

North Hamilton Church of Christ

8310 Dayton Pike/PO Box 517
Soddy Daisy, TN 37384

(423) 842-1044

www.northhamiltonchurchofchrist.com



May 3, 2020

This Week's Birthdays & Anniversaries

Birthdays:

- 4 – Carolyn Lasater
- 5 – Shane Laster
- 9 – Shirley Curvin

Anniversaries:

- 5 – Tommy & Amy Qualls

Reminders:

Our online worship service is posted to Facebook and YouTube on Sunday at 10 AM

To make your contribution digitally, you can use Venmo: @NorthHamilton-ChurchOfChrist

“Church Assemblies and the Government” David B. Smith

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 outbreak, congregations have been wrestling with the question of assembling. Should we assemble or not? Should the church assemble in smaller groups, instead of the entire congregation together at once? Does breaking up the church into smaller groups (like less than 10 people) violate the New Testament pattern of togetherness? Can we even decide not to meet together without contradicting the obligation to assemble with the saints (Heb. 10:24-25)? Our eldership was forced to make tough decisions at the beginning of the outbreak, leading to a suspension of our regular services. This was done in order to best protect the health of the congregation, especially those most at risk to the virus. The New Testament does forbid the willful forsaking of the assemblies. To my knowledge, no one I know has done this. We are still worshipping in the capacity in which we can. We are still one heart and one soul, like the early disciples. We simply selected a temporary suspension of our gatherings so that all of us can come back together again when it is safer. We utilize the same principle when we are sick with other things. We did the same thing a few years back when our building was filled with nauseating fumes from a freshly painted baptistry. All of us understand that the eldership has the right to ask such things (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17).

Now there is a different set of questions popping up. These are the ones related to the role of the government and how far the church can comply with restrictions against assemblies. We've been hearing news reports of some police departments citing and even threatening to arrest churches for trying to meet. People are now curious about the limit of the church's submission to governing authorities. Here are a few things to consider.

1. The only separation between the church and the state is a functional separation. The church has a work. Our job is to seek and save the lost (Mk. 16:15-16; Lk. 19:10). The government also has a work. Its job is to protect the innocent. Authorities do this by establishing laws and punishing those that violate the laws (Rom. 13:1-7). Both institutions are under the superseding authority of God (Rom. 13:1; Col. 1:18). The church is not the government. We do not implement and make the decisions in a civil sense—even though the civil government is still under the greater authority of God. The civil government is likewise not in the business of telling the church what we can or cannot do.

2. If there is a conflict between civil and spiritual duties, the spiritual duties win out. Peter said, “we ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). We can never surrender our faithfulness to God just because the world says we should. We must evangelize even if the world tells us otherwise. We must worship even if the government forbids it. Remember that Daniel continued to pray even though his king signed a law forbidding the practice (Dan. 6). We must comply with our civil authorities as long as we can fulfill our duty to God. But when those two things are in conflict, we must “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecc. 12:13).

So here is the answer to the question. The government does not control our worship assemblies. The eldership made the decision to suspend our gatherings in the interest of our safety. It was not because we were ordered to do so. Thankfully, our elders see the wisdom in the social-distancing pattern for the present. But it will be entirely up to them when they feel we can safely meet again. Our prayers should be offered for both the church and the government, that each will have the wisdom to do what God empowers it to do. As questions are raised daily about how much control the government has over the spiritual functions of the church, the answer is none. This means our eldership bears a tremendous burden to keep us safe and faithful. Let's pray fervently for these men.