

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

Fellowship Halls

By Ethan R. Longhenry

It has become popular among many religious organizations and denominational churches to build and maintain a facility as part of their property which is used to facilitate the sharing of meals. Sometimes such facilities are considered a “multipurpose area” that might be used for meals, meetings, or other purposes; sometimes such facilities are uniquely designed for eating and sharing meals. Many among churches of Christ have also built and maintained such facilities in the name of expediting the sharing of meals among fellow Christians. We do well to consider what the Scriptures teach and authorize.

The New Testament clearly demonstrates how early Christians manifested their association with one another by sharing meals. The Christians in Jerusalem shared meals from house to house, taking meals gladly and with singleness in heart (Acts 2:46). Exclusion from participating in shared meals was part of the consequences of disassociation (1 Cor. 5:11). The meal itself was not “*fellowship*”; in the New Testament fellowship is a relationship, something people share, not something that could be done (e.g. 1 Jn. 1:1-7).

And yet the New Testament neither burdens the local church with the obligation of facilitating such meals nor authorizes the building or maintenance of a facility to be used to that end. The New Testament provides no command expecting the church, as a corporate collective, to share meals together; the New Testament likewise provides no example of any congregation, as a congregation, facilitating such meals. Instead the Apostles expect Christians to provide hospitality to fellow Christians, providing lodging when necessary but at least opening their homes to one another in order to share meals together (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). Thus there is no New Testament authority for the local church to build or maintain a fellowship hall.

Some wonder what the problem would be with “eating in the building.” “Eating in the building” is not the problem per se. Early Christians met in homes (e.g. Rom. 16:4-5, 23); it would not be in the least bit surprising if the people who hosted the congregation would also frequently host a meal for its members. In such a situation the host family is displaying hospitality (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9); the local congregation is not facilitating the meal. In an earlier time many Christians would travel some distance in order to assemble with fellow Christians and would bring their lunch with them. After morning assemblies they would share their meals on the church grounds with fellow Christians. It would seem that the Christians in Corinth were doing something of the sort (1 Cor. 11:17-34). In such circumstances the local congregation, as a congregation, is not actively facilitating such sharing of a meal. It is one thing to “eat in the building” or “eat on the grounds;” it is quite another to build and maintain a facility for such a purpose.

So how could a local congregation build or maintain a building in which to assemble but cannot build or maintain a facility for sharing meals? In the New Testament Christians are commanded to assemble (Heb. 10:24-25); the local church must therefore have a place in which to assemble. A building is an authorized expedient so as to fulfill this command: the building is a helpful means by which the local congregation can facilitate the assembling of its constituent members, a responsibility given by God to the local church. Christians come together to share meals in the New Testament by agreement among individuals (bringing food and eating it together, as in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, or in our age, going out to share a meal at a restaurant together) or by showing hospitality (inviting Christians to one’s house and providing a meal, as in Acts 2:46). The church is nowhere commanded to run or direct such meals; the church is nowhere given that obligation or responsibility, and it remains the obligation of the individual Christian to show hospitality to fellow Christians (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9; 3 Jn. 1:5-8). The New Testament provides no basis upon which to justify expediting examples; as such there remains no authority for the fellowship hall.

It would undoubtedly be easier for the congregation to facilitate the sharing of meals among fellow Christians, but God imposed that responsibility squarely on the shoulders of individual Christians who are repeatedly commanded to show hospitality, freely and not begrudgingly, toward one another (Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9). This is not an at-

tempt to minimize the value or profit in sharing meals; in fact, it magnifies its importance, for we get to know one another best and be in better positions to edify and encourage one another when we open our homes up to one another and share meals with one another. May we show hospitality toward one another, build one another up, and glorify God! – *La Vista church of Christ*. ■

Recreational Marijuana Use

By Joe R. Price

Washington and Colorado have legalized the possession and use of marijuana. Is pot smoking harmless? Is it approved by God? Christians need the clear teaching of God's word on the recreational use of marijuana.

Marijuana is still a banned substance under federal law. Unfortunately, the U.S. Justice Department has taken a hands-off approach to enforcement. More states are working to legalize it. Remember, just because man legalizes an action does not mean God approves it. ***"We must obey God rather than men"*** (Acts 5:29).

Marijuana harms those who use it. It is not harmless fun. "Marijuana smoke is actually more irritating to the mouth, throat, air passages, and lungs than tobacco smoke. What's more, it contains 50 to 70 percent more cancer-provoking hydrocarbons. And pot-smokers tend to inhale deeply and hold their breath while smoking. As a result, long term marijuana users, like their tobacco-puffing counterparts, are at higher risk than the general population not only for chronic lung disease but also for cancer of the upper respiratory tract and lungs" (Perspectives on the Legalization of Marijuana, ***Focus on the Family***). "Long term marijuana users are also known for developing a marked lack of motivation ... Other research has linked marijuana use with poor overall job performance. This includes increased tardiness, absenteeism, accidents, and workers' compensation claims" (Ibid). A Christian smoking pot is not pursuing ***"righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness"*** (1 Tim. 6:11). Smoking a "gateway drug" is not a godly example (1 Tim. 4:12).

The purpose of recreational marijuana use is to become intoxicated. People smoke pot to "get high." This can be likened to drinking to get "buzzed." "Marijuana is a Schedule I hallucinogenic substance under the Washington Uniform Controlled Substances Act" (norml.org). People smoke pot for its "mood-altering, mind-altering" effects. The gospel says not to be drunk, high or buzzed, but to be sober-minded (Eph. 5:18; 1 Pet. 4:3; Titus 2:6). Intoxication of the mind is the main point of recreational marijuana use. Social pot-smoking, like social drinking, is against the will of God.—***The Spirit's Sword***, January 19, 2014. ■

Why God Matters

By Steven F. Deaton

Does God matter? Some behave as though He does not. They live their lives in their own way. They curse, drink, gossip, lie, cheat, steal, or commit fornication. To them, God does not matter. However, logic and the Bible, teach that God does matter.

God matters because He is the Creator. He made all things through His Son (Gen. 1:1; John 1:1-3; Col. 1:16, 17). Being the Creator, He is superior to the creature, man (Gen. 1:26, 27). He gave man life, breath, and all things (Acts 17:25). He is not only the giver of life, but the sustainer as well (Heb. 1:2; Acts 14:17). Man, therefore, must understand that God matters.

God matters because He is the Judge. God is the giver of the law of Christ (Jn. 16:7-15). All men will stand before God and be judged by Jesus Christ according to the law - the gospel (2 Cor. 5:10; Jn. 5:22; 12:48). Hence, God matters.

God matters because He is God. The very nature of God demands the conclusion that He is relevant. God is the Almighty (Gen. 17:1). He knows all things and with Him all things are possible (Ps. 139:7-12; Heb. 4:13; Mark 14:36). He is self-existent and eternal (Ex. 3:14; Ps. 90:2). We know the President of the United States matters because He is the president. The CEO of a company matters to people in the company because he is the CEO. The God of the universe matters because He is God.—***Hebron Lane Church of Christ***. ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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