

Will Our Church Follow All the Covid Guidelines?

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[0 : 00] Greetings to all of you who are watching or listening today. My name is Joshua Winters and I serve as a pastor here in the Davidson Community Bible Church in Davidson, Saskatchewan.

And for the past two, almost three months now, we have been, we've had our regular gatherings suspended because of COVID-19.

We, many of us have been worshiping at home on Sunday mornings. I've been here at the church filming my messages every week so that people can watch them at home.

We've been doing a weekly Zoom call for fellowship and for prayer on Sundays. And we've been waiting patiently for the day when we can come together in person like we did before.

Well, I'm excited to let you know that for those of us here in Davidson, that day is near. As of tomorrow, the province has now given us the green light to hold gatherings up to 30 people in places of worship.

[1 : 19] So long as we follow the requirements that they have provided. The elders and I met this past week and we have been reviewing those guidelines, those requirements.

And we've been making plans to resume our worship services. As of right now, we're hoping that we can have our first gathering outdoors on Father's Day, Sunday, June 21st.

And that we can return to worship in our facility here on Sunday, June 28th. Just at the end of the month here.

So I'm really excited at the possibility of us getting back together to be worshiping together in person, to be fellowshiping together as a church in person.

And I want to encourage you just to keep your eyes on the weekly emails that will go out on Fridays because all the details about these things are going to be there.

[2 : 30] We'll have some in the Facebook group as well and some on the website. But if you're not getting that email or if you're not subscribed, please let me know.

Give me a text or give me a phone call and I'd be happy to add you to the list. We want to make sure that everybody in the church is receiving that information so that we can all kind of resume together in a smooth fashion.

So those things being said, I am excited. But I want to begin to prepare us a little bit as a church for coming back together again.

As we've been reviewing these guidelines and looking at them, I want to let you know that church for the next while is going to look very different than it has in the past.

There are three pages of guidelines or requirements that have been given to us by the government. And we're going to do our best to follow all of them.

[3 : 43] And we think that's important. And so in today's message and possibly next week's as well, we're going to be hitting the pause button on the Gospel of John series that we've been working through.

And my hope today is to give us something that will help us, especially help us in our hearts, just to prepare for all of this change and transition that we're about to go through as a church.

If you're listening or watching today and you're a member of another church, this message is for you. Most of it will be applicable to you as well.

Every church is going to have a bit of a different approach to resuming worship. And I'd encourage you to be listening carefully to what the leaders of your church are saying and how they envision things going forward.

It's going to look different for everyone. But at the end of the day, a lot of the requirements are going to be very similar or some maybe even the same in our province.

[4 : 56] And so there's hopefully something for you here as well. So the question that we're going to look at today is simply this.

Why must we follow the requirements of the government? Why must we follow the requirements that the government has given us as we seek to resume worship in the midst of all this COVID-19 stuff?

Now, the answer to that may seem obvious to some, but to others, maybe not so much. We have heard a lot from the government in the past weeks and months.

We have heard a lot of recommendations. We have heard a lot of requirements. We've seen a lot of change which has been led by the government.

We've seen a few public health orders go out and all kinds of updates. And let's acknowledge here at the beginning that the response of many people has been all over the place to what the government has been saying and asking.

[6 : 11] The response of some has been appreciative. They're thankful for the leadership of the government through all of this, happy to do my part and help flatten the curve.

For others, it's been very frustrating because these changes have affected your life in a deep way, perhaps with a loss of income or a lower income.

Or I know for many of you, you've had troubles getting access to the health care that you need and you've had to endure months of pain because of all this and the changes that it's brought to the health care system.

Others are simply upset at this stuff that the government has let us in and has asked of us and see it as way overreacted and far too restrictive.

Many people are quite confident that they know better than the government what should be done in this particular situation for our province and for our nation.

[7 : 22] And then you've got some people that are way out there in left field who believe this whole thing is a conspiracy theory that a few have orchestrated or are managing to their benefit and at the expense of everyone else.

Here in our own community of Davidson, there's a full spectrum and variety of attitudes and ideas. I've seen some people for sure who are just not, don't feel that the virus is a threat here in Davidson and as a result have been just basically throwing the social distancing thing to the wind.

Even in our church, there is a bit of a variety of perspectives and opinions when it comes to all of this. And so how are we as a church going to navigate through all this when we don't even agree necessarily on what the truth is and on what's really going on here, on which laws are good laws and those kinds of things?

Well, my encouragement as a pastor is that we go back to God's word and we listen to him and we plant our anchor firmly there.

And I believe that that will give us the clarity that we need to make decisions and to live our lives in a way that honors God in the days ahead. And so that's what we want to do this morning.

[8 : 49] Our question is, why must we submit or follow the requirements that the government has given to us? And our answer this morning, I'm going to change it up and give it at the beginning here, is that it doesn't matter whether we believe this pandemic is a conspiracy or not, or whether we agree with all of the guidelines and requirements that have been given or not.

At the end of the day, we are to submit to those who are in government as Christians because God wants us to.

Now, where do we get that from? If you have a Bible with you, let's open it up to Romans chapter 13. Romans chapter 13.

This is a letter from Paul written to the church living in Rome. And these are not just the words of Paul, just a man. These are the words of God.

These are the words of Jesus, who Paul is an apostle of. What does God have to say to us here? Let me read it for us. Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

[10 : 12] The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong.

Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right, and you will be commended. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good.

But if you do wrong, be afraid. For rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.

Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment, but also as a matter of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants who give their full time to governing.

[11 : 30] Give to everyone what you owe them. If you owe taxes, pay taxes. If revenue, then revenue. If respect, then respect.

If honor, then honor. Now, there is a lot here in this passage. And for today, I'm going to limit myself to just three things here in this passage.

The first thing that I think we need to see here is that submitting to the government is a command. It's something that we are commanded to do by Christ.

Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities. That's the language of command. It's the imperative language in the original.

And the sense of it is this. All of you who are Christians, who are part of the church there in Rome, submit yourselves to those who are in government over you.

[12 : 31] And this kind of language is carried on throughout this section. Down in verse 3. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right.

Paul tells them, do it. Do what is right. Which in this context means obey the law. Don't break the law. Verse 5.

Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities. Verse 7. In the context of this discussion, give to everyone what you owe them.

This is a command. The language is that of it being necessary. And that's really what I want us to see here. Is that submitting to the government, obeying the government, is not optional.

It's not just a holy suggestion. It's not something that we're to do when we agree with the particular law that's being given. And that we are exempt from doing when we don't agree with that particular law or requirement or public health order.

[13 : 44] It's something that we are commanded to do. By the Lord. Now, there are of course situations in which we are maybe commanded by the government to do something that's immoral.

That's evil. And in that case, of course, we would obey God rather than the government. All of this COVID-19 situation is not that kind of an issue.

And so, we must, as Christians, as a church, obey our government. I find it interesting here too that, I mean, we might think to ourselves, well, our government is corrupt.

Our government is evil. Our government is introducing such and such a legislation. Paul doesn't say anything about the quality of government as if it could be a loophole or an excuse to not obey.

Let's remember the government of the day. As Paul is writing, we have the godless Roman emperor. I mean, ruthless man.

[14 : 57] By no means a righteous man. Making decisions, making wars all over the place.

I mean, our government is nothing compared to that. And so, as Christians, we are being commanded.

It's clear that we are to submit to the governing authorities that God has put in our lives. Now, we'll notice throughout this section that we've been given, this is the second thing, many reasons to submit.

All throughout this. And we should listen to all of those reasons. In fact, God has given those reasons to us in order to help us in our hearts to do this in a way that honors him.

Paul speaks about the matter of conscience in verse 5. He talks about how this is really what we're obligated to do down in verses 6 and 7.

[15 : 59] It's something that's right in verse 3. But probably the biggest reason that we see comes in the very first two verses.

Paul tells us this. He says, Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established.

So, authority is something that God himself has established. He is supportive of human government and authority structure in the world that he has created.

In fact, Paul applies it too. The authorities that exist, he says, have been established by God. Those who hold those positions have come to them because God has established them in those positions. Now, that doesn't mean that God agrees with everything they do or every law they pass or decision they make. But it does mean that he is sovereignly at work governing in the larger global sense of the picture.

[17:10] And that he, in a general sense, is in favor of human government. We'll leave it to God to deal with those who abuse the authority that he has entrusted to them for however long.

But authority is God's idea. It's something that he has given. And it's surprising here.

Paul even goes as far as to say that those in authority are God's servants. He says it three times in verse 4. For the one in authority is God's servant.

A little further down, they are God's servants. A little further down in verse 6. For the authorities are God's servants. The picture we get is that God wants it this way.

He has set it up this way. And so, the implication which Paul brings out is rather strong in verse 2.

He says, consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted.

[18:17] And those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. So, I think we should apply this not just to the church there in Rome at that time, but to ourselves today.

Those who just ignore and decide, I'm not going to do that. To the public health orders that have been given. To the requirements that have been given by the government.

Do not just rebel against the authority. The Saskatchewan government. The Canadian government. But we rebel against what God has instituted.

And that's a place I don't think we should be as Christians. A place which should cause us to tremble. Finally, the third thing I want us to see here in this passage is God's intention for authority. Why has God given human government and authority? We might be reading this and hear the authorities that exist have been established by God to make laws that make our lives miserable and take away our freedoms.

[19:33] No. That's not what Paul says. In fact, Paul seems to say the opposite. The reason that God has put human government in our world is not to punish us or to hurt us, to make our lives miserable, but the opposite.

Verse 4. For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. For your benefit. And he gives an example of one of the things that human governments do for the benefit of people.

And that's to keep wrongdoers in check. To deter them through law, through enforcement, through power.

From breaking the law and from doing whatever they please. From taking advantage of whoever they want to. Now, of course, our governments don't do this perfectly. And none will.

Only God himself and the government that the Lord Jesus brings will do it perfectly. But in a general sense, do you hear that message that comes through here?

[20:43] That human government has been given for your good? It's a gift of God to the world to accomplish his good purposes? I hope you hear that.

And so it's pretty clear from God's word, and this isn't the only place that speaks of it, that we as Christians, as a church, are to submit to the governing authorities.

Those in government over us. Now, that being said, it doesn't make it necessarily easy to do this.

The command is clear, but that doesn't make it easy to submit to governing authorities. And we've experienced that in the past weeks and months with all of these changes and all of these directions and requirements that have come from the government.

Some of them have been very difficult. I mean, keeping a distance from people and not seeing people like we used to and not doing the things that we want to do, this is not easy.

[21:43] One of the requirements that's been given for churches as we begin to open up again, I'll just be honest, I do not like it.

The requirement is this. It's although not recommended, when singing, participants must wear masks. I'll be honest, I do not want to wear a mask.

And even just this requirement bothers me. I mean, I'm sitting here in the sanctuary, and I've already got the chairs spaced two meters apart, and it's a good distance.

Do we really need it that much further? Does the spit fly that far out of your mouth when you're singing? Does the government not understand just how important worship is to us?

As Christians, we are a worshipping people. Our God is worthy of praise, and not just humming, but singing.

[22 : 55] So I've struggled with this. I'll admit, I'll be honest, I've even been angry at this. It's like, who are they to tell us that we can't sing unless we wear a mask?

And there will likely be other guidelines, if that's not one of them for you, that you will not like when you discover them. We've got traffic flow requirements in the church building, arrows on the floor, certain sections of the building that are off limits, so we don't congregate and get too close. And the whole nine yards, hand sanitizing, all of it, has been asked of us by the government in order to open up here again and have worship services.

And some of the reasons that we may find submitting difficult are good, are legitimate reasons, because it isn't natural to maintain that much distance between people and families.

Others, however, are just owing to our own sinful nature. We don't like people telling us what to do. We don't like authority because of the sin that we have inside of us.

[24 : 14] Whether it's God's authority, whether it's human government, whether it's our parents telling us what we have to do, our boss at work.

And then pride enters into that too, and we think that we know better than the person that's in authority. And so since we know better, we don't really need to follow that or do that.

There should be an exemption for us in this particular situation. So we'll just do our own thing. So I want to give you more than just a clear command today. I want to give you something for your heart, to help you in your heart as we begin to transition into worship again, and just being able to know, what attitude do I bring to all of this change?

And the place that we want to go for that is where we've been in Sunday school before all of this started. 1 Peter 2, verse 13 says this, Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority, whether to the emperor as the supreme authority, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.

For it is God's will that by doing good, you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish people. Now, much of that is what we've already heard from Paul.

[25 : 46] And so I'm not going to repeat it, but there's one phrase in there that I want us to hear. Submit yourselves for the Lord's sake to every human authority.

Why should we submit ourselves to human authority, to the government of Saskatchewan, of Canada, for the Lord's sake? We should submit ourselves to the government, not just for conscience sake, not just out of concern and care for those who are more vulnerable and weaker in our community and in our society, who might end up in an ICU bed when the virus does come to Davidson, not just so that we can maintain a good testimony or a witness, but ultimately and primarily with all those things, we should submit ourselves and obey the government and follow the requirements that have been given to us for the Lord's sake, for Jesus' sake, our Lord, because we love him, because we want to honor him, because we want to do that which is right, that which pleases him.

And so I hope your heart hears that. What has Jesus asked of us? We might go back to those words in the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5, verse 41.

If anyone compels you to go one mile, go with them two. The government has asked us to go with them a mile when it comes to all this COVID-19 stuff.

Let's go with them two. Let's not just try to do the bare minimum to do what we want to do, get by with this, not get in trouble for what we're doing.

[27 : 41] No, let's go the extra mile. Let's care even more for the weak and the vulnerable around us and in our church.

This becomes especially important when and if the virus actually does begin to spread in our community. We want to be practiced at going the extra mile.

So that we can protect those who are vulnerable to this virus when it comes. In all of this, and I'm assuming that most of us listening are Christians and so we do take seriously that we should submit to the governing authorities.

But in all of this, there are two different responses that we might have generally. I mean, we can come to all of these guidelines and all of these requirements with an attitude that's half-hearted. We'll go halfway. We'll do just enough, bare minimum, to get by, to be able to say we're doing it.

[28 : 50] Or we can go the whole way. We can be wholehearted. We can go the extra mile and accept these requirements that have come from the government and do them.

We can be those who come to all of our interactions with other people and then even to church on Sundays when we can meet together with grumbling and complaining at all of this stuff.

How come we're so, we have to be so far apart. We have to wear the mask while we're singing. All this stuff, you know, and spread that feeling and that attitude throughout the whole church.

Or we can come with an attitude of joyful submission. God has given us government. Government has given us these requirements and we will joyfully submit.

We will take them seriously. We will do them to the best of our ability for the Lord's sake because we love Him. We love one another and we love our neighbors, the people in our community.

[29 : 59] Which of these two attitudes brings glory to God and which does not? I think it's obvious. Well, that's all I'm going to say for today.

I want to just remind you to be watching your email as well as if you have the Facebook group. We'll be posting lots of details, lots of information about some of the transition and the things that we need to do as we begin to gather again in the weeks ahead.

And so, keep an eye out for that. I am looking forward to gathering in person with each one of you to worship and to fellowship and to pray even if I have to be two meters away from you and wearing a mask.

Let's close today with the words which Paul wrote to the church at Philippi. this is what he said. Do everything without grumbling or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure.

Children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation. Then you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

[31 : 24] Lord Jesus, that's our desire. We want to be those who shine brightly in this dark world.

And so, we pray and ask that you would give us grace. Lord, with all of these things that are being asked of us as a church, we ask that you would help us give us grace to go the extra mile and to do these things with joy to receive them as coming from you.

We ask that that you would lead us, that you would guide us, that you would give us give us wisdom in the days ahead as a church and that you would continue to be just at the center of all that we do. All of our interactions. May you be honored. May you be glorified. We love you. We pray this in your precious name. Amen. Amen.