

COVID-19 Vaccines and Gospel Wisdom

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COVID-19 vaccines are raising many hopes but also many questions. What are your hopes and questions? What about those around you?

Here we provide a short guide to thinking about COVID-19 vaccines in light of the gospel as well as some resources for further reading. We pray this might be of help to you and those around you as you seek God's wisdom and carefully talk and pray through the issues.

What vaccines are currently available in Australia?

- The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine and the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine have been approved for use in Australia by the Therapeutic Goods Administration. They are currently being rolled out according to priority groupings. Read more about this process [here](#)
- Two other vaccines (Novavax and COVAX Facility) are awaiting approval. Read more [here](#)
- Vulnerable and high-risk groups such as those in working in aged care and quarantine facilities will most likely receive the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine.
- Most other Australians will likely receive the Astra/Zeneca vaccine.
- While everyone is currently able to choose whether or not to have a vaccine, we are not currently able to choose *which one* we can have. Read more [here](#).

What concerns do Christians have about these vaccines?

Some Christians feel no concern at all about having a COVID-19 vaccine. They see it as a great way to do good in our community and protect themselves. Others have concerns, particularly about safety and the relationship between the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine development and abortion. Some common questions are:

- If I use the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine, am I complicit in the act of abortion? Am I supporting the use of aborted foetal tissue in research?
- Do the vaccines contain pieces of foetal tissue?
- Are the current vaccines safe to use? Have they been produced too quickly and pose unacceptable health risks?

Some helpful resources for addressing these questions:

- [*Does Acceptance of a COVID-19 vaccine represent endorsement of abortion?*](#) By Dr Megan Best
- [*The FAQs: Are Fetal Cells Being Used in COVID-19 Vaccines and Treatments?*](#) By Joe Carter
- [*Thank God and Roll Up Your Sleeve*](#) by Neil Chambers (contains links to some useful resources on vaccine production)
- [*The COVID-19 Vaccines: A Conversation with Dr Francis Collins on Vaccine Development*](#) with Russell Moore – some useful comments about the safety and development of vaccines + how Christians (of any political persuasion) can serve each other and our community in the COVID pandemic.
- [*Vaccinations: Health Disparity and Social Justice*](#) by Dr Nalini Pather (see Blog 4 in particular)
- [*Australian Government Department of Health Website: COVID-19 Vaccines*](#)

Some Important Points to Consider:

- **Our desire in every part of life, including in our consideration of COVID-19 vaccines, is to glorify God and point to the gospel of Christ. This means we should strive to think hard together, discerning what is good to do in his eyes and drawing on the best information available. However, when we come to different conclusions on the matter of COVID-19 vaccines, we must never ridicule or coerce Christian brothers and sisters but listen to and gently challenge one another. Most importantly, we should remain united in Christ (Romans 14:5-23) and proclaim *him* before all our other views. While we thank God for science and gratefully use the discoveries it yields, it is the gospel, not human expertise, that provides the ultimate solution to our fear and suffering.**
- **As Christians we seek to honour and protect God-given lives, particularly those of the vulnerable. Vaccines are a gracious provision of God to people whose lives are threatened by the fallout of sin. They work through provision of ‘herd immunity’. That is, if a large enough number of healthy people are vaccinated (85-95%), those more vulnerable people who cannot be vaccinated are protected from infection. When a significant number of people remain unvaccinated, ‘herd immunity’ fails to work. Therefore, getting vaccinated is an important way for healthy people to serve and protect their neighbours. Given the immense destruction COVID-19 has caused to innumerable people already and the threat of much more to come, we should support COVID-19 vaccine development and its use both within Australia and overseas,**

particularly in more vulnerable countries. Read more about how herd immunity works [here](#).

- Vaccines work by either introducing a weakened (attenuated) or dead form of a microbe (a virus or bacteria), or part of a microbe (e.g. viral mRNA or protein – these are called synthetic vaccines) into the body. These do not ‘infect’ a person, but they do trigger the body’s natural immune process, producing antibodies against the microbe. This means that the immune system is primed to fight off the ‘real’ microbe whenever it is encountered in the body in the future. The person then either doesn’t become ill or is far less ill than they would be without vaccination.
- Defined populations of human cells (cell lines) are sometimes used to produce vaccines against viruses. The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is one example. Unlike most other microbes, viruses need a cell ‘host’ to live in and multiply. These cells are taken from a person’s tissue and can be maintained for long periods of time. They are then used in the laboratory to ‘house’ and generate the attenuated viruses used in vaccines. Once the viruses are produced, they are removed from the cells and purified ready for use. **Therefore, no parts of any human tissue or cells remain in these vaccines.**
- The Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine is a synthetic vaccine (as are the Novavax and COVAX facility vaccines). This means it is manufactured without the use of cell lines. Like many other medications, however, there is a possibility that some Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines have been tested using cell lines. Once again, no parts of any human tissue or cells are found in these vaccines.
- **Some of the human cell lines used in vaccine manufacture have been derived from aborted fetuses**, often from as long ago as the 1960s. Vaccines cultured in these abortion-derived cell lines include common vaccines for chicken pox, measles, mumps, rubella, hepatitis A&B, and rabies. The Oxford/AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine has been developed using a cell line derived from a foetus aborted in the 1960s (HEK293 cell line).
- **Again, as Christians we seek to honour and protect God-given lives, particularly those of the vulnerable. Christians should always lament abortion, strive to prevent it, support women, men and families as they care for the unborn, and share gospel hope with those who have suffered because of it.** See our GiST resources on [The Gospel and Abortion](#) for ideas on how to think, act and pray about this important issue.
- **Given the way the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine has been developed, we should ask whether it is good and right for Christians to use it. The answer is a complex one.** Some Christians such as [John Piper](#) draw a straight line from this past act of abortion to manufacturing a vaccine using cells from derived from the foetal tissue now. They argue that we honour God by refusing such vaccines. However, the following points are important for Christians to consider (see [Best](#), [Carter](#), [Chambers](#) and [Moore](#) and their further references):

- **Are we being complicit in the original act of abortion by using the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine?** The original abortion was not carried out for the purposes of medical research but for personal reasons. The tissue was subsequently acquired after death and the cell line developed in 1972. Therefore, while we grieve for this lost baby, we are not complicit in an evil act carried out for the purposes of vaccine production. The abortion would have occurred whether or not a cell line was needed.
- **The next important question is whether using the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine communicates more general approval of medical research that uses aborted foetal tissue.** These days there is no need to obtain further cell lines derived from foetal tissue — the current lines work well. Therefore, using the vaccine does not (currently) create extra demand for aborted foetal tissue. We also live in a world in which most of the facilities and products we use have histories tainted by sin. We deeply grieve the all-pervasiveness of sin but, while never condoning evil, we are thankful that God is able to eventually bring good things (such as vaccines) even from evil. Participating in this good does not condone the more remote evil.
- **Therefore, many Christians warmly encourage each other to use the Oxford/AstraZeneca as well as the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccines with a good conscience.**
- **However, considering these questions reminds us how important it is to protect the lives of the unborn and support ethical research that does not require the supply of human foetal remains.**
- **For the sake of those whose consciences are still troubled by using the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine,** we should support any calls to the government to make alternative vaccines readily available.
- **There are also good reasons to have confidence in the safety of current COVID-19 vaccines.** New technologies have allowed vaccine production to speed up. Vaccines are in principle becoming safer as killed or live attenuated viruses are used less. Vaccines in Australia have also passed through the normal steps for vaccine approval including safety and efficacy testing, albeit at a faster pace. We must also remember there is risk inherent in everything we do in our fallen world. We cannot avoid it altogether. While we should minimise risk to ourselves, we must realistically consider the size of this risk and, most of all, do all we can to love and do good to our neighbours. Listen [here](#) for more on this.

As Christians, we should seek to both protect the lives of the unborn *and* the lives of our neighbours in this COVID-19 pandemic. Most importantly, let's give thanks together for what God has done for us in Christ.

Ideas for Prayer

- Thank our Heavenly Father that he provides the ultimate solution to our sin, fear and suffering in Christ.
- Thank him that he is sovereign over this pandemic and is at work upholding his church and saving the lost.
- Thank him for the provision of vaccinations and all the good they bring.
- Confess that in our fear we have failed to trust him and defaulted to selfishness in so many ways. We have often failed to encourage one another in faith. We have also failed to consider the lives of the vulnerable, both the frail and the unborn, as much as we should.
- Pray that he would give us repentant hearts and help us to glorify him through our words and deeds as we seek to love our neighbours.
- Pray that he would help us speak carefully and graciously to one another as we seek to obey him in everything.
- Pray that many would come to know Christ in this time.
- Pray that good vaccinations would quickly be made available to all and bring relief to communities around the world, enabling people to gather again with confidence.