

*Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister...Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God for the sake of... - Romans 14:13, 19-20*

Paul asks believers to prioritize loving others, in the middle of a contentious issue, so that the work of God would not be destroyed.

**How do we seek the well-being of others, even the ones we disagree with...especially the ones we disagree with, in the middle of Covid, for the sake of the gospel?**

There are obviously very real and practical concerns that continue to be addressed in response to Covid. Church leaders and pastors are trying to navigate this space the best they can, keeping everyone safe, while still trying to minister the truth and love of Christ.

As much as love ought to be our starting point, I suspect we all might need to take a step back right about now and admit...(no, let's use a stronger word)...confess that we are the problem. We don't do confession well in our North American evangelical culture. However, we have some very good examples in the Old Testament. Following is the prayer of Daniel from Daniel 9 (Nehemiah prays a similar prayer). Daniel is righteous. He does not bear individual guilt in the sin that led to his people being in exile. Yet he identifies with the sin, and bears the shame, along with the rest of his people. Could this prayer be a model for us as we confess our own arrogance, pride, judgement of others, and lack of love for others in this issue, for a lack of love for one another is a sin before God.

I prayed to the LORD my God and confessed:

**"O Lord, you are a great and awesome God! You always fulfill your covenant and keep your promises of unfailing love to those who love you and obey your commands.**

**But we have sinned and done wrong. We have rebelled against you and scorned your commands and regulations. We have refused to listen to your servants the prophets, who spoke on your authority to our kings and princes and ancestors and to all the people of the land.**

**Lord, you are in the right; but as you see, our faces are covered with shame.  
This is true of all of us....**

**O Lord our God, you brought lasting honor to your name by rescuing your people from Egypt in a great display of power. But we have sinned and are full of wickedness. In view of all your faithful mercies, Lord, please turn your furious anger away from your city Jerusalem, your holy mountain. All the neighboring nations mock Jerusalem and your people because of our sins and the sins of our ancestors.**

**O our God, hear your servant's prayer! Listen as I plead. For your own sake, Lord, smile again on your desolate sanctuary. O my God, lean down and listen to me. Open your eyes and see our despair. See how your city—the city that bears your name—lies in ruins. We make this plea, not because we deserve help, but because of your mercy.**

**O Lord, hear. O Lord, forgive. O Lord, listen and act!  
For your own sake, do not delay, O my God, for your people and your city bear your name."**  
I went on praying and confessing my sin and the sin of my people, pleading with the LORD my God.

## Daniel 9:4-7,15-20 (c.f. vs 4-20 for Daniel's full prayer)

In light of this prayer, you are invited to respond through the following reflections, actions, and prayers and **the leading of the Holy Spirit**:

### Consider the need to repent of....

- A selfish spirit
- Disobeying God by not expressing our love for his family
- Putting personal comfort above the community's need for the gospel and God
- Sowing discord, even in private conversations
- Being disrespectful of the leaders God has placed over us
- Letting the enemy divide us, especially over non-salvific issues
- Giving people reasons (in how we live and act) to mock our God and our faith
- Wanting the gifts of God without experiencing the trials and challenges God says He uses in our lives (see James 1)

### How to live a life of love and testimony...

...As a church

- Provide options for all people as much as you can
- Don't force people to all feel the same way about church (attendance, programing, etc)
- Validate people as church family even if they choose to stay away from church gatherings for the time being
- Do not advertise your differences in any degrading way, especially outside the church
- Repent of any actions or attitudes that make your position on COVID more important than the gospel and a gospel-based unity in the church

...As a vaccinated **Follower of Jesus**

- Focus more on honoring God than being right or having rights
- Don't assume non-vaccinated people are being selfish and don't care about others
- Believe that people making other choices can be thoughtful and prayerful
- Pray for others, that they would experience the fullness of God's presence and peace and safety
- Repent of being judgmental

...As an unvaccinated **Follower of Jesus**

- Focus more on honoring God than being right or having rights
- Don't assume others are acting out of fear, or blindly following government
- Respect other's choices regarding safety
- Don't assume you know the motives of others, including our government
- Believe that people making other choices can be thoughtful and prayerful
- Pray for others, that they would experience the fullness of God's presence and peace and safety
- Consider being tested weekly for COVID if you choose not to be vaccinated
- Repent of being judgmental

May we, like the Apostle Paul in 1 Thessalonians 1:6, be able to honestly say  
*"And you know that the way we lived among you was further proof of the truth of our message."*