



Church Buildings

Introduction:

1. In this lesson, I have sought to devote the whole thing to the study of the subject of “church buildings.”
2. I believe there is a lot of misinformation about such. I seek to answer two basic questions.
 - a. Are church buildings authorized by God?
 - b. If so, then what can a church building be used for?
3. The fact that there is a misunderstanding of authority among preachers in churches of Christ is made evident from two articles in *Gospel Minutes*, operated by ministers in the institutional camp.

Discussion”

I. The Breakdown of Authority

- A. Clem Thurman correctly hints as to why bake sales, car washes, gimmick contests are wrong because the Lord authorized that every man according to his ability was to lay by in store on the first day of the week (1 Cor. 16:2).
- B. But conflictingly, the same paper, one week later has David Thurman teaching regarding Tupperware parties in the church building, *“The New Testament does not give any instruction on what can and cannot be done in a church building, since the New Testament never mentions church buildings . . . I may disagree with the choice a congregation makes, but in the absence of Scripture, I don’t have the right to set down the rules for them to follow.”* I wonder if he realized when he wrote that he set down a rule, a rule that rules out rules?
 1. Clem’s article hints that authority to practice something comes from God’s word, whereas David’s article suggests that authority to practice something comes from God’s silence.
 2. David’s path is also on the pathway of ruin because he hints at if the end result is good, then whatever means you use is justified, “So, perhaps having a Tupperware party got some people in the door of the church who would not have been there.”
 - a. See Romans 3:7, 8. Even if the truth of God would somehow increase through my lie, that doesn’t justify my lie.
 - b. But what or who is the door of the church? It is not some wooden or steel entry. It is Jesus (Jn. 10:9) and no Tupperware party is going to allow one into Him. Nor does it profit a sinner at all to come into a church building to attend a Tupperware party?
- C. Let us apply “Thurman’s Rule” and see how far authority erodes away.
 1. *“The New Testament does not give any instruction on what can and cannot be done in a baptistery, since the New Testament never mentions baptisteries . . . I may disagree with the choice a congregation makes, but in the absence of Scripture, I don’t have the right to set down the rules for them to follow.”*
 - a. Why not build a baptistery big enough to have a church pool party or even a community pool party? After all, *“perhaps having a pool party got some people in the door of the church [and in the baptistery] who would not have been there.”*
 - b. If the absence of “church building” in the New Testament allows Tupperware parties, then why not the absence of “baptistery” in the New Testament authorized pool parties?
 - c. If the absence of “church building” authorizes “Tupperware parties” then why doesn’t it also allow business seminars or movie parties? Shall we convert part of the building into a theater? *“Perhaps having a theater would get some people into the door of the church who would not have been there.”*

- d. If the absence of “church building” in the New Testament allows Tupperware parties, why would its absence not authorized Video Arcade parties?
 - 2. *“The New Testament does not give any instruction on what can and cannot be done with a tract rack, since the New Testament never mentions tract racks . . . I may disagree with the choice a congregation makes, but in the absence of Scripture, I don’t have the right to set down the rules for them to follow.”*
 - a. Can we reserve some space in the tract rack for *Popular Mechanics*, *Parenting Magazine*, *Teen Magazine*, *Hair Styling*? How about some space for a deck of cards? How about some space for O’riely’s book, “No Spin Zone”?
 - b. If the Scripture’s absence of “church building” means there are no rules for what can be done in the church building, then doesn’t its absence of “tract rack” also mean that we cannot set down the rules and must allow “Sports Illustrated” or “Parade Magazine?”
 - 3. *“The New Testament does not give any instruction on what can and cannot be done with a church parking lot, since the new Testament never mentions a church parking lot . . . I may disagree with the choice a congregation makes, but in the absence of Scripture, I don’t have the right to set down the rules for them to follow.”*
 - a. Now why can we not have those car washes?
 - 1) Clem has a problem with church car washes, he says, “But such merchandising is not properly the function of the church.” Well that’s alright, we will have the car wash on church property but not give any of the money to the church, but use it for a retreat!
 - 2) We will also have the bake sale in the church building, but not give any of the funds to the church. David would say one cannot set the rules down for a church to follow regarding what can be done in a church building and a back sale might get someone through the door of the church who would not have been there otherwise and Clem doesn’t want the church to have the funds so why not have the bake sale? Makes good business sense to me!
 - b. If the absence of “church building” in the New Testament authorizes Tupperware parties, then why would not the absence of “church parking lot” in the New Testament authorize tail gate parties?
 - 1) Why not build one big enough to have a carnival and have a little course for those race cars?
 - 2) One could do the carnival, and then when he is hot he can cool off in the pool party and if he gets hungry, he can buy a cake at the bake sale!
- D. Do you see how authority is worn and battered by their approach? Do you see how they open the flood gate to all kinds of ideas and innovations?

II. Authority must be respected and maintained (Col. 3:17).

- A. Why authority must be respected and maintained:
 - 1. Because our relationship to it hinges on our relationship to Christ (1 Jn. 3:24).
 - a. Jesus said that all authority had been given to Him in heaven and on earth (Matt. 28:18).
 - b. If Jesus has all authority, and we disrespect any authority, then we disrespect what He has been given
 - 2. Because presumption is a grievous sin (Ps. 19:13).
 - a. Webster defines *presume* as, “to take upon oneself without permission or authority; dare (to say or do something); venture.”

- b. God required such as worthy of death (see Deut. 18:20). To speak in the name of the Lord, something that you presume to be true, when it is not commanded is sin. We are to speak where God has spoken (1 Pet. 4:11).
- B. Ways to respect and maintain authority:
 - 1. *Speak and act from statements of fact.* The Bible is full of all kinds of informative facts.
 - a. God is the creator of heaven and earth (Gen. 1:1).
 - b. Jesus was born in Bethlehem (Matt. 2:1).
 - c. In fact, Jesus *stated* that he had all authority (Matt. 28:18).
 - 2. *Speak and act from a direct command (Rev. 22:14).*
 - a. With commandments, you should appreciate the difference between generic and specific authority.
 - 1) If God would have told Noah to build an ark of wood, then he would have had generic authority for any kind of wood, but when God specified “gopher wood” that excluded all other kinds of wood.
 - 2) If God would have said the sacrifice of praise to God was “music” then any kind of music would be authorized. But since he specified, the fruit of our lips, that excludes the fruit of our finger tips (Heb. 13:15).
 - b. There is also something to be said for *aids* versus *additions*.
 - 1) When God told Noah to build an ark, the general command “build” authorized him to use any kind of aid to carry out the command.
 - 2) However, when God specified “ark” that excluded “speed boats” trains, airplanes, etc. When God told him to have one door, two would have added to the commandment.
 - 3. *Speak and act from an approved example.* We are commanded to follow approved examples (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 3:17; 4:9).
 - 4. *Speak and act from a necessary implication.*
 - a. These are not “hunches” but necessarily true facts. We make necessary inferences all the time. The frost on the ground in the morning necessarily implies that it was below freezing that night.
 - b. Jesus’ works made Nicodemus necessarily infer that he was a teacher from God (Jn. 3:1, 2).
 - 5. Do not speak & act from God’s silence. The silence of God doesn’t allow liberty to speak and act for reasons that we have already discussed. It restricts. 1 Peter 4:11 doesn’t say, “*If any man speak, let him speak from the silence of God.*”

III. Church Buildings and Authority

- A. Are church buildings authorized?
 - 1. David Thurman is correct in noting that “church building” is not mentioned in the New Testament, but that does not mean that they are outside the realm of authority. Either a church building is authorized or it is not.
 - 2. There are other things that we use which are not mentioned in the New Testament either. You cannot find “song books,” “overheads,” “pews,” “rest rooms,” “chalk boards,” “microphones,” “LCD panels,” “baptisteries” in the New Testament, but that doesn’t mean that they are unauthorized and can therefore be used for any practice.
- B. We must answer two questions: Are church buildings authorized and what are they authorized for?
 - 1. To answer the first part, church buildings are authorized the same way that projectors, song book, etc. are authorized. They are authorized by generic authority from a commandment.

- a. The command to “sing” in Ephesians 5:19 authorizes any aid to carry out the command: song books, song leader, overhead, etc. A song book doesn’t alter the action being done. However, a playing a piano in worship alters the act, we are not only singing, but playing too.
 - b. The command to preach the gospel to every creature in Mark 16:15 generically authorizes any aid which helps to carry out the command.
 - 1) Therefore we can preach the gospel through writing, radio or TV programs, overheads; PowerPoint and such are mere aids that do not change the action being done.
 - 2) This doesn’t mean that the church can buy radio time to advertise something unauthorized for the church to do, like meals, business seminars, aerobics. God specified “gospel” and that excludes any other kind of work.
 - c. Likewise, the command to “assemble” in Hebrews 10:25 authorizes a place to assemble. So there you have authority for church buildings. God has not bound the kind of place, but he has bound what we are to assemble for—worship.
2. Now we answer our second question by looking at what the early church did when they came together as a church. What the church was to assemble for is what the church building can be used for.
- a. Contextually, the Hebrews 10:25 assembling of saints has to do with the blood of Jesus (v. 19), the new way (v. 20), our High Priest (v. 21), faith and baptism (v. 22), confession of our hope (v. 23), the faithfulness of God (v. 23), considering one another in order to stir up love & good works (v. 24). This “love and good works” has nothing to do with a church practicing carnal or social practices.
 - b. We see the church together to partake of the Lord’s Supper and to hear preaching (Acts 20:7).
 - c. We see the disciples come together to give of their means (1 Cor. 16:1,2).
 - d. We see them assembling for prayer too (Acts 2:42).
 - e. What we don’t see them authorized to do is to come together as a church and blur the line between spiritual and carnal, or specifically, to partake of a common meal. But that was something which the home was to provide for (1 Cor. 11:17-22, 39).
 - 1) The Bible boldly clarifies that the kingdom of God is not food and drink (Rom. 14:17). Since the kingdom is the church, the church has nothing to do with eating and drinking save the memorial of Jesus Christ.
 - 2) The early church came together in the temple for worship (Acts 2:46a), but their common meals were something done from house to house. Their daily religion in the Temple consisted of what was spoken in verse 42. Their house to house was eating food and spending time with one another.
 - 3) Therefore, since the mission of the church is not carnal, but only spiritual, we cannot use the church building for carnal practices, but only spiritual exercises.
- C. What about church kitchens?
1. To have a church building you must have a command to assemble; to have a baptistery, you must have the command to baptize; to have a church kitchen, you must have a command to do what?
 2. See church kitchen chart. As you can see, church kitchens end up the same place where any other unauthorized practice(s) is. A church kitchen does not expedite any commandment.

Conclusion:

1. Let us continue to do Bible things in Bible ways. Let us continue to respect the authority of Christ and willingly submit to his lead.
2. We do not need gimmicks and fun & food to draw men to Christ. Those things may get some people through the door of the church building, but they will not get them through the door to eternal life and furthermore, you will have to keep them there with gimmicks, fun, food & frolic.
3. I see more and more of the church what we read of God's people in the days of old, *"Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play"* (Ex. 32:6).

Thurman's Rule

"The New Testament does not give any instruction on what can and cannot be done in a church building, since the New Testament never mentions church buildings. . . I may disagree with the choice a congregation makes, but in the absence of Scripture, I don't have the right to set down the rules for them to follow."

David Thurman, Gospel Minutes, September 21, 2001

THE "THURMAN RULE" CHURCH OF CHRIST

What kind of church
can you envision?



Authority
MUST BE MAINTAINED

OR IT WILL
ERODE AWAY!

HOW TO MAINTAIN IT:

1. STATEMENT OF FACT
2. DIRECT COMMAND
3. APPROVED EXAMPLE
4. NECESSARY IMPLICATION
5. RESPECT GOD'S SILENCE

CHURCH BUILDINGS

- 1. Are church buildings authorized by scripture?**
- 2. If "yes," what are they authorized for?**

"SING"
EPH. 5:19

"PREACH"
MARK 16:15

"ASSEMBLE"
HEBREWS 10:25

song books,
song leader

radio, tv,
overhead

building, hotel
room, etc.

Questions for Church Kitchens

1. A building/hotel room/house/etc. expedites the command to assemble.
 - A. What does a church kitchen expedite?
 - B. Where does the NT teach that eating and drinking are something that the church is to sponsor (Romans 14:17; John 6:22-27)?
 - C. Note: Eating, drinking, hospitality is an individual's responsibility, not the work of the collective church (I Corinthians 11:22, 34; I Peter 4:9).

2. The mission of the church is spiritual in nature (I Peter 2:5, 9, 10; I Timothy 3:15, truth is a not something physical). The work of the church is: preaching the gospel (I Thess. 1:8); helping needy saints (Romans 15:25, 26); teaching Christians/edification (Acts 20:32; Ephesians 4:11-16).
 - A. Why are so many churches making the work of the church physical?
 - B. Argument given: Eating is fellowship and fellowship is something that brethren are to be doing. Answer: If eating a common meal together is "fellowship," then are we having fellowship with unbelievers who we may eat with? What about non-Christians who come together for these "church dinners?"
 - C. Note: Fellowship is **NOT** found in eating and drinking but in walking in the truth and sharing in Christ (I John 1:3-7).
 - D. If the church can build kitchens to feed the physical body, why not build movie theaters, arcade rooms to entertain and the physical body?
 - E. If the church can build kitchens to feed the physical body, why not build gymnasiums, golf courses, weight rooms, ski mountains to exercise the physical body?