaccination, namely Romans 14.

Here, Paul directs the church on how to navigate matters that are not related to the moral law (i.e., sin). Paul assures us that in any church setting there will be various “opinions” (Romans 14:1). The word “opinions” can be equally translated as “conclusions reached through reasoning.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul acknowledges that two separate Christians, reasoning in light of scripture and endeavouring to apply the Lordship of Christ to their lives, will, sometimes, arrive at different conclusions (Romans 14:2). These conclusions are not to be treated lightly, namely, they entail the formation of conscience in the life of a Christian, which directly pertains to “faith” and “sin” (Romans 14:23). “Faith” and “sin” are matters that are first and foremost directed toward God (Psalm 51:4). One action originates from “faith” and puts the conscience at ease, yet another action proceeds not from faith and causes the conscience to become uneasy because that action is in fact sin (Romans 14:14, 23).

In the life of the Christian, the conscience cannot be separated from reasoning in the light of Scripture, and Scripture cannot be separated from its mediation of the Lordship of Christ over the life of a saint. A Christian who has reasoned in the light of scripture will endeavour to be consistent with the conclusions to which they have arrived. Although, as Paul argues, Christians may arrive at different conclusions on matters of “opinions,” and so he also urges neither to quarrel over these matters (Romans 14:1), nor to judge others on these matters, nor to place a stumbling block in the life of a believer (Romans 14:4,13). Why? Because to compel a Christian to act in discord with his conclusions is to cause them to become inconsistent with their biblical reasoning.

One such issue that would fall into this category is vaccinations. The Bible provides no clear command for or against this matter,<sup>2</sup> and therefore it seems to fall outside of the jurisdiction of moral absolutes and onto matters of conscience.

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<sup>1</sup> Arndt, W., Danker, F. W., Bauer, W., & Gingrich, F. W. (2000). A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament and other early Christian literature (3rd ed., p. 232). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 7:25

Reasoning in light of Scripture, one Christian may view vaccination through the lens of passages such as Mark 12:31, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' Aware of benefits for self and others.<sup>3</sup> They will gladly receive a vaccine, and in their conscience, they honour God. Another Christian may reason from passages such as 1 Corinthians 6:19-20, "do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body." Namely, that because the body has been purchased by God and belongs to God there is a personal responsibility of stewardship of the body, and therefore a need to be free to make individual decisions about health and medical treatments. Such an individual may hold a sincere belief that his or her (or child's) life, health or ethical integrity is potentially endangered by such procedures.<sup>4</sup>

The possibility of dual perspectives on such matters is admissible by Paul, and he describes the possibility of such an outcome in Romans 14:14, "I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus that nothing is unclean in itself, but it is unclean for anyone who thinks it unclean." However to force one of these Biblical perspectives onto a Christian Brother or Sister would be to make the error of 'binding of conscience' that is, usurping the place of God, in the life of a believer. We need to let the individual make a choice on this matter, as it is the individual believer that must give an account before God (Romans 14:10).


This perspective on vaccines is not novel within Christendom and does have a historical precedence. Writing in 1777, John Newton, the author of Amazing Grace penned the following words,

"...if a person who fears the Lord should tell me, I think I can do it in faith, looking upon [inoculation] as a salutary expedient, which he in his providence has discovered, and which therefore appears my duty to have recourse to, so that my mind does not hesitate with respect to the lawfulness, nor am I anxious about the event; being satisfied, that whether I live or die, I am in that path in which I can cheerfully expect his blessing; I do not know that I could offer a word by way of dissuasion.

If another person should say, My times are in the Lord's hands; I am now in health, and am not willing to bring upon myself a disorder, the consequences of which I cannot possibly foresee. If I am to have the small-pox, I believe he is the best judge of the season and manner in which I shall be visited, so as may be most for his glory and my own good; and therefore I choose to wait his appointment, and not to rush upon even the possibility of danger without a call... If a person should talk to me in this strain, most certainly I could not say, Notwithstanding all this, your safest way is to be inoculated.<sup>5</sup>

Though John Newton was an Anglican Minister, his advice reflects an important Baptist distinctive, that of liberty of conscience or toleration. In the Seventeenth century, after decades of suffering for the sake of conscience, both the Particular (Calvinistic) Baptists and the General (Arminian) Baptists produced similar confessions regarding liberty of conscience. The most well known of these confessions is the 1689 London Baptist Confession of Faith, which reads,

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<sup>3</sup>  A Christian Doctor's Perspective on the COVID -19 Vaccines by Dr James Yun

<sup>4</sup> <https://founders.org/2021/10/20/grace-baptist-church-statement-on-religious-exemption-to-mandatory-medical-procedures/>

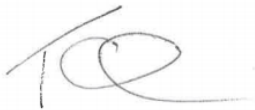
<sup>5</sup> Newton, J., & Cecil, R. (1824). *The Works of John Newton* (Vol. 2, pp. 129–130). London: Hamilton, Adams & Co.

God alone is Lord of the conscience, and has left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or not contained in it. So that to believe such doctrines, or obey such commands out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience; and the requiring of an implicit faith, an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience and reason also.<sup>6</sup>

Namely, on matters not pertaining to God's moral law, Christians should be free to act according to conscience.

It is soon going to be evident what choice people have made regarding vaccination. I would encourage you, in light of Romans 14, not to judge each other but rather to patiently bear with one another in love and service. I believe this is both a Biblical perspective and a Baptist perspective.

On behalf of the Elders,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tim Grant', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Tim Grant  
Pastor | Mount Isa Baptist Church

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.the1689confession.com/1689/chapter-21>