



The Fellowship Digest

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August

The Civil Magistrate

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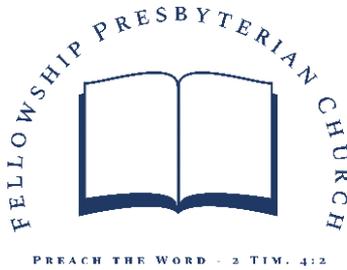


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COVID, CHRISTIANS, & THE CIVIL MAGISTRATE

By Dr. Keith Mathison

It is now a little over four months since various lockdowns and quarantines began in the United States in response to the spread of the coronavirus. I haven't written anything about it for a couple of reasons. First, I'm neither a medical professional nor an expert in contagious viruses. I do not believe that reading or watching news reports and reading a few Facebook posts qualifies me to speak authoritatively or even competently on the nature of this virus. Second, as with many other topics, discussion of this one has been thoroughly politicized, and it is almost impossible to write on politicized topics without being misread or misunderstood. However, I have received enough questions from my former and current students that it seems it might be worth putting some thoughts down in written form.

I don't intend to comment directly on the virus, per se. Frankly, I have no idea what to say about it because the information I have been reading and hearing over the last four months has been extraordinarily confusing. What I read in one newspaper contradicts what I read in another, and what I read in both is contradicted by what I read the following day or the following week. Furthermore, I don't have the expertise to weigh and evaluate the conflicting information, and I can't gain such expertise overnight. In part, the changing information is understandable, because this is apparently a new virus and research is ongoing. Be

that as it may, it is still confusing (at least to me), so I am not going to offer any opinions on the virus itself. I suppose everyone has a right to their opinion, but not everyone's opinion is right. My opinion on the virus, if I was confident enough to form one, would almost certainly be off in one way or another. And what happens online, stays online . . . forever.

Rather than attempt to speak directly on the virus itself, what I would like to attempt to address is the way in which Christians respond to the ever-changing information and directives, especially those coming from the civil magistrate. I don't pretend to have all the answers, but I know church leaders and individual Christians are having to think through everything they read and hear and make decisions for their families, churches, and others based on this information. It's very difficult, and a lot of different questions have arisen.

Two questions that I've seen more than once in recent weeks concern face masks and congregational singing. Should I obey or disobey if the local or state government mandates face masks in public places such as churches? Are the restrictions on certain aspects of corporate worship such as singing an Acts 5 situation worthy of civil disobedience? These kinds of questions are becoming more and more frequent in some contexts, at least in the United States. I am certain many are going to disagree with my thoughts on these issues. It may be that those who disagree are right and I am wrong. Either way, it might be worth considering a few “big-picture” principles in the hope that it will at least provide some food for thought as believers wrestle with these things.

Our first principle is that God is our Creator and Redeemer, and His word is our ultimate authority. As followers of Christ, we are to obey God. This principle is (or should be) non-controversial, so for the sake of space, I am not going to dwell on it at the moment. The problem is not so much the agreed upon concept that we are to obey God. The problem comes in when we start to speak about obeying lesser authorities such as civil magistrates. One text that regularly comes up in such discussions is Acts 5:29 “We must obey God rather than men.” Before discussing this text, we need to dispense with something that seems to be a common misunderstanding of it in some circles. Some seem to have taken “We must obey God rather than men” to mean we must never obey men. That, however, is not what Acts 5 is saying. The statement in Acts 5 is made in a context in which the apostles have been commanded by God to preach the Gospel and commanded by certain Jewish leaders not to preach the Gospel. The command of these human authorities directly contradicted the command of God. In that case, the apostles had to obey God rather than those men. They had to preach the Gospel and suffer whatever consequences this entailed at the hands of wicked men.

I think most Christians understand that God has instituted subordinate authorities in human life. There are relations of authority and submission between husbands and wives, parents and children, elders and church members, etc., and most Christians understand that. The difficulty seems to arise when we talk about civil magistrates. In the United States, there is a strong tradition

of civil disobedience, and particularly since the Vietnam era, there has been a high level of distrust and skepticism about the civil magistrate – at least at the federal level. In many segments of the population in the U.S., there is a strong and often hostile anti-government sentiment. In some cases, this results in complete contempt for governmental authority and flouting of civil laws.

The question Christians need to ask is how we as followers of Christ are to think about the civil magistrate. What should our view be? Do we simply choose and baptize one of the world's many competing political philosophies – philosophies expressing everything from virtual worship of the state to complete contempt for it? That is what many Christians have done. But is that what we should do? I am in agreement with John Calvin in that I do believe that we can learn many things from non-believers about such things as human government (Institutes, II.ii.12–13), but I also think we have to be self-critical when we consider their ideas. We have to make sure we don't adopt ways of thinking that are contrary to basic biblical principles.

So, does Scripture give us any guidance on this question? Are there any biblical principles regarding the way Christians should relate to civil magistrates? Yes, there are. There are numerous relevant texts, but I want to look at three important New Testament passages: Romans 13:1–7; Titus 3:1; and 1 Peter 2:13–17.

In Romans 13, Paul writes, “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore, whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who

resist will incur judgment" (vv. 1–2). What is most interesting about this statement is that Paul is writing at a time when the governing authorities are all pagans and not the least bit sympathetic to Christianity. The emperor and the governing authorities under him are persecuting the church. And yet, God's word says that “whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.”

Christians today need to consider these verses very seriously. We need to ask whether our actions, or the actions we are encouraging by our words and/or deeds, is inviting God’s judgment. God does not pit obedience to Himself against obedience to civil magistrates here. We are most certainly to obey God, but as Romans 13 indicates, one of the ways we obey God is to obey those God Himself has sovereignly and providentially put in authority over us. This includes civil magistrates. Even those we don't like. Even pagan Roman emperors. Elsewhere, Paul tells Titus: “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient” (Titus 3:1). Do we need to remind ourselves of this as well? Have we forgotten these words of God, or are we conveniently ignoring them? If so, do we really have a high view of Scripture?

A third significant passage is found in 1 Peter:

Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of

God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor (1 Pet. 2:13–17).

Note that he says we are to be subject to human authorities for the Lord's sake, and these human authorities include the emperor and the governors under him. He tells us to honor the emperor, who at that time was a persecutor of the church. Do we honor the contemporary equivalents of the emperor and his governors by mocking them whenever we do not agree with them?

Passages such as these provide us with a very clear general principle regarding our position as Christians in regard to the civil magistrates. God Himself has sovereignly and providentially put the civil magistrates in that position of authority over us, so resisting them is resisting Him. Because of sin, there will be exceptions, such as we see in places like Daniel 3, but the exceptions are exceptions, not the rule. Our general attitude as Christians toward the civil magistrate, according to Scripture, should be one of honor, respect, and submission for the Lord's sake. God placed them in these positions of authority.

How does this apply when, during a pandemic, the civil magistrate is putting certain restrictions on Christian worship gatherings – such as requiring face masks and prohibiting singing in close quarters? The first thing I would ask my brothers and sisters in the United States to consider is that Christians throughout history and around the world today have figured out ways to corporately worship God in far more difficult circumstances than these and with far more prohibitive restrictions than these. Those of us who are Christians living in the United States are not suffering persecution by being required to wear a face

mask. We are suffering inconveniences. If we think we are suffering persecution by being required to wear a face mask for an hour while indoors in a public place, we need to talk to Christians who have lived or do live in places where real persecution occurs.

Second, as Christians we certainly do have a biblical call by God to gather together for corporate worship. Out of love for God, we are to obey that call. I think almost all Christians basically agree here, so I don't think I need to belabor the point. However, we also have a corresponding call to love our neighbor as ourselves, and we cannot say we love God if we do not love our neighbor (1 John 4:20). Christians today sometimes seem to have difficulties in understanding how to apply this principle, especially in our current context. Many people commenting on this topic pit these two against each other as if emphasizing both biblical imperatives is somehow unbiblical.

I think it is abundantly clear that one element of loving our neighbor is not to do anything that unnecessarily endangers his life. My church uses the Westminster standards as its confession of faith. The Westminster Larger Catechism has two questions on the sixth commandment that directly address the principle of preserving the life of our neighbor:

Question 135: What are the duties required in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The duties required in the sixth commandment are, all careful studies, and lawful endeavors, to preserve the life of ourselves and others by resisting all thoughts and purposes, subduing all passions, and avoiding all occasions,

temptations, and practices, which tend to the unjust taking away the life of any; by just defense thereof against violence, patient bearing of the hand of God, quietness of mind, cheerfulness of spirit; a sober use of meat, drink, physic, sleep, labor, and recreations; by charitable thoughts, love, compassion, meekness, gentleness, kindness; peaceable, mild and courteous speeches and behavior; forbearance, readiness to be reconciled, patient bearing and forgiving of injuries, and requiting good for evil; comforting and succoring the distressed, and protecting and defending the innocent.

Question 136: What are the sins forbidden in the sixth commandment?

Answer: The sins forbidden in the sixth commandment are, all taking away the life of ourselves, or of others, except in case of public justice, lawful war, or necessary defense; the neglecting or withdrawing the lawful and necessary means of preservation of life; sinful anger, hatred, envy, desire of revenge; all excessive passions, distracting cares; immoderate use of meat, drink, labor, and recreations; provoking words, oppression, quarreling, striking, wounding, and: Whatsoever else tends to the destruction of the life of any.

If this is true, does the biblical mandate to gather for corporate worship override it or take priority over it? No. We are to do both. But we have to keep the sixth commandment principle always in our mind, especially when abnormal and exceptional circumstances arise.

The Bible itself makes exceptions regarding worship when contagious diseases are in view. The most obvious Old Testament example is the case of leprosy. The

general rules for worship called all of a certain age to participate in the tabernacle and temple ceremonies, but those diagnosed with leprosy were not permitted to do so. Why? Because leprosy was a highly contagious disease. Those with leprosy had to be separated from the community. They were quarantined.

Obviously, this example doesn't correspond in a precise one-to-one way with the coronavirus, but I do think we can take away some basic principles from it. First, the mandate for corporate worship doesn't ride roughshod over doing what is necessary to mitigate the spread of a potentially fatal contagious disease. It doesn't override the sixth commandment. Second, in the Old Testament, those with the contagious disease of leprosy were forcibly separated from the corporate worship of Israel. They were readmitted only if they were healed and a priest confirmed it. So, in principle, based on what Scripture teaches, the call to corporate worship has to be balanced with appropriate concern for the lives of the worshipping community (and in our case today, also with the lives of unbelieving neighbors of the worshipping community).

Part of the difficulty, however, is transposing these principles into our current situation. The most difficult part of this is attempting to figure out when lives are actually in danger. What makes it more difficult to answer such questions is that there is a lot of conflicting and ever-changing information about the coronavirus. Leprosy has been around a very long time, and medical professionals have a decent understanding of it. The coronavirus is new, and medical professionals are still seeking to understand it. Different medical professionals have different ideas about it. Some people who have contracted it have died. Others

who have contracted it have recovered. Medical professionals are still seeking to determine all of the contributing factors to the mortality rate of different subgroups in the population.

In the midst of all of this, the various civil magistrates at the federal, state, and local levels have to make difficult decisions. Can they wait until there is a worldwide consensus on the seriousness of the virus in every circumstance? No. Because the civil magistrate has a responsibility to the sixth commandment as well. One of the legitimate tasks of the civil magistrate is to protect the lives of citizens. In the midst of a storm of conflicting and ever-changing information, they have to attempt to protect lives when they believe there is a legitimate threat.

I would not want to be in their shoes having to make those decisions. No decision they make is going to satisfy everyone. This is why we have to keep in mind those principles outlined in Romans 13 and elsewhere. God is the one responsible for placing the civil magistrates in their positions of authority over us. By doing so, God gave them the authority to make these decisions. We are to be subject to them as children are subject to parents. The Larger Catechism compares civil magistrates to fathers and mothers in its commentary on the fifth commandment, indicating that the general principle of the fifth commandment includes honoring all whom God has placed in authority over us.

Question 125: Why are superiors styled father and mother?
Answer: Superiors are styled father and mother, both to teach them in all duties toward their inferiors, like natural parents, to express love and tenderness to them, according

to their several relations; and to work inferiors to a greater willingness and cheerfulness in performing their duties to their superiors, as to their parents.

The Catechism goes on to explain what honoring superiors looks like and what sins against them look like:

Question 127: What is the honor that inferiors owe to their superiors.?

Answer: The honor which inferiors owe to their superiors is, all due reverence in heart, word, and behavior; prayer and thanksgiving for them; imitation of their virtues and graces; willing obedience to their lawful commands and counsels; due submission to their corrections; fidelity to, defense and maintenance of their persons and authority, according to their several ranks, and the nature of their places; bearing with their infirmities, and covering them in love, that so they may be an honor to them and to their government.

Question 128: What are the sins of inferiors against their superiors?

Answer: The sins of inferiors against their superiors are, all neglect of the duties required toward them; envying at, contempt of, and rebellion against, their persons and places, in their lawful counsels, commands, and corrections; cursing, mocking, and all such refractory and scandalous carriage, as proves a shame and dishonor to them and their government.

We should examine our hearts and ask whether our attitude toward the civil magistrate is characterized more by what we read in question 127 or question 128? We do not

want our attitude toward these superiors to be comparable to the attitude of petulant children toward parents.

So, what about the specific mandate to wear face masks? Frankly, I have no idea whether face masks are an effective means of slowing the spread of this virus, but if the biblical principles summarized above are true, it matters little because the mandate to wear them in public indoor places for the time being is not contradicting any command of God. Does it infringe on my ability to do what I want to do when I want to do it? Perhaps, but autonomously doing what I want to do when I want to do it is not an axiom of biblical ethics. Biblical ethics puts God first and puts the good of others before self. Paul, for example, was always ready to give up things he was legitimately free to do if it was for the good of others. Christians have to beware of adopting philosophies that are all about me and mine, philosophies focused on self and doing what the self wants to do when and how the self wants to do it. The Bible, in contrast to such philosophies, is continually talking about dying to self.

What about directives against singing in close quarters? This question is more serious because it potentially affects an element of corporate Christian worship. Such directives have been put in place in some parts of the United States, such as California. Christians are wondering whether this is a case of a magistrate legitimately attempting to preserve life or a case of a magistrate overstepping his bounds. Given the biblical principles summarized above, we have to be very careful about jumping to conclusions.

These mandates may simply be a result of civil magistrates working with the incomplete information they

have and trying to err on the side of caution. Some of them may be persuaded that singing in close quarters increases the probability of spreading a potentially fatal virus. Might they be wrong because they have made a decision based on wrong information? Yes. But it may also be the case that their information is right. If that information is right, then we may be dealing with a situation analogous to the leprosy cases in the Old Testament where the lives of the worshipping community and its neighbors (i.e. the sixth commandment) take precedence.

Some Christians believe these mandates against singing are attempts by the magistrate to persecute the church or discriminate against the church. That too is possible, but in order to discern whether such mandates are a case of discriminatory persecution aimed at the church, we would want to ask some questions such as: Are Christian churches the only ones being required to refrain from singing in close quarters for a while? Or does this mandate apply across the board? Does it include synagogues and mosques as well? Does it include high school and college choruses? Does it include theater companies and concerts? If it is directed only at Christian churches, it might be a case of discrimination, or it might be case of over-zealous ignorance. If the mandate applies across the board, it might simply be the case that the civil magistrate is doing the best he can with the information he has at hand.

If Christians disagree, should they simply ignore these mandates? Given what Romans 13 and other texts clearly say, a Christian needs to ask whether he is 100% certain that what the civil magistrate is requiring is the principled equivalent to bowing to a statue of

Nebuchadnezzar before disobeying the magistrate.

According to Romans 13:2, God takes very seriously resistance to the authorities He has placed over us: "those who resist will incur judgment." We cannot take that lightly.

Furthermore, we also need to ask ourselves whether we are 100% certain ourselves that singing in close quarters will not increase the risk of spreading a potentially fatal virus to a neighbor. Recall what the Larger Catechism said regarding the sixth commandment. I don't know that any of us, especially those like myself who are not medical professionals, have absolute certainty about this virus. Without absolute certainty, what does the principle of loving our neighbor and upholding the sixth commandment require? Would it not require erring on the side of caution? Isn't that what we say Christians should do in other cases where the lives of human beings are potentially endangered?

Is it possible that some of us are pitting love of God against love of neighbor again? Love of God requires love of our neighbor. If a train made you run late for church, God's call to gather for corporate worship does not give you the liberty to run red lights and stop signs at 80 mph to get to church on time. For years before the coronavirus outbreak I have witnessed Christians disregarding the health of others over and over again. I cannot tell you how many times I have attended a crowded church and ended up being seated near someone who obviously had a cold or the flu. I don't want to assume motives and say that such people reflected on what they were doing before they did it, but I think they might have an imbalanced understanding on how to relate God's call to corporate worship and the

call to love our neighbors. Even the flu can be deadly, especially to elderly people and those with compromised immune systems. If you are sick, stay home without being asked to do so, and return when you are no longer sick.

We also need to consider long term questions. We should ask, for example, how our decision regarding singing is potentially going to affect the task of proclaiming the Gospel in certain circumstances. What if the magistrate, for example, ends up being right about the relation between singing in close quarters and increasing the spread of the virus? What if we reject the civil magistrate's directive and do this and an elderly or immune-compromised person in our congregation gets sick as a result? What if someone outside our congregation catches the virus because of our actions? Aside from the potential legal and financial ramifications, how could this impact the way the local community views our church and its message? Again, this all goes back to the fact that there is a lot of conflicting information on this virus. Unless we have absolute certainty that we are not needlessly putting someone's life in danger (violating the sixth commandment), should we not err on the side of caution until we have a clearer grasp of it?

I don't think anyone is being asked to deny Christ yet or not preach the Gospel. If that happens, then Acts 5 does come into play, and you absolutely have to obey God. What we are being asked to do right now is more akin to what churches have been asked to do for a time in past pandemics (e.g. the Black Plague, the Spanish Flu, etc.) and what churches have been asked to do for a time during war in some places. In other words, we are being asked to put up with temporary inconveniences. That requires patience.

Christians should be known for putting others before themselves. As best I can tell, we do not have enough information to know for sure that we are not endangering our neighbors' lives by flaunting directives we disagree with. As long as we are not being told to deny Christ or to stop preaching the Gospel we need to do whatever we can “to preserve the life of ourselves and others.” Putting ourselves and our neighbors at unnecessary risk of a potentially fatal virus is not a case of heroic martyrdom. According to my church’s confessional standards, it’s a case of violating the sixth commandment.

My sister in law works at a nursing home as a registered nurse. She was assigned to the Covid unit there for six weeks. During that time, she was not able to be with her family face to face. She has told us that ten of her elderly patients died of this virus during her time caring for them. Before I left Facebook, I was chatting with a pastor in Italy who had a Reformed Baptist pastor friend in Italy die from it. As I understand it, the large majority of people recover from it, but some do die from it. Even if I’m not concerned for myself, I have to show an appropriate level of concern and consideration for those I encounter every day, my neighbors. The person next to me in the choir could have the virus and be asymptomatic or pre-symptomatic. They could pass it on to me, and then the next day, I could inadvertently pass it on to an elderly neighbor or a person undergoing cancer treatment while shopping for groceries. Even if the person in the choir recovers and I recover, what if the elderly person doesn’t recover – all because I thought I knew better than everyone else? Maybe I do, but unless I’m absolutely certain, doing what I want to do when I want to do it is potentially risking

the lives of our neighbors and thus violating the sixth commandment.

I have spent the bulk of this post talking about things Christians can consider as they think and pray about how to respond to the civil magistrate. I have spent the bulk of this space on that because I believe we should always start by examining ourselves. We have not reached a state of sinless perfection yet, so we have to examine our own hearts before looking at anyone else. But lest I be misunderstood and receive more emails than necessary, do not hear me saying that the civil magistrate is infallible. Civil magistrates are sinners too. They can be and many times are wrong. Their decisions can be wrong. Their words and actions can be wicked. They can overstep their bounds. They can be persecutors of the church. Many have been, and many are. Sometimes God puts such wicked magistrates in authority over His people as a judgment.

Christians cannot control much of this. We can control how we respond. This is where remembering that civil magistrates are authorities under God in the way that husbands and parents are authorities under God is important. All human authorities are sinners. All human authorities are fallible. But all are legitimate God-ordained authorities and thus owed honor and respect. In the U.S. and many other nations, if a magistrate sins or oversteps his bounds, the church can remind him of it. Individual citizens, including Christians, can pray for him or her and elect someone else if necessary. In any part of the world, if the church determines that a magistrate is commanding Christians to sin, then the Church is to obey God and willingly accept the consequences. Whatever we as

Christians do, however, it has to be in line with the basic principles outlined in Scripture.

Finally, I think all of us need to be reminded right now that our civil magistrates and church leaders are also our neighbors, and they are having to make a lot of extremely difficult decisions based on limited and sometimes conflicting information. They are in an unenviable position and they are getting criticized daily. The last thing we should be doing is making their jobs more difficult. Rather than grumbling and complaining, let us instead pray for them. Before we look at what they might be doing wrong, let us examine our own hearts. And let us pray for one another, bearing one another's burdens throughout the pandemic and beyond. Rather than dishonoring those God has placed in authority over us, rather than mocking brothers and sisters who are submitting to those authorities and wearing masks, let our response to this difficult situation glorify Christ and point people to Him. May the difficulties we are dealing with be used by God to make us more like Christ.

NOTE: Article used with permission. The original may be found at https://www.keithmathison.org/post/covid-christians-the-civil-magistrate?fbclid=IwAR0ttYsuhp0Fbb_yBqYodxuhE1ePvPakLN-LTdb4vZ46mhULIQ3HX1aYAMw

~Preaching Schedule for August 2020~

August 2	AM: Romans 13:8-10 PM: Judges 7:19-25
August 9	AM: Romans 13:11-14 PM: Judges 8:1-35
August 16	AM: Romans 14:1-4 PM: Judges 9:1-21
August 23	AM: TBD PM: No Service
August 30	AM: Romans 14:5-12 PM: Judges 9:22-57



~Announcements~

- **Reminder:** The Session is asking that all members attend all stated meetings of the church unless providentially hindered.
- The **pulpit ministry of Fellowship** is on **SermonAudio**. You can access the sermons preached by our pastor on the Fellowship website at www.fellowship-pca.org or go to <http://www.sermonaudio.com/fellowship-pca>
- **The bulletins** for the services of the church are now available on the church website.
- The pastor can be heard **on the radio** each **Tuesday from 10-10:30 AM on WLIK**. You can listen locally at **97.9 FM, 1270 AM** or **stream** it over the internet at www.wlik.net.
- **The church library is now open. Please take a look!**
- Please secure your copy of the **August prayer calendar**. It is available on the table in the hallway.
- **We will celebrate the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper** on August 2, 2020, in the AM worship service.
- There will be a **called congregational meeting** for **August 30th** immediately after the AM Worship service.

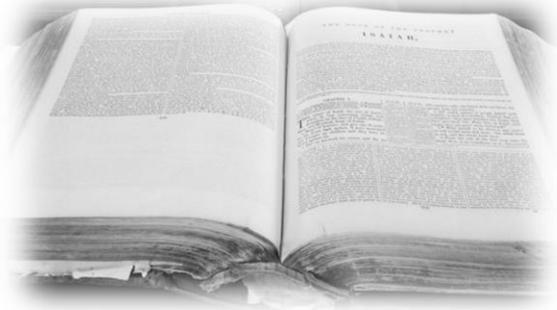
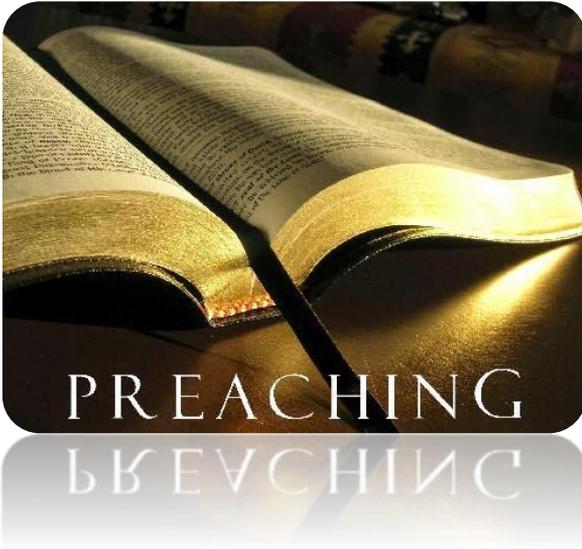
~The Preaching of the Word of God~

Westminster Larger Catechism – Q160

Q. 160. What is required of those that hear the word preached?

A. It is required of those that hear the Word preached, that they attend upon it with **diligence, preparation, and prayer; examine** what they hear by the Scriptures; **receive the truth** with faith, love, meekness, and readiness of mind as the Word of God; **meditate, and confer** of it; **hide** it in their hearts, and bring forth the **fruit** of it in their lives.





Note: Each month, to help us prepare for worship and the preaching of God's Word, the pastor will be offering a summary of the upcoming sermons. These will include discussion questions that can be used for family or personal worship.

~August 2 – AM Worship~

Sermon Text: Romans 13:8-10

Main Point: Love is the fulfilling of the law.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Paul mean when he tells his readers to “owe no man anything”? Is he prohibiting debt of any kind?
2. What is the thing we owe everyone above all else?
3. What is the summation of the second table of the Ten Commandments (commands 5-10)?
4. How does love fulfill the law? Is the subject of love a New Testament command only?

~August 2 – PM Worship~

Sermon Text: Judges 7:19-25

Main Point: Through the labors of Gideon, the LORD delivers the people of old from the Midianites.

Discussion Questions:

1. What process is employed to deliver the people of God from the Midianites?
2. How complete was the victory over the Midianites?

~August 9 – AM Worship~

Sermon Text: Romans 13:11-14

Main Point: Christians are not to make any provision for the flesh and the works of unrighteousness.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does Paul mean when he tells his readers to “wake from sleep”?
2. Paul mentions that “salvation is nearer to us now than we first believed.” What is he referring to in this statement?
3. What are the works of darkness? Consider Gal. 5:19-21.
4. What does it mean to “put on the Lord Jesus Christ”?

~August 9 – PM Worship~

Sermon Text: Judges 8:1-35

Main Point: The people are punished for failing to help Gideon.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who are the people that are in conflict with Gideon?
2. What did Gideon request from these people?
3. Why did they refuse?
4. What is the result of these people who refused to help Gideon? Why?

5. How long did the land have rest after Gideon secured victory over the Midianites?
6. What did the people of old do after the death of Gideon?

~August 16 – AM Worship~

Sermon Text: Romans 14:1-4

Main Point: Christians are to be mindful of the weak consciences of other believers.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to be “weak in faith,” according to Paul in 14:1-4?
2. What analogy does Paul use to make his argument in these verses?
3. What are some areas of conscience that believers hold to in the church today? How should you respond to those areas?

~August 16 – PM Worship~

Sermon Text: Judges 9:1-21

Main Point: The rule and treachery of wicked leaders.

Discussion Questions:

1. Who is Abimelech?
2. How did he gain power in Israel?
3. Why is Mount Gerizim mentioned in this passage? See Deut. 27:12.

~August 23 – AM Worship~

Sermon Text: TBD (Pastor on Vacation)

~August 23 – PM Worship~

NO SERVICE

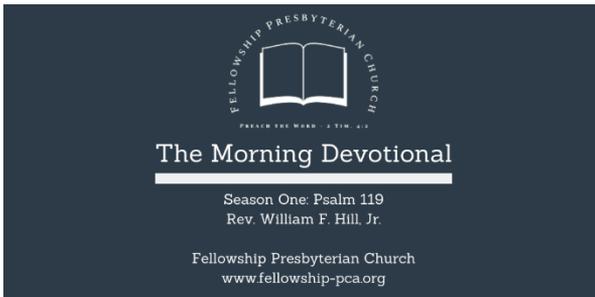
August 30 – AM Worship~

Sermon Text: Romans 14:5-12

Main Point: Christians should be careful not to pass judgment on other Christians over matters of conscience

Discussion Questions:

1. What are some areas that are matters of conscience that Christians wrestle with and/or hold to in the church?
2. What analogy does Paul use in this passage regarding matters of conscience?
3. Is Paul talking about the Christian Sabbath (the Lord's Day) in this passage? Why or why not?



~August 30 – PM Worship~

Sermon Text: Judges 9:22-57

Main Point: The downfall of wicked leadership

Discussion Questions:

1. How long did Abimelech rule over Israel?
2. Why did God send an evil spirit between Abimelech and the leaders of Shechem?
3. How did Abimelech die?
4. What lessons can be learned in the narrative of Abimelech found in chapter nine?



At **Fellowship Presbyterian Church**,

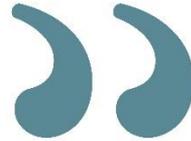
we believe that the **preached Word** is central to our worship. It is to be attended to

with diligence and care. The Word of God preached is the living and active voice of the Lord Jesus Christ to His people.



Q. 88. *What are the outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption?*

A. The outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicateth to us the benefits of redemption, are his ordinances, especially the **word, sacraments, and prayer**; all which are made effectual to the elect for salvation.
(Westminster Shorter Catechism)



Services

Wednesday

6 PM Prayer Meeting and Bible Study

Current Study: *One Lord, One Plan, One People: A Survey of the Bible: The book Deuteronomy.*

Lord's Day

~~9:45 AM Sunday School - Currently Suspended~~

11 AM Worship

Series: Romans 12-14

5 PM Worship

Series: The Book of Judges

~~6 PM @ Wellington Manner [2nd Sun. of the month] -
Currently suspended~~

~~2 PM [Final Sun. of the month] - Currently suspended~~



~Church Life~

~Birthdays and Anniversaries~

Birthdays

August 23 – Syndi Jones-Curtis

August 24 – Randall Sheetz

August 31 – Elizabeth Moon

Anniversaries

August 24 – William Sr and Sandra Hill

August 29 – Andy and Linda Woodall



~The Pastor's Study~

"The Pastor's Study"

The radio ministry of Fellowship Presbyterian Church

Every Tuesday from 10-10:30 AM



Live stream on www.wlik.net
97.9 FM | 1270 AM

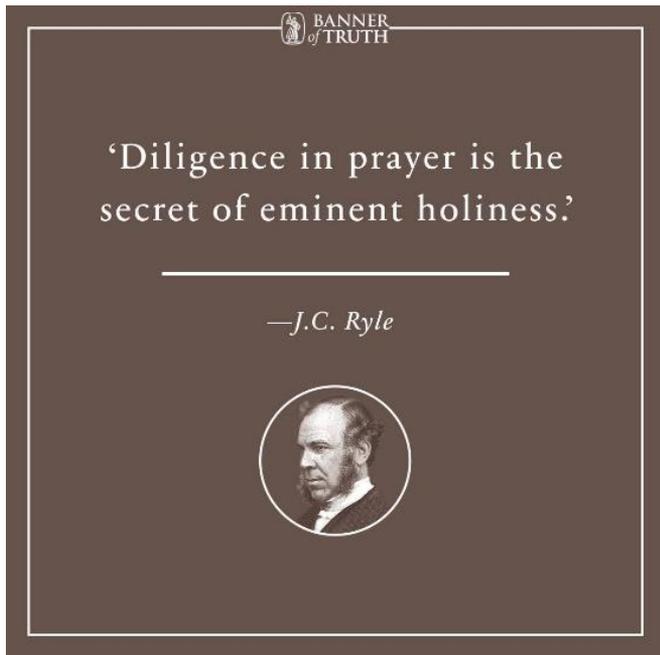
Fellowship Presbyterian Church
www.fellowship-pca.org

Tune in each Tuesday!
10 AM

~Prayer~

If you have any prayer needs that you would like included in the newsletter, please let one of the elders or the pastor know.

Please submit them by August 28, 2020, by 5 PM to be included in the February *Fellowship Digest*.



CHURCH

- **Worship on the Lord's Day**
 - Pray that the Lord would be pleased with our labors in worship.
 - Pray for God's people to be prepared and hungry to hear God's Word preached.
 - Pray for receptive hearts and minds and a zeal to worship the Lord.
 - Pray that we would worship the triune God in Spirit and truth.
- **Preaching**
 - Pray for the preached Word to be a demonstration of the Spirit of God.
 - Pray that the Word proclaimed would be the Word of the Lord.
 - Pray for the preaching to penetrate the hearts and minds of men.
 - Pray for fruit to come from the preaching of the Scriptures.
 - Pray for the pastor as he labors in the study.
- **Outreach and Evangelism**
 - Pray for the Lord to bless the radio ministry.
 - Pray for the Lord to bring us visitors.
 - Pray that the Lord would provide an opportunity to speak to others about Christ.
 - Pray that the Lord would grant boldness to our witness before the world.
- **The Session**
 - Pray for wisdom in dealing with various difficult matters.

- Pray that the elders would faithfully shepherd the flock of God.
- Pray for strength and protection from the efforts of the evil one.
- **The Diaconate**
 - Pray for grace and wisdom to handle various physical needs of the church body.
 - Pray for strength and protection from the evil one.
- **Building and Finances**
 - Pray that the Lord would protect our property from harm and unexpected expenses.
 - Pray that the Lord would give wisdom in handling the finances.
 - Pray that the Lord would bless the giving received each week.
- **Denomination**
 - Pray for the Lord to use the churches of Highlands Presbytery to advance the gospel.
 - Pray for the protection of the ministers of our presbytery.
 - Pray for wisdom for the Teaching and Ruling Elders as they meet and conduct the business of the church.
 - Pray for the PCA as a whole.

OTHER MATTERS

- **Church members**
 - Pray for the chronically ill and those who suffer from chronic pain.
 - Pray for the Lord to protect the membership from illness

- Pray for those who have upcoming medical procedures.
- Pray for the Lord to sustain the marriages in our church.
- Pray for the Lord to save the lost relatives of the members.
- Pray for the needs mentioned at the meeting.
- **Country**
 - Pray for the Lord to pour out his Spirit on the nation.
 - Pray for the Lord to save the souls of men.
 - Pray for the leaders of the nation. Pray that God would save them. Pray that God would prevent them from any wicked act.
 - Pray about the public sins of the country: abortion, homosexuality, etc.
- **Missions**
 - Pray for Matt Lamos as he labors to plant a church in Belgium. Pray for his financial needs. Pray for protection from the evil one and other hostile people.
 - Pray for Greenville Presbyterian Theological Seminary. Pray for financial growth. Pray for the professors, staff, and students.
 - Pray for the persecuted church in areas of the Middle East, China, Pakistan, etc.

~Hymn of the Month~

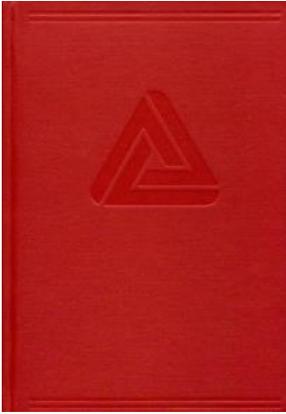
Give to Our God Immortal Praise

Trinity Hymnal #3

This hymn will be used in worship throughout **August**.

- 1** Give to our God immortal praise;
mercy and truth are all his ways:
wonders of grace to God belong;
repeat his mercies in your song.
- 2** Give to the Lord of lords renown;
the King of kings with glory crown:
his mercies ever shall endure,
when lords and kings are known no more.
- 3** He built the earth, he spread the sky,
and fixed the starry lights on high:
wonders of grace to God belong;
repeat his mercies in your song.
- 4** He fills the sun with morning light;
he bids the moon direct the night:
his mercies ever shall endure,
when suns and moons shall shine no more.
- 5** He sent his Son with pow'r to save
from guilt and darkness and the grave:
wonders of grace to God belong;
repeat his mercies in your song.
- 6** Through this vain world he guides our feet,
and leads us to his heav'nly seat:
his mercies ever shall endure,
when this vain world shall be no more.

~Hymns for August 2020~



Note: These hymns will be used in worship throughout **August**. Please review them. You are encouraged to ask the pastor for a **free *Trinity Hymnal*** for your personal use at home and in family worship.

Hymn of the month: #3

August 2

AM Worship: #3, #168, #433

PM Worship: #2, #32, #92

August 9

AM Worship: #3, #486, #537

PM Worship: #5, #460, #348

August 16

AM Worship: #3, #252, #644

PM Worship: #100, #693, #585

August 23

AM Worship: #3, TBD

August 30

AM Worship: #3, #460, #389

PM Worship: #115, #261, #45

~Future Editions of *The Digest*~

September: The Church

October: The Lord's Day

November: Church History

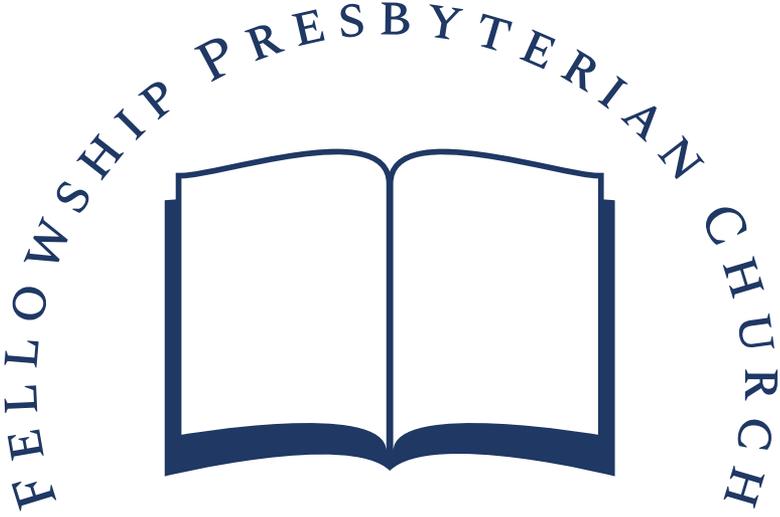
December: The Bible

Note: if you have suggestions for topics for *The Digest*, please see the pastor.



~Notes~

~Notes~



PREACH THE WORD - 2 TIM. 4:2