

# Disputable Matters

## *The Sin of the Stronger Believer*

October 10, 2021

Good morning weaker seekers and strong believers! How we all doin'? If you're visiting, welcome home. I'm Bruce, and I'll be your server, as we address the elephant in the room. Because, as *promised*, today's question is: **Should Christians wear COVID masks?**



Now, there are basically **two impassioned positions held by authentic ambassadors of Christ**. Those who regard cloth masks as *effective* against COVID, hold that *wearing* them glorifies God by **protecting lives without jeopardizing freedom; and defending our witness to the world, and obeying a clear command to submit to authorities**; whereas those who regard them as *ineffective*, hold that *not-wearing* them glorifies God by **protecting religious freedoms without jeopardizing lives, and defending our flock from the world, and obeying a higher command to resist unlawful overreach**.

That's *oversimplified* and there are *variations within*, but that's *basically* it. So who's basically *right*, and who's basically *wrong*, and who's *side am I on*, and, basically, who *cares*? *Everyone ... who actually, authentically, embraces one of these two divided views, and earnestly believes that theirs' is the strongest position, with the strongest supporting Scriptures. So how about you?* If you *have a stance*, **do you believe that your view is the stronger of the two?**

Thing is, these two views are so polarized at this point that arguing is pointless. As we saw last Sunday, this is a full-fledged "*disputable matter*" among *believers*, that the enemy can *use* to divide to some degree. **So what can we do when we can't agree?** Well, if you see *yourself* as the *stronger*, and those other half-wit-nesses as *weaker*, then **you've obligated yourself to our Father's first and foremost command to the stronger believer** (found in Romans 14) to:

*Accept the one whose faith is weak, without quarreling over disputable matters. [As opposed to respectfully discussing or debating] ... for God has accepted them. [So] Who are you to judge someone else's servant? ... [Each] should be fully convinced in their own mind. ... [because] whether we [believers] live or die, we [like servants] belong to the Lord. ... You, then, why do you judge your brother or sister? Or why do you treat them with contempt? For we [sincere servants – whether sincerely right or sincerely wrong on momentary issues] will all stand before God's judgment seat. [We will?] ... [Yes. And] each of us will give an account of ourselves to God [on eternal issues]. Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another [lest we be judged (Mt 7:1)]. Instead, [of allowing disputables to become divisive] make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister. Therefore do not let what you [all] know is good be spoken of as evil. For the kingdom of God is ... a [undisputable] matter of ... righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, [so don't be an obstacle in another believer's way] because anyone who serves Christ in this way is pleasing to God and receives human approval. Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. Do not destroy the work of God – Romans 14:1-20 NIV*



*This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent. – John 6:29 NKJ*

*And this is His command: to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us. – 1 John 3:23 NIV*

Let us *consider* how to *stir up* one another to *love* and *good works*, – Hebrews 10:24 ESV

For we are *God’s workmanship*, created in Christ Jesus to *do good works*, – Ephesians 2:10 NIV

For we are *God’s fellow workers*; – 1 Corinthians 3:9 NIV

And I am sure of *this*, that He who *began* a *good work* in *you* will bring it to *completion* at the Day of Jesus Christ. – Philippians 1:6 ESV

So, whatever you do, “do not destroy the work of God”! Were you aware that the saved will “stand before God’s judgment seat” and “give an account”? And some will suffer loss! Paul writes about it to the Corinthians. So what *account* will we give before God? Not an account of our *sin* per say; that was judged once for *all* on the cross – and that’s *foundational* to our *faith*.

For *no one* can lay *any* foundation *other* than the one *already* laid, which is *Jesus Christ*. [But, we will give an account of what we’ve built on that foundation] ... their work will be shown for what it is, because the *Day* [of Jesus Christ (Phil 1:6)] will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, [Because “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.” (Lk 3:16)] and the *fire* will test the *quality* of each person’s *work*. If what has been *built* survives, the *builder* will receive a *reward*. If it is *burned up*, the *builder* will *suffer loss* but yet will be *saved*—even though *only as one* escaping through the *flames*. – 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 NIV



*That* won’t be *pleasant*. But notice that the *reward* is ours to *lose*.

Every watch *American Pickers*? I like that they look for “rusty gold”. That’s how they describe an item with a **valuable maker’s mark and good patina**. The scars and *marks* of *use* give it *depth* and *interest* and a *story*; and the *maker’s mark* gives it value. And **together they determine its full reward**. But the reward is reduced by damages caused either by neglect or a unwise restoration that removed the patina. Shar and I have an antique kitchen table; and my favorite part is a corner with several scars from an ice pick from when ice boxes were ice boxes. **So what’s our reward?**



Blessed is the one who *perseveres* [or should I say, *patinas*] under trial because, having stood the *test*, [of fire, perhaps?] that person [the *testifier*] will receive the crown [i.e. royal mark] of life that the Lord has promised to those who love Him. – James 1:12 NIV

[Jesus said] Blessed are the *merciful*, for they shall *receive mercy*. – Matthew 5:7 NIV

For *judgment* will be *merciless* to one who has shown *no mercy*; [which I assume burns like gas on a fire before the throne; but] *mercy triumphs* over *judgment*. – James 2:13 NAS

For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown [i.e. royal mark] in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when He comes? Is it not you? – 1 Thessalonians 2:19 NIV

Oh. Wouldn't *that* be *incredible* if the crown of life – that *most marks* us as our *Maker's* – refers to all those we've helped to usher into our Father's kingdom?

For you [writes Paul to the Philippian believers that he's been working with] are my joy and the reward for my work. – Philippians 4:1 NLT



And wouldn't it be *horrible* if that's why that which we haven't *rightly built up, burns up*?! And if that's why we'd be "saved— even though only as one escaping through the flames". We're all *gonna die* – this world will pass away – but **we're given these moments as opportunities to get our hearts right while leading others in the way by our example.**

So, my position on *this* disputable matter, is pretty simple: *whatever* I currently think ('cause my thoughts change), and *whenever* I express my thoughts to *others*, **I want to be a stepping stone to the throne, rather than a stumbling block.** Because, "*whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord*". Which means, **we don't have the right to have the right stance without grace.** Paul concludes his instructions regarding disputable matters, to the stronger believers, writing:

We who are *strong* [capable] ought to bear with [whatever we perceive as] the *failings* of the *weak* [incapable] and *not* to please *ourselves*. [But to put others first] Each of us should please our neighbors [not as mere people-pleasers, but] for their [eternal] good, [You know:] to build them up. For *even* Christ did not please *himself* – Romans 15:1-3 NIV

Because, **things burn up unless they're built up in Christ.** Two choices. Two teams. **Builders vs. Destroyers.** And there's plenty of room on one team for both impassioned positions, regarding *any* passing disputable matter among believers. So "*do not destroy the work of God*".



So why is so much responsibility put on the *strong* believer? Because, **the weaker can't cater to the stronger.** But **the stronger can bear the weaker.** So are you the stronger? There's an old sheep herder's saying: "A good shepherd paces the flock to accommodate the weakest lamb." You see, **the sin of the stronger is insensitivity to the vulnerability of the weaker.**



You know how we baby-proof our homes? It isn't to please *ourselves*, but to protect our little lambs. When Shaz (my daughter) was little we had a hard time keeping up with her. She got into the Desitin; she got into the Vaseline; and she got into the toilet ... literally! **We got frustrated, but we never got in the toilet with her!**

Those who are stronger are *not* to look *down* on the weaker, but to regard them as children. And **we don't condemn children for being children.** You don't say to a child, "What are we having for dinner?" You say, "I guess I'm making dinner. What would you like? And don't say 'candy'."

Maybe keep in mind that **meekness isn't weakness – it's strength under control.**

Listen to Paul's emotion: "*For even Christ did not please himself*". *Even He* who is infinitely wise and mature and considerate, was gentle with Peter the denier; and Thomas the doubter; and Judas the betrayer, and you, the whatever-you-are.

*Even He* who is pure and holy allowed himself to be covered in sin. So when *you*, a follower of *Him*, regard a fellow follower as more *childish* than *yourself*, you've *obligated yourself* to the role of a patient, gentle, *parent*, for the sake of *His* flock.

Because, **people are deeply affected by self-sacrifice, not self-righteousness.**

Which *doesn't* mean we don't *instruct* and *challenge* one another. Just that, whenever we turn a disputable matter into a divisive moment, and condescend to a sincere servant, **we're building with stumbling blocks rather than stepping stones.** And it'll burn before the throne. So:

Be *shepherds* of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you *must*, but because you are *willing*, as God *wants* you to be; ... not *lording* it over those *entrusted* to you, but being *examples* to the *flock*. And when the *Chief Shepherd* appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away. – 1 Peter 5:2-4 NIV



Scripture pictures this life as a fading shadow. (Ps 109:23) Wouldn't it be poetic if the crown of life was an unfading shadow cast in the presence of His glory? Whatever it is, it's ours to lose. So whatever position you hold, be sure to:

*Hold on* to what you *have*, so that *no one* will take your crown. – Revelation 3:11 NIV

**So, who's side am I on? Yours.**

Because *somebody's* gotta be the *parental* referee. And I guess that's *me*, because I *also* believe, like many of *you*, that I have the strongest position – which is a variation of the two. But *that* obligates me, as it does *you*, to a *shepherd's* role.

**I'm more than happy to discuss my view, and often do, one-on-one, in a God-honoring way; but I'm sure not gonna stand up here, before the Lord, and throw more fuel on the fire!**

Each of us will give an account of how we fulfilled our created purpose: trusting and loving our Father, and obeying and displaying His Son. **So if I'm gonna judge a life, let it be my own!**

For if we would judge *ourselves*, we would not be judged. – 1 Corinthians 11:31 NKJ

And the big reveal is sure to be the reward that remains when the smoke clears!