

To the fellowship at Calvary Chapel Lebanon:

PHIL 1:2 - "Grace to you and peace from God our father and the Lord Jesus Christ"

In this season, our hearts are full to overflowing for the many blessings we enjoy in this country. We have free access to the Word of God, and the federal courts have just protected our freedom to worship together. Praise God.

Although there has been good news about upcoming vaccines, this pandemic is not static. This past spring, the CDC predicted a surge of cases in the fall, and that has in fact materialized. On November 22, 2020, Lebanon County reported 193 new cases of COVID, which is more than double any previous day's total since the beginning of the pandemic. We are not yet out of the woods.

And because of this surge, **the Governor of Pennsylvania has issued new regulations affecting all churches in the state of PA. The new restrictions, which take effect on November 27, 2020, state the following:**

**"Attendees of churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, and other places of congregational worship are required to wear face coverings in compliance with the updated order requiring universal face coverings."**

To remove any ambiguity as to the intent, **the Department of Health said this under their FAQ section**

**Question:** Are individual/attendees, according to the Department of Health, required to wear masks during indoor/outdoor worship services?

**Answer:** Yes.

So as a fellowship, because this mandate is coming from our God-ordained state governing authority, and because compliance on our part does not cause us to violate any scriptural teaching, **we believe we as a church should willingly comply.**

Additionally, we believe this is something we can do to support our community in order to help protect the most vulnerable among us, especially during this time of a surge in cases.

As we are admonished in 1 COR 12, if one part of the body suffers, every part suffers with it. And, in like fashion, if one member of the body seeks to protect

themselves from COVID, we should love them enough to do all we can do to enable that.

As I have said in every letter I have written concerning COVID, there are so many diverse opinions on this subject, with each side providing volumes of data to support their position. And yet, my guess is that once the pandemic is behind us, and all of the post pandemic research has been gathered, we will probably all need to admit that although some of our opinions were correct, some were not.

**Since we all know that none of us have a perfect line on this, let's be gracious towards one another, united in the spirit and living in peace with one another. Paul says this very thing in EPH 4:3 "Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the spirit, binding yourselves together with peace."**

As I thought about this, I thought back to my early competitive days playing soccer.

When I would get upset at an opponent during a game, I would say things to them (usually "jerk" or "clown" under my breath – loud enough for them to hear) or I would retaliate physically in a very non-Christian like manner.

And you know, whether we won or lost, by the time I got home, my spirit would be flooded by shame and regret for my un-Christ like behavior. Likewise here, we don't want to live with regrets as to how we contributed disunity to our fellowship during these months. Instead, **let's continue to be gracious and loving toward one another and our state officials. They have an impossible task on their hands, trying to manage a pandemic that is unmanageable. So let's be at peace with them as well.**

**ROM 12:8 – "Do all that you can to be at peace with everyone."**

**So a few particulars:**

- 1. The state mandates that all people wear masks while in the church building, from the time you walk into church until you leave.**
- 2. Children's Sunday school classes will adhere to the same mask guidelines as followed in the public school setting.**
- 3. Although we as a church are required to wear masks, the Department of Health has said that pastors and church leaders are not required to**

**enforce this mandate. With that said, although we as pastors and church leaders will not be policing this, we ask that you make compliance a matter of your heart and willingly comply at all times.**

- 4. And in order for me as a pastor to keep the heart of this mandate, I plan to stop hugging people and shaking hands (my wife and Ted excluded!). Sue and I plan to continue to greet people at the back of the church, but we will (painfully) restrain ourselves from any physical contact, except maybe for an elbow bump!**

**And in closing, I would ask that we all be steadfast in prayer, asking God for the grace to be loving and kind in the response to these changes.**

God gave the Apostle Paul the answer for us:

2 COR 13:11 “Be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you.”

EPH 4:3 “Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.”

COL 3:15 “And let the peace that comes from Christ rule your hearts for as members of one body, you are called to live in peace.”

Happy belated Thanksgiving!

Love, Thom