As of today, May 27th, churches across Minnesota are reopening to new guidelines set by Governor Walz over this past weekend, and with that, they are also reopening to a host of issues and conflicts. Having read through the 12 page document I can foresee many frustrations and challenges such guidelines will bring.

Let’s take for example, the problematic face mask. These days people have been asserting their right NOT to wear a mask. *Why*? There could be a host of reasons – 1) I don’t believe it helps 2) it’s uncomfortable 3) I’m too embarrassed to wear it 4) I don’t like being told that I have to or 5) (I have heard this from Christians): I’m not afraid of death. So you also drive without a seatbelt?? You’re right, we have a hope that has overcome death, but that doesn’t mean we should not value life. The reason to wear a facemask is not solely for oneself – actually we’re told it is mainly to protect others from you since so many appear asymptomatic. And the result being, that if everyone wears one, we will all be looking out for one another.

But what this issue points to, along with a number of others, is something more basic to the Christian life. If we can understand this, it would clarify a great deal of our thinking. Here it is**: For the Christian, our individual rights are to be willingly subjected to a higher goal.** If my right contradicts or impinges upon this higher goal then there is no other alternative than to release that right.

The apostle Paul was not unaware of his rights as an individual and as an apostle. He asks the Corinthians church in 1 Cor. 9:1

*4Do we not have the right to eat and drink? 5Do we not have the right to take along a believing wife] as do the other apostles and the brothers of the Lord and Cephas?*

Paul goes on about the fact that he has a right to make a living on the Gospel. He could collect money to pay his wages. Yet in the middle of v 12 he says,

*Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ.*

Paul was willing to lay aside his rights for a higher goal: making the gospel absolutely free of charge. Paul didn’t want people to get turned away from the gospel because they might conclude that this was just how he made his living. Paul refused to let the gospel get second place to his rights. So he worked to make a living for himself so no one saw an ulterior motive for his preaching other than the supreme value of the gospel. Why? Because he loved Jesus and loved the people to whom he preached Jesus.

This is a day when Christians are going to need to be willing to lay aside their individual rights in order to love their neighbor (which is a proof of our love for God, 1 Jn 4:21). If wearing a face mask demonstrates my love for another human being, I’ll gladly wear it. Even if it is a flawed measure – (albeit some value!) if by it we show consideration for others, let us gladly wear it. Don’t preach a message that is about God’s love and grace for the world while you yourself don’t think or act considerate yourself. Are you willing to put your rights ahead of the gospel? Think of what Jesus set aside when he humbled himself by being made in the likeness of men and descending all the way to death on the cross. From eternal glory to utter humiliation.

This is my prayer for the church as we prepare to adapt to challenges of a different worship setting:

*I pray that we might do all things without grumbling or disputing, that we might be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, that we might shine among them as lights in the world (Phil 2:14-15)*

For Jesus sake and supremacy of the gospel let’s do all we can to be the leaders of loving thoughtfulness in this world.