

FIRST PERSON: Pastors, protect your flock

*By Bob Mamrak
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I find it appalling that many (most? all?) of our churches make masks optional during this COVID-19 coronavirus crisis. As of Oct. 12, there have been 106,000 reported cases and 3,115 deaths in Mississippi. I have heard people who don't wear masks claim it is their "right." I can understand a biker at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally saying that, but not a Bible-believing child of God. Doesn't 1 Corinthians 8 instruct us to give up our rights for the sake of others? Did not Jesus set that example in Philippians 2:5-8? Didn't Jesus tell us to love our neighbors?

There are vulnerable people in our congregations. For the sake of these more vulnerable people, wear a mask. The virus is not a hoax. Over 215,000 Americans have died. The virus doesn't care if you're Hindu, Buddhist, Baptist, atheist, Republican, Democrat, Independent, or brain-dead. It kills indiscriminately. Scientists and doctors say it's going to get much worse before it gets better.

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Responsible leaders hope for the best but prepare for the worst. If the experts are wrong, there's no harm done by wearing masks and avoiding crowds. It's temporary. If the experts are right, being incautious will cause people to die.

Perhaps you have heard of the August 7 wedding in Maine conducted by Todd Bell, a Baptist preacher who has railed against his state's coronavirus regulations. Sixty-five people attended, in violation of the state's 50-person maximum rule. Almost nobody wore masks. So far, over 270 coronavirus infections and eight deaths have been traced to that wedding. Several people who weren't there but know people who did attend have tested positive despite living over 100 miles away. There have been 10 cases in Pastor Bell's congregation.

I pastored in Choctaw County for over 30 years, following the Biblical mandate to shepherd the flocks God entrusted to me. Clearly, that entails keeping them safe. Pastors, please do so. I'm guessing Todd Bell wishes he had.

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