

Follow Scriptural 'Safety Codes' When Building

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One of the most contentious aspects – and there are many – of a building process come from the permitting and safety coding. The source of the conflict basically comes from the perception that government officials are dictating what churches can and can't build on their own property.

This conflict is fueled by some architects and general contractors who advise clients that they have the "connections" and can circumvent rules established by municipalities and take shortcuts to the construction of facilities. Keep in mind that permits for building are based, for the most part, in safety. For example, facilities in South Florida must have shutters or hurricane-resistant windows. Those in San Francisco must have features aimed at minimizing earthquake damage. And following the recent flooding, it's a foregone conclusion that homes and commercial structures in Atlanta will require more stringent permitting processes.

If church leaders attempt to circumvent these procedures, they are missing out on an important method of ministry. Scripture continually points out that we must live our lives in truth and demonstrate integrity. If we try to bend the rules, we are falling off the path detailed by Christ. We will also lose credibility and show a lack of integrity among government officials and congregations. While we may not like the stringent guidelines established by municipalities, we must follow the rules established by those who govern us.

Throughout Scripture, we are told that God has established everything and as good stewards of his world, we must follow governments which were put in place by him. This concept is clear when Nehemiah appealed to King Artaxerxes, requesting gifts in kind, donations, services, safe passage, materials and military escorts. Nehemiah was rewarded by God with a successful project. This theme re-emerges in Daniel 2:21: "He changes time and season; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning."

God also specifically tells us to obey governments he puts in place – even if we don't understand the reasons or like the officials charged with enforcement. "Obey the government, for God is the one who put it there ... So those who refuse to obey the laws of the land are refusing to obey God and punishment will follow ... So you must obey the government for two reasons: to keep from being punished and to keep a clear conscience" (Romans 13).

There's no question that following all permitting and code regulations can be time-consuming, expensive and frustrating. But in our experience, God has rewarded several projects when his law is followed.

Several years ago, a youth facility was built in a small central Florida town. The concept among church leaders was that they could build a youth ministry if they had a location in town where kids could play ball, hang out and hear the Gospel. It was better than having them out on the streets. This ministry grew, but the building became much more when Hurricane Wilma pretty much devastated the small town. Most buildings were damaged, but this small youth center withstood the winds and became a shelter for many people during the ensuing months of recovery. The kitchen was operational, the air conditioning worked, and the roof remained in place. The congregation grew because prospective members saw God's grace at work.

God blessed this building for many reasons, one of which was that the church leaders were excellent stewards and followed government officials in all aspects of construction. The structure survived the storm and membership grew. The church's availability demonstrated to the citizens of the town, government officials and church members that they were people of integrity. This, too, is spelled out in Scripture: "They could find no corruption in him (Daniel) because he was trustworthy and neither corrupt nor negligent" (Daniel 6:4).

In addition, by following God's law we don't run the risk of being labeled by friends, church members, and, yes, government officials as lacking in integrity. We are to be different, and those we deal should realize that we are different and how we live – and how we build a new church facility – should provide others with a glimpse of Christian life. "No wound was found on him because he trusted in God" (Daniel 6:24).

God also advises us that while we may not agree with advice we should accept it as God-given. "The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice. Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise" (Proverbs 12:15). By acting in this way, we can minister to many non-believers throughout the building process. Keep in mind that building inspectors frequently slow down the construction process because very specific criteria aren't met. By accepting these seemingly miniscule corrections in a Godly fashion, church leaders can minister to inspectors who will readily see that we are following Scripture in every aspect of construction. "Provide things honest in the sight of all men" (Romans 12:17). And, like the small youth center in central Florida, church facilities can be blessed because God's will was respected and followed.

"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock" (Matthew 7:24).

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