

Trends

65% of American adults describe themselves as Christians when asked about their religion, down 12 percentage points over the past decade. Meanwhile, the religiously unaffiliated share of the population, consisting of people who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular,” now stands at 26%, up from 17% in 2009.

- via *The Royal Society for Public Health*

Psalm 9:17: “The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God.”

Sentence Sermons

“It is the duty of all Nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly implore His protection and favors.”

—George Washington, first U.S. president

Proverbs 14:34: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.”

News & Notes

Please pray for Zachary Wallace. He is not faithfully attending services as he should (Heb. 10:24-25). “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (Jas. 5:16)

Please keep sister Wilma Cardwell in your prayers. She is an encouragement to all of us!

Pray for all our members who do not attend regularly. Try to encourage them!

Pray for all the lost souls, especially those in the greater Bloomington area. Pray that Westside might be an influence for good in this community.

Pray for the all of our students: elementary, secondary and college. Our young people face many trials and temptations at school.

There are many needy saints, including preachers! Can you help?! Let me know.

Anyone need prayers? Let us know so we can announce it and post it.

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Words of Life

Westside church of Christ

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

John 6:68



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Let's Play Frisbee!

Craig Thomas

While on earth, Christ made it clear His desire and duty was to do God's will (Jn. 6:38). Because of Christ's obedience, the Father gave Him “All authority...in heaven and on earth.” (Matt. 28:18). As His disciples, we are to “keep [Jesus'] words” and in doing so we have His assurance He and the Father “will come...and make [their] abode” with us (Jn. 14:23).

God has revealed His Will through His Word in a clear and understandable manner (Eph. 3:1-5). Thus, as Paul writes, the things “God has revealed...to us through His Spirit” (i.e., His Word) are “The things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Cor. 2:9-10). Hence, everything we teach, preach and practice must have the approval and sanction of our Lord (Col. 3:17). To do otherwise is condemned by Him! “But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?” (Lk. 6:46; cf. Jn. 14:15)

When man decides to operate outside the realm of divine authority God is not pleased. Just ask Aaron's sons. They used unauthorized fire to burn incense and God burned them (Lev. 10:1-2). Just ask the great deliverer and prophet Moses. Moses struck the rock instead of speaking to it and God denied him entrance into the Promised Land (Num. 20:11-12). Uzzah was not authorized to touch the ark of the covenant, but did so (BTW: He touched it with seemingly good intentions!). As a result, “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzza, and He smote him, because he put his hand to the ark” (1 Chron. 13:9).

With these thoughts in mind, let us consider the use of the church building. All sound and knowledgeable Christians understand the church is not the church building. The “church” Jesus built (Matt. 16:18), and “purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28) is not bricks and mortar, but people; people who have obeyed the gospel and are “saved” (Acts 2:47; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23). The “church building” is merely an expedient (i.e., aid) used by Christians to obey God's will insofar as the work and worship of the local church is concerned. It is no different than songbooks serving as an aid so Christians may carry out God's command to “sing” (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16).

God's people derive authority to act in religious matters from God's Word (e.g., Col. 3:17). Sometimes God's instructions are specific and sometimes they are gen-

eral in nature. For example, when God instructed Noah to build an ark in Genesis 6, He *specified* the materials, dimensions, and layout of the ark (Gen. 6:14-16). Therefore, Noah could not, with Divine approval, substitute other materials, use other dimensions, or change the ark's layout. However, God did not *specify* the tools and methods Noah was to use in constructing the ark. Thus, for Noah to obey the command to build the ark he was authorized, in a *general* way, to use the tools and methods (i.e., *expedients*) needed to obey God's will (e.g., saw, axe, block and tackle, etc.).

The same is true regarding the church building. God has *specified* the work and worship of the church. The work of the church falls into one of three realms: 1) *evangelism* (1 Thess. 1:6-8), 2) *edification* (Acts 2:42; Eph. 4:15-16), or 3) *benevolence* (Acts 4:34-35; 11:27-30; Rom. 15:25-26; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). Some aspects of these works are *specified*. For example, we are *limited* insofar as evangelism is concerned to preaching the gospel (Mk. 16:15; cf. 1 Thess. 1:8). Christ does not authorize the church to preach politics. Regarding benevolence, the New Testament pattern shows the church only extending benevolent aid to "needy saints" (1 Cor. 16:1-2, etc.). It's true individual Christians have an important benevolent responsibility that extends to "all," and is an critical criterion of our judgment (Gal. 6:10; Matt. 25:31-46; Jas. 1:27; 1 Jn. 3:17). But the scope of local church benevolence is *limited* (see 1 Tim. 5:16). In the realm of edification, the local church meets to worship on the first day of the week and its activities are *limited* to the five acts of worship *specified* in the New Testament: 1) preaching/teaching (Acts 2:42; 20:7), 2) singing (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16), 3) praying (1 Cor. 14; esp. v. 15), 4) giving of our means (1 Cor. 16:1-2), and the observance of the Lord's Supper (Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:18-26).

Some aspects of these important collective responsibilities of the local church are not *specified* by Scripture, but are nonetheless authorized in a *general* way and require the use of *expedients* to carry them out. For example, as already cited, our Divine duty to sing in worship (Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16) authorizes the use of song books to carry that out. Similarly, the use of a place to meet for worship is necessary to carry out the Divine duty to "not forsake the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25) to worship. The local church is not *limited* to owning a building for such purposes. The church could rent a room, meet in a member's home, meet under an oak tree, etc. The Divine requirement to meet for worship necessarily *requires* a *place* to meet even though the meeting place is not *specified*.

Is the church building "holy"?

Since faithful brethren refuse to use the church building for secular and common activities, thus, some have accused us of believing the church building is "holy." This charge is usually made in a derogatory, derisive, disapproving and condescending way. It is usually coupled with the injunction: "The church is not the church building." (see discussion above) So, is the church building "holy"?

The word "holy" is a prominent word in Scripture. It appears 180 times in the New Testament. The Greek word for "holy" is *hagios* and "fundamentally signifies 'separated' ...in its moral and spiritual significance... and therefore consecrated to God, sacred" (Vine). It refers to some thing or person "set apart for God, to be, as it were, exclusively his" (Thayer).

The word "saint" is used to describe Christians and is derived from the same Greek word *hagios*. Thus, Christians are people "set apart" by God. We are "set apart" from the world to serve and glorify Him (1 Pet. 2:5, 9).

The building is authorized only to serve the Divine instructions given to the local church pertaining to its work and worship. So, the building certainly meets the definition of *hagios* as something "set apart" by God since we use it to obey His instructions concerning the work and worship of the church. The building is not "set apart" for the purposes of playing bingo, financial management classes or weaving baskets. Neither is it "set apart" as a banquet hall or gymnasium. But, it is "set apart" for the divine purposes God requires of the local church. Nothing more and nothing less. So, is the church building "holy"? I believe it certainly meets the definition!

So, what about playing frisbee? At our church building the local church has



purchased a set of four small, round metal plates to pass the unleavened bread as we observe the Lord's Supper. The Scriptures do not *specify* this method as the only way of serving the unleavened bread. The Scriptures just tell us, in a *general* way, to eat the bread and also instructs us in the manner and purpose of eating it. Hence, we use the plates as an authorized *expedient* to aid us in observing the Divine instructions to partake

of the Lord's Supper. But, you know, those little metal disks would make great frisbees! Ridiculous? Yes! Why? Because those plates were purchased from the local church treasury (i.e., from the Lord's money) and are thus "set apart" for divine service (i.e., to partake of the Lord's Supper). For Christians to play frisbee is not wrong, but it would be wrong to use the communion plates to do so! Surely, we can understand that.

Is the church building any different than the communion trays? Both are purchased from the Lord's money to serve the needs of the local church in the observance of Divine-appointed service. What authority then is there to use them for common purposes? None! We have no more authority to use the church building for bingo games, scout meetings, social meals, basketball games, or other common things than we have to use the communion trays to play frisbee.

Hair splitting? Nit picking? Majoring in minors? I don't believe Nadab and Abihu would think so. Neither

"Then Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, each took his censer and put fire in it, put incense on it, and offered profane fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. 2 So fire went out from the Lord and devoured them, and they died before the LORD."

Leviticus 10:1-2

would Moses or Uzzah. How about you and me? Further, recall the Word of God is that "which God has prepared for those who love Him." (1 Cor. 2:9-10). When we do what is not authorized by His Word, no matter how trivial it may seem to us, our claim to "love Him" becomes a hollow claim. Do you and I love Him? "If you love Me, keep My commandments." (Jn. 14:15)