

Should Christians Meet in Buildings that Display Pagan Symbols?

By Art Braidic and Terry Moore

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All Scriptures are from the New King James translation unless otherwise noted.

For many years the Church of God has rented rooms from various organizations for Sabbath and holy day services. The primary reason for using these halls has been a lack of funds to purchase our own buildings. The problem arises when members find themselves in a building surrounded by pagan stained glass windows, sitting in pews, gazing at crosses, or other symbols which we clearly understand have ungodly origins. Is it acceptable for the God's people to meet in halls that display pagan symbols such as those owned by the Freemasons? What about Protestant halls or even those of unbelievers that display ungodly decor? Is it appropriate to have a Church service in a Universalist Church that accepts symbols based on all forms of worship?

It is clear that our society has adopted many religious practices that are evil. In several ways we are much like the ancient Greeks whose cities were filled with the symbolism of many false gods. In this context, it is our belief that the kind of building we worship in is not a sin. However, it offends some people and can give the impression to outsiders that there is little difference between these false religions and the true Church of God. In other words, it becomes an appearance of evil which is something we are to avoid (1Ths. 5:22). What, then, should we do?

Paul wrote that any idol we might encounter is nothing, and there is no other God but one (1Cor. 8:4). Paul also taught about Christ on Mars Hill while in the midst of the philosophers, judges, and numerous idols. We also have the example of Paul and Silas praying and singing songs of praise while in a Roman prison (Acts 16:24-25). Therefore, the Almighty would not consider it breaking His law if we worshipped Him in these types of buildings. In fact, there may come a time when brethren are held against their will. Would God reject our worship or prayer if we were imprisoned in a Catholic church? Of course not!

As another example, a Samaritan woman asked Christ if worship should be conducted at the temple on mount Gerizim or in Jerusalem. The Messiah's answer helps us understand how God's point of view:

Jesus said to her, "Woman, believe Me, the hour is coming when you will neither on this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews. But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God *is* Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4:21-24).

In other words, Christ did not teach that we could only worship God in a building fitting the beliefs of God's people. He simply confirmed that the Scriptural teachings which had been entrusted to the Jews were correct (Rom. 3:1-2). His emphasis was the way we worship—not where. Wherever we might be, our worship is to be in spirit and truth. Our minds are to be pure and this is of primary importance.

Still, Freemasonry, Protestantism, Catholicism, and all religions other than that taught by Christ are heretical forms of worship. Their symbolism reflects the mystery religion of Babylon and it is sin. Realizing this, some congregations have chosen to rent activity rooms that are separate from a building's worship center and which contain no objectionable symbols. Others find it acceptable to move, or cover up, any symbols during Church services, and then uncover them when our services have ended. If ministers choose to use a hall where symbols cannot be removed, this can offend some members.

An example of such a predicament was explained by Paul when addressing the issue of meat offered to idols. The meat was clean to eat because the idol was nothing. In like manner, the activities that take place in a Masonic Lodge or Protestant buildings do not defile the hall. Their doctrine is untrue, and the gods they worship do not really exist. Their symbols and rituals contain no truth. However, association with them could have an appearance of sin and may offend a brother or sister in Christ. Therefore, Paul explained the principle by using an example of meat offered to idols. He said that if his brother is offended by his eating of meat, he would not eat it:

Therefore concerning the eating of things offered to idols, we know that an idol *is* nothing in the world, and that *there is* no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us *there is* one God, the Father, of whom *are* all things, and we for Him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom *are* all things, and through whom we *live*. However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. But food does not commend us to God; for neither if we eat are we the better, nor if we do not eat are we the worse. But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble (1 Corinthians 8:4-13).

We must consider the conscience of others. For example, imagine Christians living in Ephesus and meeting in the temple of the Greek goddess Diana. The citizens that Paul preached to might conclude that it was perfectly fine to accept Christ while continuing to worship Diana.

Because of these biblical principles, it is our belief that the structure of a building, or the heresy taught in them, does not make it a sin to enter such an establishment. Still, the symbols found there can lead to the appearance of evil and might be an offense to some. Therefore, these things should be avoided.

It is our belief and practice that the best course of action is for the Church of God to avoid meeting in buildings used for false religious purposes or that contain occult symbols. If this is not possible, we recommend choosing a building in which any offensive symbols can be removed, or covered, during our worship of the true God.