
Words of Truth

Are Church Buildings Really About God?

By: Brian A. Yeager

Why do “church buildings” exist? Why do “church buildings” have air conditioning, heating, padded seats, etc.? Is it for the Lord? Are buildings needed to serve God? I am very familiar with the logic that the church building is an expedient to fulfill the command to assemble. If you’re honest, is that an adequate answer? Here is a follow-up question, if buildings are a necessary expedient to fulfill the command to assemble, why don’t we read about them in the New Testament? Would one dare say that congregations today are larger? Three thousand assembled at the already existing temple in Jerusalem (Acts 2:41-46).

The inspired Scriptures, rightly divided, give us the information to be thoroughly furnished unto all good works (II Timothy 2:14-18 and II Timothy 3:14-17). Since the argumentation generally surrounds expediency, let’s test some things. We are commanded to sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs unto God (Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16). We are shown that each one of us cannot have a different psalm (I Corinthians 14:26; 40). We are instructed to sing with an understanding of what we are singing (I Corinthians 14:15). Can you do that without some written song for us all to be on the same page of? Furthermore, don’t we often read from an inspired “song book” (Psalms)? You can see written songs are authorized, right? Can we assemble without the church owning a building (Acts 5:42, Romans 16:5, I Corinthians 16:19, Colossians 4:15, and Philemon 1:2)? If something can be done properly without an “expedient measure”, is it really expedient? Will you consistently apply the answer to that?

I once presented the reasoning above to a person that immediately responded by saying God had a temple built. That is very true and the tabernacle was before that. The thing is, God gave instructions to build the temple. God said when, where, by whom, and how to build the temple (I Chronicles 28:1-21, I Kings 6:1-7:51, and II Chronicles 3:1-5:14). He even gave instructions concerning the rebuilding of the destroyed temple (Ezekiel 40:1-46:24; cf. Ezra 1:1-5). When God wants something done He requires a pattern to be fulfilled in doing it (Exodus 25:9, Exodus 25:40, and Hebrews 8:5). What’s the pattern to follow in building a church building? You will find church buildings in the same Scripture that speaks of female elders and mechanical instrumental music in worship. We have authority for written songs, containers for the fruit of the vine (Luke 22:14-20), the day we must assemble as a congregation (Acts 20:7 and I Corinthians 16:1-2), what kind of bread to partake of (Matthew 26:17-30), etc. You cannot put Scriptures down that show us anything about constructing or purchasing church buildings. So, who is the building for? What’s the obvious answer mean?

The Buildings Are For Us

We have authority to meet in a place that has lighting and so on (Acts 20:7-11). What I cannot find is authority for us to use the Lord's money to build or maintain a place to assemble in. Can you find that authority (if so, please show it to me immediately so I can know it and teach it)? Now, I can and have argued expediency with the best of them. However, I cannot put one single Scripture in place to consistently support it. Shouldn't the fact that we cannot turn in the Scriptures and show that God wants us to build, purchase, or maintain buildings to assemble in resolve this question (Leviticus 10:1-2, Numbers 9:1-9, II Samuel 7:1-7, Proverbs 16:25, Isaiah 8:20, Matthew 7:21-23, Luke 4:4, Luke 6:46, Galatians 1:6-10, Ephesians 5:10, Colossians 3:17, II Timothy 1:13, II Peter 1:3-4, II John 1:9, and Revelation 22:18-19)? The truth is, the buildings that have been built in our days have nothing to do with the Lord. Our buildings are for our comfort and convenience.

What Does That Mean For Us?

Here in El Paso we have reasoned that if we are going to have a facility for us it has to be paid for by us. We can meet in a public place and even have a regular place to assemble in (I Corinthians 11:20 and I Corinthians 14:23). We have already seen that can be a public place (like the temple) or a privately owned place (such as a home). We all have the liberty to spend our own money on lawful items as we see fit (I Timothy 6:17; cf. Ecclesiastes 5:18-19). If one, several, many, or even all members of a congregation want to build a facility and maintain it with their funds; so be it. While the money is in our hands it is under our authority (Acts 5:1-4). That saint or saints would own and maintain that property. With that, we have to be cautious in considering what is lawful, expedient, and edifying (I Corinthians 10:23-33). What we do not have is authority to spend the Lord's money as we see fit.

There are heavy limitations on how we use the funds we collect on the first day of the week. For one brief, short principle; consider how we are to help widows (I Timothy 5:3-16). How could we look at a fifty-year-old widow, faithful to the Lord, and tell her "no" to giving her funds while we are using those funds to make a building cooler in the summer and warmer in the winter? Come on! There is more to be said, but the lacking authority should be enough.

Conclusion

We are currently assembling in a building here in El Paso that we the members care for. The building though is "on its last legs" (so to speak). Decision days may be coming soon. We are on the right path here. We have to be careful not to fall back into human traditions that many of us have been wrong on in times past (Colossians 2:18-23). I don't have all the answers. The answers I do have are right though. I know that we are not erring if we don't abuse the Lord's funds to provide a place to assemble. What do you know (Romans 14:23)?