

On Vaccines: Tolerance, Charity, and Balance

Scott Ritsema

It goes without saying that the controversies over the COVID-19 vaccines have confronted our people with a crisis.

To take them or not? To advise them or not? And maybe most importantly of all... to align with the agenda to mandate them or not? That last question is the easy one.

Mandatory Covid Vaccination

About a month ago we published an [article](#) seeking to deal only with the issues surrounding vaccine coercion. Praise God that the grassroots of our community are almost unanimously on board with the importance of individual consent to what is inserted into your body.

In fact, that near-unanimity of opinion was evident already last summer when a post I made on Facebook about vaccine freedom became the single most liked, shared, and commented-on Facebook post that I've ever made.

(Side note, I do not keep up on my Facebook messages and notifications, so if you've been unsuccessful at getting a hold of me there, shoot me an email, scottritsema@gmail.com.)

Whether pro or anti-vax, the Adventist body represented on that thread was literally unanimous in support of freedom of conscience. Praise the Lord.

As a mentor of mine said to me on the phone the other day, Scott, remember this: there will be many in heaven who took the COVID vaccines and many in heaven who did not take the COVID vaccines... but there will be no one in heaven who used coercion.

Amen. If we betray the principles of the kingdom of God in favor of resorting to force to compel the conscience, then we have aligned with outright Satanic principles. God forbid.

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:16).

"Where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3:17).

God never forces the will or the conscience; but Satan's constant resort—to gain control of those whom he cannot otherwise seduce—is compulsion by cruelty. Through fear or force he endeavors to rule the conscience and to secure homage to himself. To accomplish this, he works through both religious and secular authorities, moving them to the enforcement of human laws in defiance of the law of God (The Great Controversy, p. 591).

Both Right and Righteous?

The overwhelming support on that vaccine-freedom post on Facebook was reminiscent of the 98% favorable 'like-to-dislike' ratio on the viral [abortion video](#) that Adventist viewers catapulted into YouTube prominence during the 2019 abortion controversy in our church.

Major Adventist speakers, filled with both grace and truth, compellingly expressed the clear Bible truth on the value of both the mother and her unborn baby.

Indeed, taking an innocent life is the ultimate and most extreme expression of the coercive impulse.

I have to give folks a pat on the back. By God's grace alone, while the corporate body of Christ certainly doesn't get everything right, they sure have a knack for aligning with self-evident truth on some of the most pressing and difficult issues of our time. But the deeper question is a heart question. We may be right on abortion, vaccine freedom, or any host of issues... but are we righteous?

Are we like Christ... 100% grace and 100% truth?

What kinds of feelings emerge in our hearts when we think of those with whom we disagree on controversial issues? Even those who've had bad attitudes toward us.

Romans 14 counsels us to not 'despise' or 'judge' others over 'doubtful disputations.'

There's a reason every one of us is humbled and convicted each time we read this or hear this quoted:

"Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own" (Christ's Object Lessons, p. 69).

Vaccination and Coercion

It goes without saying that the choice to vaccinate or not is a profoundly personal matter.

If it becomes a matter of assessing one another as gullible dupes or as conspiracy theorists / selfish people, we're a long way from the character of Christ being perfectly reproduced in His people.

If it leads to shunning, condemning, or prohibiting, we're a long way from the kingdom.

It is only in mutual love, tolerance, and service that we reflect the character of Christ. And those Christian attitudes are the antidote to the menace of coercion.

Will We Find Our Voice?

Zooming out a bit. While the body of Christ is united on the matter of freedom of conscience... big tech / social media – not so much.


The latest scandal out of Facebook is that they have an algorithm that apparently throttles "liberty-based objections" to the onward march of the vaccine regime. If that algorithm went into effect, you might not hear as many objections to forced vaccination on that platform.

And it also appears that there won't be a viral video of Adventists on YouTube with a montage of our leading voices speaking up for freedom of conscience on vaccines.

Yes, YouTube censorship... for some reason, opposing forced vaccination makes you an “anti-vaxxer” (yup, that's an actual word in [the dictionary](#), and its definition includes those who “oppose laws mandating vaccination” – so I guess we're all anti-vaxxers now?).

anti-vaxxer noun

 Save Word

an-ti-vax-xer | \ ,an-tē-'vak-sər  ,an-,tī-\

plural **anti-vaxxers**

Definition of *anti-vaxxer*

: a person who opposes [vaccination](#) or laws that mandate vaccination

// As *anti-vaxxers* launch a campaign against a bill that would eliminate their ability to opt out of required shots, supporters of the proposal are delivering more than 21,000 petition signatures to the office of state Sen. Ben Allen ...

— Alexei Koseff

But not just YouTube censorship. There aren't yet any viral videos expressing SDA convictions on liberty of conscience because, frankly, our people have yet to find their voice on the matter. I'm not sure why the relative silence, so far.

It feels political maybe? It's too early maybe? It's definitely not divisive, since tolerance is a powerful unifying principle.

Moving on from that, the subject of this article actually goes beyond vaccine freedom issues to how those representing our health message have discussed the controversies surrounding the science behind COVID-19 vaccines, in general.

If you've been listening to our major voices and media outlets you've heard one perspective about the COVID-19 vaccines, a perspective from leading Adventists that has echoed the recommendations we hear from the public health authorities:

There are no safety concerns about these vaccines. They are effective. And there's no reason you shouldn't take the vaccine – not only for yourself, but more importantly, as a caring person, to protect others.

We listen to our experts. They are knowledgeable. They dedicate their careers to saving lives.

And they all seem to be in agreement, so we go with it. But there's a problem.

While these Adventist professionals are, no doubt, honorable people, do we necessarily trust those whom they are trusting?

You don't have to be a conspiracy theorist to ask that question. After all, inquiry and dissent are at the heart of the pursuit of scientific truth. Many times, the guardians of orthodoxy are discovered to

be flat-out wrong. And almost always, there's another side in the scientific community begging to be heard.

For example, while those in power were "following the science" in locking down society last year, over 43,000 medical practitioners and over 14,000 medical and public health scientists (hardly a rag-tag fringe) signed [a declaration of dissent](#) against lockdowns and school closings, advocating that the young and healthy "immediately be allowed to resume life as normal."

It was called [The Great Barrington Declaration](#). These medical and scientific voices presented their view that lockdowns were insane, harmful, and ineffective. And in retrospect, they are the ones whose credibility has stood the test, not the public health authorities.

Much more could be said about the waning credibility of those scientists who happen to hold positions of power. But what we all need to remember is that they are not the science. Science is established through the scientific method, not through the proclamations of the powerful.

Presently, millions of people, including many Adventists (non-fanatical, non-conspiracy-minded Adventists) have rightly lost a great deal of confidence in those who appear on the news claiming a monopoly on what is scientific truth. This skepticism is not only a prudent default position to carry into the pursuit of truth, but, given the insanity of the past year, it is to be highly encouraged.

Yet Adventists, who are looking to our own health experts for guidance on the COVID-19 vaccines are hearing a decidedly one-sided message in recent weeks, a message that mirrors almost exactly the perspective that so many of us are now having second thoughts about.

What prompted this segment of the article is not to argue over the vaccines, but to ask ourselves a bigger question about how we arrive at scientific truth, as well as a simple desire that our people hear a real conversation. Otherwise, what is billed as a "[conversation about science](#)" might just strike a huge swath of the body of Christ as a [one-sided PR piece](#) for the status quo.

Many thinking Adventists are rightly put off by that type of 'conversation,' as it's been called. They want to see all the [scientific evidence](#) on the table and to hear both sides of the debate—a real conversation.

But it seems we've vilified as fanatical any view that raises questions about these vaccines.

When I was a history teacher, I enjoyed allowing my students to encounter and weigh the arguments on both sides of various historical disputes. When I see the opposing view getting the short end of the stick, my impulse is to give it a platform. So, it is in that spirit that I share some of the other side of the debate over the COVID-19 vaccines that are to be found in our church community (not from any certainty or expertise that I have, of course).

But, since the best conclusions are drawn from a multitude of counsel (when we reason together and become thinkers, not mere reflectors of other men's thoughts), we should be encouraged to listen to both sides and then make our choice, as reason and divinely guided conscience dictate.

So, you've heard a lot of the unified pro-COVID-vaccine position in our church in recent weeks; now here is just a bit on the other side, presented as an effort to bring some balance; to fill in the gaps and make it more of a conversation.

1. The first resource is a video featuring a pre-eminent (non-Adventist) research/medical scientist, Dr. Peter McCullough. Dr. McCullough is a world-renowned mainstream physician and epidemiologist who is a pro-vaccine individual and was fully on board, giving the COVID-19 vaccines to his patients. Until recently:



2. The second resource is a series of statements from various level-headed, yet dissenting, Adventist medical professionals that I have casually collected in recent days. (See below.)

There is currently an unprecedented number of mainstream people from the medical and public health community dissenting from the orthodox 'narrative'. And Adventists are no exception.

Based on what we've been hearing from various outlets recently, one would be led to believe that all Adventist physicians believe in the safety of mass COVID vaccination. The series of statements compiled below, while not intended to prove anything about the vaccines, illustrates that there is another viewpoint in our medical community that we should be hearing and evaluating.

This group is growing, and it is not a marginal group within our church. This sampling of statements I received via email in a brief window of time is just the tip of the iceberg of Adventist medical professionals who are developing serious concerns about this vaccination program. They may be in the minority, but their perspective and the science they are relying upon needs to weigh into the discussion.

Pseudonyms

A quick note on pseudonyms. A few of those who submitted comments wanted to NOT be anonymous, but since some did want to remain anonymous, in an effort to encourage more people to contribute and not single out those who requested anonymity, I promised to attribute all of these statements to pseudonyms, given the controversial nature of these discussions. People do risk their careers and reputation when they dissent, so I can understand the request for anonymity. That atmosphere of fear and intimidation should tell us all something about the darkness of the age in which we live. Anybody who submitted comments and didn't get included or who wants their name and further comments to be public, feel free to comment below. The credentials and statements below are, of course, authentic. Many of the comments were edited for the sake of brevity.

Here are a couple dozen responses that I received in the past few days when asking our professionals how they feel about the COVID vaccines:

As an outpatient internist, I see a broad spectrum of covid disease in the population. Out of several hundred cases I have seen, about 7 have been hospitalized, and 3 of my patients, unfortunately, have died. However, no patient that I was able to treat early in disease with simple and readily available prescriptive and natural remedies needed to be hospitalized or died.

After the vaccine roll-out, about 30 of my patients have now had severe and lasting adverse reactions to the vaccine, including 1 death, a stroke, several cases of neurologic syndromes currently under diagnostic evaluation, brain bleeds, severe long-term rashes, and shortness of breath. Numerous people are unable to return to work due to fatigue or other nonspecific symptoms.

N. Smith, MD

With regards to the COVID vaccines, I have some safety concerns. As an ophthalmologist, I have seen several patients who experienced neurological complications and compromise of their immune system. While these are just short-term effects at the moment, we have not confirmed long term safety for these vaccines and mRNA technology has a history of highly toxic side effects. There is no scientific proof that this toxic side effect profile has been solved.

For those who have already had confirmed COVID infections or those at low risk I recommend against vaccination. It is putting your health at unnecessary risk for minimal benefit. For pregnant or nursing mothers, avoid the vaccine, as there is very limited safety data in this category, and you are putting your child at risk unnecessarily.

For those who are at high risk due to existing medical conditions or age the best approach is to optimize your health. Most chronic conditions are completely reversible with lifestyle changes and reversing these would lower your risk substantially. As a physician, I refuse to make a global recommendation for an experimental substance.

T. Anderson, MD

I think that there is effectiveness in vaccines in general, including, likely, the coronavirus vaccines available at this time. I do not think it makes any sense, however, to encourage these vaccines to be given to the general public. To me that is outrageous! I think the vaccine should be offered to be available to those who are at high risk of mortality from this virus but not to low-risk groups such as children. Children get the virus, mild to no symptoms, and survival is about 100%.

I think we all need to be very careful about pushing our views too strongly on either side, as I see this already is polarizing within local churches. As example, it appears local churches as we 'open' up, we are seemingly opening our arms to those vaccinated but not so much to those who are not vaccinated. The issue of vaccination in my opinion must remain a personal, private decision.

E. Chang, OB/Gyn

Prior to the recent developments I was only recommending the vaccine to older adults who were in poor health; now I am having second thoughts about that. Vaccination of healthy people who have a 95% chance of survival when there is early treatment available is unnecessary.

Forcing people to get vaccinated is unreasonable and unscientific, furthermore, it is morally wrong. Rewarding people with money and other things, recommending pregnant women to get vaccinated without assurance of vaccine safety for them is irresponsible. A system that behaves in such a way cannot be trusted.

F. Garcia, MD (Internal Medicine, Geriatric Medicine)

I am concerned about the safety of the mRNA COVID vaccine. The side effects of the vaccine that were reported by some of my patients include: severe headache, prolonged fatigue/malaise, prolonged flu-like symptoms, diarrhea, abdominal pain, myalgia, and even multiple pulmonary embolisms.

I had worked with mRNA in my research in the past; mRNA can revert back to cDNA in the presence of reverse transcriptase (RT). We have readily available RT in our cells all over our body. The spike protein can affect multiple systems in our body: vascular, respiratory, neurological, GI, and reproductive system as well as our mitochondria.

There is no long-term safety study on this vaccine, therefore, we have no definitive evidence of safety for this vaccine. Report from VAERS as of 5/28/2021, 294801 had adverse events and 5165 people had died after taking the vaccine.

R. Williams, PA

Many of my colleagues and I feel the same about long-term safety. We simply don't have any data on this point. The process of bringing a vaccine to market is extremely time-consuming and expensive. Compared to a normal vaccine timeline, we would still be in phase I testing, far too early to make definitive safety claims.

Some prominent vaccine experts have warned about antibody dependent enhancement. While this has not yet become apparent, primarily because we are still far too early in the pandemic, should this become an issue, it could be devastating.

We have far too much group-think, cheerleading (even bullying) going on by the media, the scientists, and the vaccine companies. I am not a firebrand. In this world of shouting, there is great need for quiet, calm dissent.

G. Brown, MD

If you are under 65 and 'healthy,' your risk is essentially 0, and I would recommend NOT getting any of the experimental COVID-19 vaccines. If you are at increased risk, talk to your doctor ABOUT YOUR PERSONAL RISKS regarding BOTH getting and not getting vaccinated. Age, BMI, Health Status, Immune Function, Vit D level, Medical Conditions, Living/Working situation, access to Medical Care, availability of COVID-19 Therapeutics.

Also, consider the many simple lifestyle changes for improving one's risk level, and wait as long as reasonable to see what new information becomes available over the next few weeks to months.

If one's risk balance is clearly in favor of getting vaccinated (which would be a very rare and extreme case only), I previously recommended the Pfizer vaccine. I now retract that—information received today indicates that both vaccines are associated with cardiac inflammation—up to 10% prevalence.

S. Rodriguez, MD

I really don't have a lot of unusual concerns. Same as everybody.

I had COVID-19 last June-July and almost died. I'm not going to get the vaccine because I'm already naturally vaccinated.

I do ask my patients if they have been vaccinated and if so, what kind of reactions occurred. I'd say at least 20-25% have had adverse reactions – from mild arm aches to going to the ER and being in bed for 2 weeks! Some say they felt like they had covid after the jab.

R. Thompson, DDS

There appears to be a misunderstanding about the true impact of the vaccine. Many people believe what they are told through the media and other interested leaders that the benefits outweigh the risks. Many are not aware of the numerous immediate and long-term effects of the vaccine; therefore, they are not given a fair chance to make a true informed decision to take or not to take the vaccine.

It is disturbing that people are trusting in a system which is experimenting on them, and the group-think is so strong that many people actually follow leaders by taking the vaccine. However, they do not realize that they stand alone when it comes to how their body will react which can range from mild to severe notwithstanding the long-term effect on their health.

B. Stanton, MD

The Adventist church and health movement were called to reform the practice of medicine. In the process of saving life, the Adventist physician was counseled to sacredly regard each life. We were never to think that the loss of life due to a drug could be made up for by the potential benefit it might have. The Spirit of Prophecy warns that the conscience of physicians should ever remain tender in regard to this.

D. Adams, MD, MPH

I'm not into creating dissention, but my feeling about these mRNA vaccines is that they are extremely dangerous, that there is enough research now to show that they will be a crime against humanity, and it is my duty as a Christian physician to stand up for the image of God in man that I believe is being desecrated.

O. Williams, OB/Gyn, MPH

Contrary to popular belief, none of the clinical trials for any of the vaccines have shown that the vaccines reduce the risk of death. The RNA and DNA vaccines indeed have been produced and rolled out in 'warp speed.' But one thing we cannot warp is time. It will take time to ascertain what the long-term consequences of these vaccines will be.

But even in the short term, these are turning out to be much riskier 'vaccines' than other vaccines that we routinely use. Vaccines are given to healthy people, so they need to have a very high bar of safety. So far, from what I have seen, that is not the case with these vaccines, which recruit your own cells to make a pathogen. It seems to be a set-up for autoimmune attacks on platelets and nerve cells, to name a few effects we are seeing in some people.

Beyond this, having to show proof of vaccination by businesses for employers and customers is a frontal assault on the liberties that the United States has stood for and is a dress rehearsal for the enforcement of the mark of the beast. If Seventh-day Adventist healthcare workers wish to be medical missionaries, indeed wish to utilize the "right arm" to introduce people to the Three Angels' Messages, to fear the Creator and give glory to Him, that Babylon is fallen, and to not receive the mark of the beast (which will be coerced), we need to ask ourselves if promoting this experimental device which is making many people ill, which governments are increasingly using coercion to ensure that every citizen gets, and which may soon be required to function in society, is part of the message that we have been called to give in these last days.

N. Smith, MD

In the history of U.S. pharmaceuticals, no vaccine trial has been allowed to continue after 50 reported deaths. The current COVID-19 vaccines have reached reported death totals of over 5000 in the U.S. alone. Over 10,000 hospitalizations. Thousands of reported and severe reactions and injuries including blood clots, seizures and other neurological injuries, myocarditis and other heart issues, and more. Never in our country's history has a medication or vaccine of ANY kind been allowed to be distributed to the general public with even close to these horrifying numbers.

As documented by Pfizer and resulting from their own research, their vaccine achieves an absolute risk reduction of, at best, 0.8%. This means that any individual who receives the full vaccination from the Pfizer COVID-19 vaccine, has an overall reduced risk of COVID-19 symptoms by only 0.8%. Naturally occurring immunity, however, has been fully documented and unarguably proven to be far more effective than the vaccines, and it offers a broader, lifelong immunity to COVID-19 and its variants. Also, according to Pfizer's own research, all that they can confirm that it actually can do is potentially reduce the severity of symptoms; the vaccine was not shown in trials to prevent the transmission of the illness or prevent an individual from becoming infected.

Former director of an Adventist educational and health institute

I have great concerns about the push to vaccinate the huge numbers of people who have already had COVID and have natural immunity. I am also greatly concerned about the push to give the vaccine to children and young adults who are not as affected by the illness and apparently don't spread it – a risk that seems not warranted with a very new vaccine.

Also, it concerns me that there continues to be a big push to 'get the needle in the arm of every American' when obviously the numbers with COVID have greatly diminished; I've only had 1 case since Dec, and prior to that our practice had 1-2 new cases weekly.

M. Thompson, MD

I don't see any benefit in any of the vaccines. I give principled advice. The known content of this so-called vaccine looks not good at all.

B. Sanchez, MD

I've done a lot of research, and the vaccines are very concerning and, I feel, very unsafe to take. I can't find holes in websites such as America's frontline doctors.

R. Nguyen, DO

I don't recommend the vaccine to any of my pregnant patients. Pregnant patients were not included in the limited trials. Also, there are no complete animal trials. We expected to see a wave of births about 9 months after the lock down due to the forced cohabitation situations a lot of women faced. Instead, we saw a wave of miscarriages. My partner and I both saw the same thing: an unusual number of miscarriages. I have also personally seen complications. An employee of our facility died 2 weeks after.

P. Jones, OB/Gyn

As a Bible-believing people, we recognize that health is best maintained when we advance toward the Garden of Eden, not away from it. As a people we were warned not to make allopathic medicine our standard. We did it anyway, and now we are reaping the consequences. It amazes me that we can take a chemical into our body which produces negative effects (fever, body aches, upset stomach, dizziness, etc.) and be absolutely convinced that chemical was good for us. Have we completely lost the ability to reason from cause to effect?

G. Miller, MD

I am very concerned that this vaccine was rushed without due precaution. I will personally be waiting at least three years before taking the vaccine.

T. Lopez, MD

I'm a hospital physician working in the largest hospital in Fort Worth, TX. My family and I came down with Covid-19 in October of last year. It was far from pleasant but we survived by the grace of our Lord. We are healthy, active, and lead a whole-food plant-based way of eating. And I'm convinced that it had something to do with it. I do lifestyle medicine counseling on the side.

I declined the vaccination. I made the decision that I was going to wait since I should have a robust immune response. I'm not anti-vaccination, I believe it has its place in the practice of medicine. But I have restricted my own children from receiving the myriad of stuff recommended, they've only received very few immunizations.

I have not treated one single patient with Covid in about 2 months at least.

There are reports that the virus is mutating in different areas of the world, leading to the potential of repeated vaccinations pushed by those in authority. Here is what I don't like:

1. Incessant promotion and fear mongering by the press. I tell my patients all the time "Just turn off your TV, seriously."

2. It's still under emergency authorization only. What that means? You get a complication? Sorry. You end up in the hospital with a life-threatening blood clot? Too bad. You die? Such is life. And this is under-reported.

3. What is the long-term effect of a messenger RNA vaccine? There are two sides to the argument and one of them is wrong, and we will soon find out. A cytokine storm is real! That's what happens when they're dying of Covid in the ICU. Can the cytokine storm occur after re-exposure in vaccinated persons? Some studies suggest this.

4. It has a very high potential of being forced upon the public and I have a problem with this. It goes against your civil rights. My advice to everyone is the same: It's a personal choice. Weigh the pros and cons.

W. Thomas, MD

I have always been the least likely to fall for a conspiracy theory. As a retired scientist, I am able to recognize when science is being perverted for nefarious purposes. I believe that COVID restrictions and forced vaccination are the dry run for the Mark of the Beast coercions. The parallel seems so precisely the same. The Overton Window regarding government coercion is being drastically widened.

E. Edwards, non-medical physical scientist

I think people who are already immune should think twice about the vaccine. Norway has banned the Jansen for safety concerns. Check your antibodies and consider your risk factors.

F. Kim, MD

I'm very concerned about what's happening in the world, especially in regard to the coercion around experimental medical interventions – especially the unethical experimentation and pressure on kids that is here now and coming on stronger. I feel we are living in the times of Daniel and need to stand firm and say, 'We will not defile our bodies.' The more we learn about these biologicals, the more concerning it becomes.

B. McDonald, MPH

I believe that we are seeing the hardening of our collective conscience as we see Adventist leaders joining with the government in making sweeping recommendations for this experimental therapy. To make these recommendations, we have chosen to turn a blind eye to the thousands of deaths and the tens of thousands of injuries that have been reported. We have chosen to make the basis of our decisions drug sponsored data, rather than inspired counsel. In pursuing the goal of becoming the standard of medical care, we have lost our tender regard for human life and thus the ability to be true to our calling as reformers of medical practice and people who would restore the image of God in His people.

D. Adams, MD, MPH

And may the conversation continue, with grace and always “seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6).

Scott Ritsema is an educator, writer, and speaker with a passion for the present truth. In 2014 Scott left the teaching profession to answer God's call into full-time ministry. His seminars (Media on the Brain and The Media Mind) have been featured at GYC and ASI conventions, as well as on satellite TV and radio both inside and outside the church. Scott is director and speaker for Belt of Truth Ministries, based in Lakeview, Michigan.



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