

The Use and Abuse of Church Buildings

Acts 2:41-47

Introduction: To whom does a church building belong? Do elderships have the exclusive right to control its use? Are church buildings even authorized in scriptures? It is interesting how the use of a church building becomes a stumbling block to the faith of Christians. Church buildings are hardly referenced in scriptures but time and again brethren misuse them to their own detriment.

I. The historical use of church buildings.

A. Church buildings have been in use before the Church was established (Lk. 24:52-53).

B. After Christ's ascension and before the church began, 120 of His disciples met in (or used) an upper room (Acts 1:13-15ff).

C. The first known church assembly was in the Herodian temple (Acts 2:46).

1. Remember, the church had well over 3000 members (Acts 2:41-42, 44, 46).

2. However, it was a non-owned public building/facility.

3. The church at Jerusalem was using that temple as a place to meet at least until the stoning of Stephen (Acts 8:1) and likely long thereafter (Acts 15:4).

D. Churches met in various places and commonly in homes (Rom. 16:5, 23; 1 Cor. 16:19; Col. 4:15; Phm. 2).

1. The fact that homes were mentioned as meeting places implies that buildings were used as meeting places (1 Cor. 11:22, 34).

2. The notion that the early church only met in homes is simply not true.

II. Churches have a command to assemble (Heb. 10:25).

A. Only ignorance of English grammar would declare otherwise. (Some claim the word "ourselves" in the sentence reflects past action so it's not a command.)

B. A command gives authority to assemble. The absence of how to assemble allows liberty as to where the assembly may take place.

C. Those that claim there is no command to assemble must recognize some example as authority for assembly in the absence of a command (in order to necessarily infer its authority).

1. By example, we have the church in the New Testament meeting 5 times in houses, once in an upper room and 3 times in a public facility.

2. Without a command to assemble, these are only specifically mentioned locale for a church. An owned building is not one of the examples (Even they meet in buildings; they can't have it both ways.)

3. Either there is a command and thereby authority to meet in a building owned by the church or there are only examples of assemblies in houses, upper rooms or public facilities and thereby no authority to use an owned church building. **People who claim there is no command to assemble would be violating scriptures if they meet in a church building.**

III. Church buildings are for the use of the saints.

A. *"The collection for the saints"* (1 Cor. 16:1-2).

B. Elders oversee the flocks, not the buildings (Acts 20:28).

1. Wouldn't barring members from the use of the church building be counterproductive to an Elder's role and responsibility?

2. Wouldn't barring members from assembling be placing a stumbling block before its weak members (Rom. 14:13)?

B. The liberty to assemble in a building can become a stumbling block when it is not used as authorized and it causes brethren to sin (1 Cor. 8:9).

1. The use of a church building is a liberty not to be abused.

2. If members are barred from its intended purpose, it can become a stumbling block as weak members may not return when it is arbitrarily allowed to be used for assembling. The Lord said, *"Beware..."*

IV. The church buildings are not bargaining chips.

A. "If you do what I say or follow my instructions, then you can use the building." Where does that come from? Where is the authority for such a position? Shouldn't we be doing what the Lord instructs (Heb. 10:25)?

B. When churches split what do the leavened members almost always want?

C. *"Beware of covetousness..."* (Lk.12:15). Because life does not consist of the things possessed. The righteous understand this. Wicked members feel they possess the building.

Conclusion: The use of the church building is for the saints. The Lord's money was used for its purchase; therefore, the building is subject to Christ's authority just as the church is subject to Christ. We cannot abuse the liberty Christ gives for its use!