

## **Elders' Statement on Vaccines**

October 2021

The following statement from the elders of Faith Community Church regarding vaccines is intended to provide biblically grounded guidance to members and regular attenders of our local church. The information below may prove helpful to those who do not attend Faith Community Church; however, the elders only bear spiritual oversight responsibility for those in our immediate care. We encourage all Christians to seek guidance from the appropriate pastors and leaders at their respective local churches.

In addition, this statement focuses on what the elders of Faith Community Church deem to be the most prominent biblical principles that are pertinent to the current vaccine issue. Concerns about constitutional law, public policy, employer directives and the like are not in the purview of this statement.

### **General Statement Regarding Vaccines**

We are grateful to the Lord for His providential provision of medical advances that enhance the physical health and well-being of all people created in the image of God. As beneficiaries of God's kind providence in the healthcare arena, we believe that we are called to be good stewards of the gifts we have been given (Matthew 25:14-30). This stewardship responsibility falls to every Christian; however, it does not require the same action from everyone. The elders of Faith Community Church, therefore, do not believe that the Scriptures compel us to affirm a singular and definitive position regarding the taking or declining of vaccines. Nor do we intend this statement to be interpreted as a commentary on the overall efficacy or necessity of vaccines in general, or the COVID-19 vaccines, in particular.

What we do believe and definitively affirm is that the members and regular attenders of Faith Community Church, guided by Scripture and the indwelling Spirit of God, should make wise and biblically informed decisions about their individual health based upon principles of faithful stewardship and their individual convictions of conscience. This necessarily means that godly brothers and sisters in the church may hold different views and make different decisions regarding vaccines without violating explicit commands or prohibitions in Scripture.

### **Convictions of Conscience & COVID-19 Vaccines**

In Romans 14:1-15:7 and 1 Corinthians 8-10, the apostle, Paul, deals extensively with matters of conscience among fellow believers in a local church context. In fact, his primary aim in these lengthy passages is to exhort believers who differ on matters of conscience to love one another and prefer one another rather than judge one another based solely upon individual convictions of conscience. In the opening verses of Romans 14, Paul provides the following summary exhortation:

*One person believes he may eat anything, while the weak person eats only vegetables. Let not the one who eats despise the one who abstains, and let not the one who abstains pass judgment on the one who eats, for God has welcomed him. Who are you to pass judgment on the servant of another? It is before his own master that he stands or falls. And he will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make him stand. One person esteems one day as better than another, while another esteems all days alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. (Romans 14:2-5).*

In the first century, Paul addressed Jewish and Gentile believers in the church who had very different convictions about the kinds of foods that were permissible to eat and the appropriate times and modes of worship that were unique and meaningful. In our time, we are dealing with a spectrum of convictions about COVID-19 vaccines. In either case, believers are called to sacrificially prefer one another and not condemn (Romans 14:13), to walk in humble love rather than “puffed up” pride (1 Corinthians 8:1-3), and to “pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding (Romans 14:19).”

At Faith Community Church, there are men and women who have received the vaccine because they were convinced in their own minds (Romans 14:5) that principles of good stewardship, sacrificial love, and the proper care for their own bodies as the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) warranted such a decision. There are others in our church who have chosen not to get the vaccine for the very same reasons. The elders would affirm both decisions if they were made with clear consciences and in honor and gratitude to the Lord (Romans 14:6).

In addition, there are some brothers and sisters among us who have labored under a conviction of conscience regarding the use of fetal stem cell lines in the development and/or testing of certain COVID-19 vaccines. These cell lines were originally drawn from two aborted babies several decades ago – one in 1973 and another in 1985. Some of the higher-profile vaccine makers are using fetal cells in the production process (Janssen Research, Johnson & Johnson, AstraZeneca, Oxford University), while others only involve these cell lines in the efficacy testing process (Pfizer, Moderna). In either case, some Christians hold a conviction regarding the use of these cell lines and their historical connection to the clearly sinful act of abortion that prevents them from taking one of these vaccines. Doing so would constitute a violation of their conscience and would, thereby, be sinful.

Others in our congregation have researched and prayerfully considered the implications of the fetal cell lines issue. While they whole-heartedly believe that abortion is a sin of epic scale and consequence, they do not believe that taking a COVID-19 vaccine constitutes any kind of affirmation or support of such sin. Since current cells being used are materially distinct from the original cells, and the intent of their use today is vastly different than the intentions of those involved in the original, heinous acts of abortion more than 35 years ago, these brothers and sisters are not compelled by conscience to reject the vaccines.

The elders of Faith Community Church view both positions as matters of individual conscience. One person’s conscience constrains them while another’s conscience frees them. Both, however, “should be fully convinced in his own mind,” and then honor the Lord as they follow their own convictions of conscience. Neither should judge one another, nor lord their liberty over the other, but rather they should support one another in humility and love.

We know there are other nuanced positions concerning vaccines, and we are aware that many in our congregation are contemplating difficult and perplexing questions about the appropriate application of biblical truth in specific scenarios they are facing. In these situations, we encourage the members and regular attenders of Faith Community Church to seek wise counsel, to inform their consciences with Scripture, and to trust in the Lord’s goodness and ultimate provision. As Paul concluded his instructions to the Corinthians regarding matters of conscience, let us heed his exhortation, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God (1 Corinthians 10:31).”