

The Warrenton Declaration

Preamble

With the rise of COVID-19 and all of the attendant ramifications, it has been incumbent upon the church to come to terms with what it believes related to the intersecting areas of biblical ethics, authority, and medical mandates.

Unfortunately, due to a pervasive lack of theological and biblical understanding on these issues coupled with a tendency to over-attribute power and jurisdiction to the state, oftentimes churches have defaulted to almost reflexively acquiescing to whatever government health agency statements are made and the policies they put in place. The legitimacy of the sweeping powers attributed to the state is either simply presumed or reinforced with scant, or faulty biblical support. Powers are assumed to exist unless explicitly denied rather than regarded as absent unless firmly established by Scripture.

As a result, rather than leading on these issues, pastors often become little more than mouthpieces for government health agencies and are then used by these same agencies to help carry out their bidding.

The reasons given for following such policies and mandating them in the local church are not typically justified by a well-rounded and systematic understanding of the whole counsel of Scripture on authority and what it means to love one's neighbor as oneself. Instead, the rationale given is usually disjointed, unbalanced, and confused.

To that end The Warrenton Declaration on Medical Mandates, Biblical Ethics, & Authority was created in order to provide clarity on these issues moving forward, to equip local churches and their officers in providing clarity on where they stand, and to assist individuals who are being mistreated in their churches with a well-ordered summary of belief in this regard.

Declaration

I. WE AFFIRM that all authority, in heaven and on earth has been bestowed upon God the Son, Christ Jesus. (Is. 9:6-7; Dan. 7:13-14; Col. 1:15-20; Matt. 28:18).

II. WE AFFIRM that delegated, earthly authorities have been instituted by God as His servants to function as a blessing to those in their jurisdiction through their Godly governance and rule according to God's law and in obedience to Christ (Ps. 2:1-12; Rom. 13:1; Rom. 13:3-5; 1 Pet. 2:13). These may be civil authorities (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13-14), ecclesiastical authorities (Heb. 13:17), vocational authorities (1 Pet. 2:18), familial authorities (Eph. 6:1; 1 Pet. 3:1), and self-governing individuals (Prov. 25:28; Rom. 12:1-2; Mk. 12:31; Lev. 19:18; 1 Pet. 2:16).

III. WE AFFIRM that to ascribe total jurisdiction to any human authority is idolatry, since this kind of unlimited authority is reserved only for Christ Jesus (Is. 9:6-7; Dan. 7:13-14; Col. 1:15-20; Matt. 28:18). This establishes limits to the jurisdictional authority of all subordinate offices that exist under the authority of Christ.

IV. WE DENY that the existing civil authorities have unlimited jurisdiction.

V. WE AFFIRM that the scriptural jurisdictional limits of delegated human authority are also established by good and necessary consequence given that various offices are said in Scripture to be required to be obeyed "in everything" (Col 3:20, 22; Eph 5:24; Tit 2:9). The sense in which "in everything" is used in these verses cannot mean that obedience is obligatory for all commands regardless of their morality, since Scripture also teaches Christian disobedience to sinful or abusive commands (Acts 5:29, Ex 1:15-20). "In everything" also cannot mean that obedience is obligatory for all non-sinful commands, since Scripture also establishes multiple offices of human authority (Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet 2:18; Eph 6:1; Romans 13:1). These offices may at times conflict, thus requiring Christians to consider which authority is acting within their rightful jurisdiction to determine if obedience is required. Thus, commands to obey "in everything" must refer to the obligation of Christians to obey all non-sinful commands of true authorities which are also within the proper jurisdiction of the authority giving the command.

VI. WE DENY that biblical commands to obey authorities, whether civil, ecclesiastical, familial, or vocational “in everything” (Tit. 2:9; Col. 3:20, 22; Eph 5:24) can be construed to negate the roles of their respective jurisdictions which Scripture also teaches (Rom. 13:3-4; Gen. 1:26-28; Deut. 6:6-7; Prov. 22:6, 23:13-14; 1 Tim. 5:3-16, 6:1-2; Eph. 6:1; 1 Cor. 11:3).

VII. WE AFFIRM that in instances where a Christian’s responsibilities to God and his fellow man are not hindered, the Christian may choose to obey some unjust commands when such commands can be obeyed without engaging in sin. This may be because compliance with the command is done under duress, because compliance is expedient, or because compliance is rendered in an exaggerated fashion in order to further expose the wickedness of the command (Rom. 12:20; Matt 5:38-42).

VIII. WE DENY that any human or group of humans who claim to be civil authorities are in actuality, recognized by God to be civil authorities, solely by virtue of their claims to that authority or the claims of those who support them (Hosea 8:4).

IX. WE AFFIRM that true civil authorities are legitimate to the extent they, as appointed by God, bear the sword to fulfill the description of what civil authorities are in Scripture, namely, that they punish evil and praise good (Rom. 13:3-4; 1 Pet. 2:14) according to their civil office and jurisdiction.

X. WE AFFIRM that civil magistrates have lawful authority to punish civil crimes like assault (Ex. 21:18-19), murder (Gen. 9:5; Ex. 21:12), rape (Deut. 22:25), theft (Ex. 22:1), fraud (Lev. 19:35-36; Deut. 25:13-16), man-stealing (Ex. 21:16), and false witness (Deut. 19:15-19), and to ensure proper due process through the civil courts, payment of liability for verifiably proven harm (Ex. 21:33) and proportionality of punishment (Deut. 16:18-20, 17:6, 19:15-21).

XI. WE AFFIRM that Christians should obey the biblically lawful instructions and commands of earthly authorities to the extent of their proper, God-ordained, role and jurisdiction (Rom. 13:1; 1 Pet. 2:13).

XII. WE DENY that the Pauline era reign of Emperor Nero can be credibly invoked to invalidate the limiting description of what constitutes legitimate civil authority in Romans 13:3-4. First, this is due to the clear witness of Scripture regarding the identity and characteristics of legitimate biblical civil authority (Rom. 13:3-4); and second, to the fact that the Neronian persecution did not begin until the great fire of Rome in 64 AD, which was seven years after the writing of the book of Romans (57 AD).

XIII. WE DENY that the specific authority granted to Pilate to execute Christ Jesus according to God’s plan of redemption (Jn. 19:10-11) is evidence of a general principle of civil governance whereby civil magistrates retain legitimate authority to do evil or make any commands outside the bounds of their jurisdiction.

XIV. WE DENY that the only reason one may lawfully disobey an authority is if they are commanded to sin by that authority.

XV. WE AFFIRM that disobedience is also permissible should any command be given outside of the jurisdiction of the particular authority. For example, throughout history, civil governments have sought to force individuals into certain vocations, foisted improper controls over affairs of the church, and imposed restrictions over the number of children that a family is permitted to have. Frequently, these kinds of orders are claimed to be for the “greater good” of the public. To whatever extent these commands would not have required anyone to sin, obedience is still not morally obligated since these commands are outside the jurisdiction of the authority making the commands.

Section 2 – Application to Medical Mandates

XVI. WE DENY that the civil authorities have been granted lawful jurisdiction and authority over personal, familial, or “public” health.

XVII. WE DENY that the leprosy-related passages in Leviticus 13 & 14 can be construed to teach the general principle that civil government has unqualified and legitimate jurisdiction over managing “public health.”

XVIII. WE AFFIRM that these leprosy passages are related not to the spread of biological contagion, but of ceremonial uncleanness as is evidenced by numerous factors: First, even the man covered head-to-toe in white leprosy was declared “clean” (Lev. 13:12-13) and was permitted in the camp. Second, the stated reason for the general expulsion of lepers is the same reason given for the expulsion of those who touched a dead body or had a bodily discharge; not biological contagion, but ceremonial uncleanness which “defiled the camp” before the Lord (Num. 5:1-4) . Third, nowhere in Scripture is leprosy described as being biologically contagious. This “leprosy” also afflicted houses (Lev. 14:34) and garments (Lev. 13:47). “Leprosy” was not the same as modern day “Hansen’s disease”. Fourth, in order to prevent belongings in a “leprous” house from being declared “unclean” by the Priest, the owner was permitted to empty the house of his possessions before the Priest arrived for inspection (Lev. 14:33-36). Preventing biological contagion through sanitization (burning) of objects was not in view here. The ceremonial practices associated with the now defunct Levitical Priesthood have been made obsolete by Christ’s greater Priesthood (Heb. 7:12), and cannot be credibly invoked as providing civil government with jurisdiction over “public health.”

XIX. WE DENY that civil governments have lawful jurisdiction or authority to remove anyone’s right to pursue their livelihood and conduct their affairs in public.

XX. WE DENY that civil governments have lawful authority to enact “lockdowns” predicated on protecting “public health” as this is not their jurisdiction.

XXI. WE AFFIRM that individuals are free to restrict their own movement about society to this end should they deem it wise to do so. They may not lawfully demand that civil government employ force on their behalf to restrict the liberty of others.

XXII. WE DENY that such violations of medical freedom by the civil government, or the subsequent mandating of vaccines and masks are rightly justified based on the claim that unmasked or unvaccinated persons “present a general danger to the health of the public due to viral spread.”

XXIII. WE AFFIRM that it is the Christian duty of each family to seek the well-being of their neighbor (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39; Jer. 29:7) and that this includes adopting reasonable practices for the symptomatically ill to refrain from knowingly exposing their neighbors, especially in a crowded or public context. Each Christian should seek to live at peace with all men in a manner that displays the love of Christ in obedience to the law of God (Rom. 12:18; Mic. 6:8).

XXIV. WE DENY that the existence of communicable viruses, viral testing mechanisms, or the invention of vaccinations creates a new standard of morality whereby a healthy person simply conducting their affairs in society without vaccination, viral testing, or wearing a mask is evidence of criminally or morally reckless behavior. Moreover, if such a standard for violation of medical freedom is adopted, conceivably, civil governments could permanently regulate and restrict every facet of life since according to this same rationale, various flu-like viruses can be unknowingly spread at all times. Further, there are a host of other far more deadly dangers such as heart disease, which, like virus-related hospitalizations, also place a burden on the health system. The civil government does not then gain authority to ban soda intake for obese individuals.

XXV. WE AFFIRM that a biblically faithful view of the civil government sphere as well as the ecclesiastical government sphere provides no lawful jurisdiction for civil magistrates or ecclesiastical authorities to mandate or in any way coerce individuals to inject substances into themselves or their children or cover their mouths, noses, face, or any combination thereof, with masks.

XXVI. WE AFFIRM that any civil or ecclesiastical authority that attempts to coerce individuals or their children with any form of public banishment, fine, imprisonment, social ostracism, or other forms of coercion for not wearing a mask or injecting a substance into their bodies are ascribing to themselves authority not delegated by God and are in grievous sin (Matt 19:14; Tit 3:10; 1st Cor 1:10; Rom 16:17).

XXVII. WE AFFIRM that although local churches may reasonably enforce policies of calling on the symptomatically ill to stay home, any attempt to impede fellowship in the body by a believer on the grounds of failing to inject a substance into their bodies or the wearing of a mask is also divisiveness (Tit 3:10; 1st Cor 1:10; Rom 16:17).

XXVIII. WE DENY that personal and family decisions to decline vaccination or the wearing of masks are necessarily out-of-step with the biblical command to love one's neighbor as oneself (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39).

XXIX. WE DENY that conformity to a given recommended course of medical action is made to be civilly or morally obligatory by appeals to an alleged "majority" of expert opinion, or available medical data.

XXX. WE DENY that an individual Christian's obligation to the weaker brother (1 Cor. 8:1-12) compels any Christian to violate his or her conscience (Rom. 14:3; 1 Cor. 10:31) regarding the wearing of masks or injecting a substance into their body. Such action may be regarded by Christians both as contrary to sound and loving health practices for themselves and their family. Specifically with masks which are worn visibly on the body, Christians may also have concern in their conscience about the message they believe wearing the mask sends to the world. They may regard the wearing of masks as bearing false witness (Ex. 20:16; 23:2) or as an unloving, tacit endorsement of what they see as propaganda surrounding their use and enforcement upon their neighbor.

XXXI. WE AFFIRM that those who seek to bind the conscience of the believer by insisting that conformity with mask or vaccination mandates is the only way for a Christian to fulfill the command to "love one's neighbor as oneself" are treating the traditions of man as the commandments of God (Mk 7:6-9). These individuals are themselves guilty of twisting the Scriptures and are effectively subjecting the law of God to the ever-changing and conflicting whims of "public health" agencies, the latest medical study, or majority opinion.

XXXII. WE DENY that choosing to respectfully decline a church officer's request to wear a mask is in any way evidence of divisiveness or rebellion against ecclesiastical authority since the ecclesiastical office does not hold jurisdiction over personal or familial health decisions.

XXXIII. WE DENY that all instances of requiring masks for church meetings are necessarily sinful or divisive in such cases where the meeting is held at a venue where the property managers are not the local church and such property managers require mask wearing for entrance. This is a property issue. In such cases, those who choose not to fellowship because of the mask mandate at the meeting venue should not be said to be in violation of any biblical commands regarding regularly meeting with the saints. To the extent possible, church officers should seek to secure a meeting venue where the local congregation will not be forced to exclude non-masking individuals due to the whims of the building owner.

XXXIV. WE AFFIRM that maintaining personal health and personal health decisions, including decisions about which medical interventions to adopt or forego, are the role and jurisdiction of each individual and their family.

XXXV. WE DENY that parents are guilty of neglect or abuse if they choose to forego a given medical intervention such as a medical procedure or vaccine due to the fact that they are not convinced of the short and long term risk profile or effectiveness of the action. This remains true regardless of what recommendations they have or haven't received from a doctor.

XXXVI. WE AFFIRM that it is anti-scriptural for a parent to categorically deny all medical interventions to their children at all times with the rationale that all medical intervention is, as a category, evidence of a lack of faith in God (1st Tim 5:23).