**FAQ’s Regarding RHC’s Response to “Safer at Home” and the C-19 Pandemic**

The Overseers of Redemption Hill Church have a unanimous conviction that we must modify our method of meeting together in subjection to our government’s “Safer at Home” rule. We do not have a specific date for resuming in-person ministry but are continuing to monitor and respond to the ever-changing circumstances arising out of this pandemic. We have established a task force to help us create a phased “return to normal” (or “new normal”) patterns of ministry in a safe and efficient manner, and you can expect to hear more specifics periodically. We have established an online survey to get your personal feedback in this process and encourage you to participate.

We have no way of knowing for certain at this point, but anticipate this phased plan will start with smaller groups and greater restrictions and gradually free us to more accustomed modes of ministry. Limitations will likely begin with things such as wearing of masks, social distancing, no physical contact (no handshaking, hugging, etc.), and that those that are at highest risk continue to shelter in place and participate via our online and audio recording of our worship services until it is safe to participate in person.

Our fervent prayer is that our government will find an appropriate pathway through this pandemic that will restore our ability to meet face-to-face soon, but are also unanimous in our conviction that there could come a point where obeying God will require us to no longer comply with Safer at Home standards. Our position is rooted in scripture and much prayer, and should God ever lead us to respond differently to our government, that response will also come out of scripture and much prayer. Some of the key scriptures and points of understanding guiding us follow in a “frequently asked questions” format. If you have any questions or want to dialog further, please do not hesitate to reach out to any overseer (all contact information can be found on our church website: [www.redemptionhc.com](http://www.redemptionhc.com)).

***What does God say about a Christian response to government?***

Scripture directs us to honor and be subject to governing authorities because they are appointed by God. This is widely taught in the New Testament and is *almost* without exception.

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 . . .

(Romans 13:1-2)

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. Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.

(1 Pet 2:13-18)

Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.

 (Titus 3:1-2)

Tell us, then, what you think. Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?”. . . Then he said to them, “Therefore render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.”

(Matt 22:17, 21)

Our primary orientation to governing authorities—mayors, county boards, governors, presidents—is submission, honor, and obedience to the laws of the land. We do this because God has established authority and delegated it to them. We do this to honor God.

***Do we still need to submit to “bad” government?***

Yes.

It is important for us, first, to adopt a heart of humility and admit that “bad government” is only rightly understood from God’s point of view and I may or may not have clarity on what my government is doing. However, this question is not as relevant as I might think anyway. Peter and Paul are both writing while Nero is Caesar. He was a man of distinctively bad moral character—eventually executing both men. His rule was unjust in so many ways, yet these apostles, under the inspiration of God’s Spirit, command us to be in subjection. As Americans we have the right to speak back to our government in appropriate ways—we are free to question or challenge, but never disrespectfully or harshly. As Christians, we must always maintain a heart of subjection, humility and grace.

***Are there any exceptions to the requirement of being subject to government?***

Yes.

Our driving question must always be, “can we obey God and government at the same time?” As long as the answer is, “yes” we must obey, but sometimes our answer is, “no.” When this is the case our allegiance is to God above government. Civil disobedience can be biblical, but the bar is high.

* The Hebrew Midwives refused to kill babies against Pharaoh’s command. (Exodus 1)
* Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not bow down to the idol and Daniel continued praying to the Lord rather than temporarily pray to the king. (Daniel 3, 6)
* Peter and John refused to stop preaching the gospel and replied to the Sanhedrin:

We must obey God rather than men.

(Acts 5:29)

These are clear moral absolutes. None are rooted in the politics of the day. Our current situation is not so clear as these, which leads to another important question…

***Are there any other exceptions to the requirement of being subject to government?***

Yes.

We believe God has given clear patterns of life and ministry that *in certain circumstances* may require civil disobedience to remain faithful to God and his word. The New Testament repeatedly commands us to behave certain ways toward *one another* (e.g. John 13:14; Romans 12:9-13; Colossians 3:12-17; etc.) which most naturally occurs when we meet face to face. It assumes we are gathering together for a variety of other purposes and even commands us not to forsake assembling together.

For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them... [church discipline]

(Matthew 18:20)

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another… [communion]

(1 Corinthians 11:33)

What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation… [worship]

(1 Corinthians 14:26)

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near… [mutual edification]

(Hebrews 10:24-25)

None of these passages specify what meeting together will look like—location, time, order of service, frequency—they simply require that we gather. While violating Romans 13 or Titus 3 happens the moment we stop following government, passages like Hebrews 10 have a cumulative weight. Not gathering in person for a time is not *necessarily* forsaking assembling. We must also remember that these passages were given in a day where there were only two options: meet together physically or do not meet together at all. We are able to do much effective ministry through on-line gatherings, *at least for a season.*

RHC has agreed to forego meeting in person for this season in order to preserve life, primarily for those that are most at risk. We continue to weigh how long we believe it is prudent and faithful to God to obey the government policies on not meeting together physically. There may come a day when we discern that the “cumulative” effect of Safer at Home would prevent us from obeying God—at which time we will thoughtfully and prayerfully alter our course.

A case could also be made that government mandates may sometimes make us complicit in moral evil. Some argue that Safer at Home may actually cross this line. We must exercise caution here. We must have confidence before God that our calculations of the relative good versus evil are sound and accurate. More importantly, we must reckon with Christ’s statement that his people were to pay taxes to a wicked regime that used those very taxes to harm many people, even Christians (also see Rom 13:6–7). Is Jesus requiring his followers to join in injustice by obeying a Roman law that demands taxes? Certainly not. Yet, he is not giving the freedom to not pay taxes (i.e. obey a law that will undoubtedly do some harm). Clearly, it is possible to obey God *and* obey the government, even in very challenging situations—and that is what we are aiming to do at this juncture.

 ***How do we respond to other churches resuming in-person ministry?***

Currently, evangelical churches are responding to safer at home in a wide variety of ways. This may seem confusing. But we believe most churches are *interpreting* the scriptures the same way and the differences are a matter of *application*. Every church that altered ministry in response to government did so because they wanted to obey Romans 13. As they are considering next steps, it seems everyone is asking some form of the question: “When is it no longer possible to fulfill our ministry and mission mandate without in-person ministry?” This is a strong place of unity. We must guard this! Satan would love to polarize us. This might look like drawing a contrast between those who are “reckless” and those who are “wise”; or between those who are “following God” and those who are “following man”; or between those who are “bold and visionary” and those who are “compromising and timid”; or it could take some other form. We must resist this thinking. Our response is not to be based on choosing wisdom over recklessness, or boldness over timidity—it is about discerning God’s will for our church at this point.

Some churches have settled on May 31 as the date to resume in-person ministry. We will not. We pray God’s blessing on our brothers and sisters, but will continue to follow the guidance we believe he has given us. If another church follows the same biblical process and winds up in a different application place—we need to live by our convictions and graciously grant them the dignity to do the same. This carries over to a personal level as well. None of us has the vantage point to see everything clearly and confidently, but we all have the responsibility to prayerfully and humbly seek God’s guidance through his word and to live in light of that. Our commitment as overseers is to continually do this for RHC.

So much hostility is in the air of our culture. We need to show Christian love to our brothers and sisters in Christ, to other churches, to our governing authorities and to people who may hold very different views and express them strongly. Romans 13:1-7 figures so prominently in all that we are doing right now. We need to read a little further:

Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. For the commandments, ”You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

(Romans 13:8-9)

As we read even further, we discover Romans 14 and 15 are all about not judging our brothers and sisters about their convictions.

The pathway forward is hard for all of us. Whatever the timing for returning to in-person ministry, the wait will feel far too long. Whatever the timing for returning to in-person ministry, the pathway forward will be challenging. Redemption Hill, and the larger church of Jesus Christ are in this together. We must not forget this. God has purposes he is working out and he will guide us forward in ways that bear abundant kingdom fruit. Our responsibility is to be prayerful, humble and loving.

And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap if we do not give up.

(Galatians 6:9)

Journeying together with you,

The Overseers of RHC