

August AFS Meeting

Eli Sanders - "Apostasy: One man's journey through Pentecostal ministry, Eastern Orthodoxy and the occult and how he discovered free thought"

Eli Sanders was born into a zealous Pentecostal family in rural Alabama. A King James-only Christian, he was prophesied over at a young age and told he would be an evangelist. Based on that prophesy, Eli teamed up with Dr. Charles Stanley for ten years, graduated Bible College, and worked as a youth pastor in the Assemblies of God. Eli got to know Dr. Charles Stanley on a personal basis and even had dinner with Jerry Falwell in his home.

But, having been disillusioned with the ugly side of televangelism and politics in the ministry, Eli converted to a more liturgical form of Christianity and was tonsured an acolyte. Eli also drifted through several progressive Christian traditions and even socialized with Bishop John Spong and Marcus Borg from the Jesus Seminar.

But, after reading Nietzsche, Robert Ingersoll, Charles Templeton, Anton LaVey, and Marjoe Gortner's biography, Eli knew he was done with Christianity for good. Eli's spiritual and intellectual journey is candid, emotional, and unique because he was so fearless and charismatic about his faith.

Eli has been an "out of the closet" agnostic for about five years and works as an Engineer at CNN in Atlanta.

Calendar

Aug 12	Potluck	12:00 p.m.
Aug 12	AFS General Meeting	1:00 p.m.
Sep 9	AFS Board Meeting	11:00 a.m.
Sep 9	AFS General Meeting	1:00 p.m.

All events are at AF Hall unless noted and are subject to change.

Be sure to like AFS's Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought



The Freedom From Religion Foundation is urging Atlanta-area residents to remember our nation's foundational wall: the one dividing state and religion.

A large billboard with the message has gone up on Spring Street near the intersection of Atlanta Road in the city of Marietta. The eye-catching panel proclaims "The Only Wall We Need Is Between Church-State" against the backdrop of two portions of a clearly divided brick wall.

The billboard, the second time FFRF has displayed this dictum in the Atlanta region, is on display for a month as part of a year-long media campaign in the South's most bustling metropolis. Georgia FFRF member Jack Egger is underwriting the campaign, for which FFRF is truly appreciative.

The wall between state and church is under assault as perhaps never before, FFRF contends. All of us should strive to ensure that religion and government are separated from each other, as our Founders envisioned.

"This fundamental constitutional principle is truly endangered with President Trump's nomination of Brett Kavanaugh for the Supreme Court," says FFRF Co-President Annie Laurie Gaylor.

The August Potluck

Before the August 12th meeting we will have a Potluck Lunch, starting at noon. Join AFS members and guests for some good food and great socializing. Please bring food according to the first letter of your last name:

A-G: Bring a dessert

H-P: Bring a side dish

Q-Z: Bring a main dish

AFS will provide drinks, plates and silverware.



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 unless otherwise noted. Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:00 for socializing. Visitors are always welcome.



The views and opinions expressed by speakers at AFS do not necessarily reflect those of AFS members or its policy.

Aug 12: Eli Sanders, “Apostasy: One man’s journey through Pentecostal ministry, Eastern Orthodoxy and the occult and how he discovered free thought”

Sept 9: Ed and Michael Buckner, “Religion and Politics in the Trump Era”

Oct 14: Dale McGowan, “Getting Past Small Things Like God”

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoo.com to subscribe. The AFS Forum email list is a place for discussions of freethought, atheism, agnosticism, church-state separation and religion. To subscribe to this list, send an email to AFSForum-subscribe@yahoo.com. The AFS Facebook page is at facebook.com/AtlantaFreethought. For calendar information on AFS activities, please join the [Meetup group](#). The AFS website is www.atlantafreethought.org. To keep up to date on the Atlanta Freethought Society calendar of upcoming events, please join our Meetup group: meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society.

The Atlanta Freethought Society is a member-run organization dedicated to advancing freethought and protecting the rights and reputation of freethinkers, agnostics, atheists and humanists.

We welcome anyone who is interested in learning about living a good life free from religion through attending AFS speeches, debates, and discussions. We employ protests, letters to the editor, broadcast appearances, and any other reasonable and civil means available to achieve our mission.

We define freethought as “the forming of opinions about life in general and religion in particular on the basis of reason and the evidence of our senses, independently of tradition, authority, or established belief.”

We actively support a strict separation of church and state as the best means to guarantee liberty for all, regardless of religious belief or lack of belief.

We seek to educate ourselves on many topics but especially on religion and non-religion. We do this through a series of thought-provoking speakers and programs, and by maintaining a web forum and an extensive library of freethought, religious, and related books, pamphlets, videotapes, and audiotapes.

We provide an organization where freethinkers and non-theists can develop friendships, talk freely, socialize and enjoy each other’s company. We do not discriminate against anyone on such irrelevant grounds as race, sexual orientation, age, gender, class, or physical disability. We welcome members and leaders of all political parties and preferences. Any who are like-minded are welcome to join us.

Because we are designated by the IRS as a 501(c)(3) educational organization, contributions to AFS are tax deductible.

Views, opinions, positions or strategies expressed by authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, positions or strategies of the Atlanta Freethought Society or any member thereof. The editors of *Atlanta Freethought News* reserve the right to edit or alter in any manner it sees fit any articles deemed to be obscene, offensive, defamatory, threatening, in violation of trademark, copyright or other laws, or is otherwise unacceptable; and also to correct grammar and to conserve space.

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Atlanta Freethought News

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Membership includes voting privileges and
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Fallacy of the Month

Illegitimate Appeal to Authority

By Dennis Martin, PhD (AFS Secretary)

This is the seventh in a monthly series discussing the kinds of faulty reasoning that you are likely to run across in everyday discussions and debates. Atlanta Freethought Society's mission includes teaching how to avoid faulty reasoning so that your thoughts are free from mistaken reasoning and unsupported authoritative claims.



No one can be an expert in every subject-matter. We have to trust someone or some source of knowledge as we go through life. So-called knowledge is 'authored' or expressed by someone or some group as purported authorities. Since we assume that there is a difference between true and false statements, we also assume there are

legitimate and illegitimate authorities. Criteria can be established for specific areas of expertise. An illegitimate authority would then be someone who didn't meet the criteria in that field. Sometimes this fallacy is simply called "appeal to authority", which is incorrect and why the word "Illegitimate" is important in the name. The **Illegitimate Appeal to Authority** fallacy occurs in a number of ways.

Appeal to a Saying or Proverb is illegitimate, because the authority in this case can't respond to questions of more evidence. Citing religious Scripture falls into this category. A saying might be proven by modern scientific experiments, but then its authority doesn't rest in the saying itself, but in the evidence behind the saying.

An **Out of Date Authority** is citing someone who used to be an authority but is no longer. This can happen in fields of knowledge that have changed slowly but drastically, such as geography – you wouldn't want to cite ancient Egyptians. Or it can happen in fields that change quickly – you wouldn't want **Alan Turing** to show you how to use a cell phone. Some fields don't progress in a cumulative way (one expert building upon prior expertise) – such as literary criticism – so citing 'older' authorities remains relevant and legitimate

An authority is illegitimate if testifying **Outside Their Field of Expertise**. This is the version of fallacy that most critical thinkers can recognize immediately. A spokesperson appears on TV who you vaguely recognize as being an authority on something, so you pay attention to what they are saying. Later you realize they were just an authority on some TV drama, or they are an authority on a completely different topic.

Often an authority is **Not Clearly Identified**. "They say," "I heard," "A recent study reports" are examples of vague references. References can also be made to organizations which are fancy-sounding but non-existent.

Sometimes people claim to be authorities on subjects that are **Not a Matter for Expertise**. The subject of love comes to mind. Simply being able to recite everything ever written on a subject is not necessarily expertise. An 'authority' ought to be able to squeeze out and 'author' new information from their knowledge of the subject. Otherwise, why do we need their authority? Just trust the authorities that they claim to know.

Finally, freethought in the tradition of **Ingersoll** espouses a healthy skepticism of all authority. Freethought doesn't reject authority. It relishes expertise in knowledge. What freethought rejects is authoritative claims which are unsupported by factual evidence that can be tested.



Atheists' lives also are full of love and meaning

By ED BUCKNER Jul 1, 2018

July 1, 2018 • Galveston Co, TX *The Daily News*

Bill Tinsley, surely a nice guy, can string sentences together well enough. Want a bland affirmation of faith, something to help maintain religious complacency? "Choosing Faith" (*The Daily News*, June 29) will suffice.

But if a believer wants serious, honest consideration of theism, she'll need to turn elsewhere. One readily available source (among many): **Richard Dawkins's** *The God Delusion* (2006).

Two problems with Tinsley's bromide:

1. The design argument was posited most famously by **William Paley** around 1800 (it was laid out long before). Paley's example (a watch not a computer), but not his argument, was different and has long since been debunked, perhaps most effectively by **Darwin's** *On the Origin of Species* (1859).
2. Claiming that love and meaning must come from God, and therefore, faith in God is necessary for love and meaning is illogical and circular. Those of us without any god-beliefs have lives as full of love and meaning as those who're sure meaning must be imposed. Historically, concluding that meaning has to have external origins just plays into the hands of people eager to have power over others.

Stephen Hawking's conclusion beats Bill Tinsley's: faith "is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."

Ed Buckner

Houston (Clear Lake)

You're basically killing each other to see who's got the better imaginary friend.

- Richard Jeni

Trump Administration Launches Task Force To Aid In Using Religion To Discriminate

By Liz Hayes/Wall of Separation Blog

www.au.org

Attorney General **Jeff Sessions** announced the formation of a “Religious Liberty Task Force” to enforce the Department of Justice (DOJ) guidance he issued last fall that would allow religion to be used to discriminate.

The announcement came during a **Religious Liberty Summit** on July 30 – an event that was replete with religion and representatives of organizations that strive to undermine the separation of church and state.

“Americans from a wide variety of backgrounds are concerned about what this changing cultural climate means for the future of religious liberty in his country,” **Sessions said**. “President **Trump** heard this concern. I believe this unease is one reason that he was elected. In substance, he said he respected people of faith and promised to protect them in the free exercise of their faith.”

What Sessions really means is that the Trump administration is committed to an agenda of preserving the power of the Christian fundamentalists who carried Trump into office and who want to use their religious beliefs as justification to discriminate against women, LGBTQ people, religious minorities and anyone else who doesn’t conform with their narrow vision of Christianity.

The new task force is the Trump administration’s most recent step to undermine people’s rights in the name of religious freedom. Sessions charged the task force with implementing his infamous guidance on religious liberty, which is a blueprint for using religion to discriminate. AU Legislative Director **Maggie Garrett** **previously described** some of the harmful outcomes that could result from the guidance:

- People and corporations could cite religion to ignore nondiscrimination laws that protect women and LGBTQ people.
- Taxpayer-funded organizations could use religion to justify discriminating against the employees they hire and the people they serve, even if it conflicts with the terms of their government grant or contract.
- The government could give religious exemptions to businesses and government employees, even if the result meant taking away a right or benefit the law guarantees to someone else.

In other words, the guidance would allow people, businesses and taxpayer-funded organizations to use religion as a trump card to almost any law.

There’s no doubt that using religion as a sword to harm others is the administration’s intent with this new task force. Just consider who surrounded Sessions at Monday’s summit:

- The owner of **Masterpiece Cakeshop**, the Colorado bakery that asked the Supreme Court to condone its use of religion to discriminate against a gay couple seeking a wedding cake. The DOJ had supported Masterpiece’s argument.
- Louisville Archbishop **Joseph Edward Kurtz**, a leader in the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, who advocated for allowing taxpayer-funded **adoption and foster care providers to discriminate** against parents and children and for nonprofits to deny women access to birth control, all in the name of religion.
- Sen. **James Lankford** (R-Okla.), a proponent of several pieces of legislation that would undermine church-state separation, including the **Child Welfare Provider Inclusion Act** that would allow adoption agencies to discriminate and the **Conscience Protection Act** that would allow

health care providers to deny medical care.

- Several people who have been affiliated with the conservative Christian legal organizations Alliance Defending Freedom and Becket Fund, some of the leading advocates for these types of policies.

“The event by the Justice Department offends the true meaning of religious freedom,” **said Rachel Laser**, AU’s president and CEO. “Far from seeking to safeguard religious freedom, Trump, Sessions and their allies are hard at work trying to destroy that precious right by favoring the religious views of a select few at the expense of religious freedom for all Americans. They seek religious freedom for some, not for all.”

FFRF emphasizes necessity to bar church politicking

ffrf.org

The Freedom From Religion Foundation is pleased to learn that the U.S. Senate has voted for a must-pass spending bill that does not contain language to repeal the ban on church electioneering.

This news comes after the U.S. House approved a provision slipped into the FY 2019 Financial Services and General Government Appropriations bill to cripple the Johnson Amendment. The provision in the House bill would make it nearly impossible for the Internal Revenue Service to enforce the Johnson Amendment, enabling churches to promote political viewpoints and endorse candidates running for office without penalty.

Moreover, this language in the bill weakens this crucial protection for churches against political corruption. Diluting the Johnson Amendment would make the Citizens United decision look trivial and nominal by comparison. If the amendment is repealed, billions in dark money will inevitably flow into and out of churches for political purposes, pressuring churches to become dark money conducts.

The spending bill will now go to a congressional conference committee that will hash out what language gets put into the final version of the bill.

FFRF is affirming the need to maintain the full enforcement of the Johnson Amendment in this must-pass legislation and condemns any attempt to turn churches into PACs.

The Search For Any Evidence Supporting Trump's Muslim Ban Continues

By Liz Hayes/Wall of Separation Blog

www.au.org

It's been 18 months since President Donald Trump issued his first Muslim ban. It's just shy of a year since Trump enacted his third and current Muslim ban. And a month has passed since the U.S. Supreme Court said this cruel ban that separates American Muslim families can remain in effect.

And yet, we still have no proof from the administration that the Muslim ban was based on anything other than Trump's hostility toward Muslims.

When Trump issued Muslim Ban 3.0 last September, he claimed a "worldwide review" by the Departments of State and Homeland Security of other countries' immigration procedures justified his ban. But the government hasn't provided any evidence to back up these claims; instead, the administration's process to create and enforce the Muslim ban remains shrouded in secrecy.

Americans United and our allies Muslim Advocates, the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU School of Law and the law firm Covington & Burling LLP in July 2017 filed a **Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request** with the State Department to produce critically important reports the government says led to the creation of Muslim Ban 3.0 and its predecessors. But the government never produced any documents.

Then AU and its allies filed a lawsuit, *Brennan Center for Justice v. U.S. Department of State*, to force the government to fulfill its legal obligation to provide the information or explain why it couldn't. A federal judge in January **ordered the government** to produce the documents we requested by Feb. 9, 2018, or provide an explanation for why the reports were being withheld. But still, the Trump administration hasn't produced any substantive documents.

The court battle over these documents continues; last night we filed our written argument in the district court explaining why the American people are entitled to know whether there is any basis for excluding millions of people because

of their religion and country of origin from visiting their loved ones in this country. These reports have been cited as the justification that has upended countless lives in the United States and around the world – we deserve to know what's in them. It's telling that the administration insists these reports justify the Muslim ban while at the same time refusing to disclose what they say.

Given Trump's long history of **anti-Muslim rhetoric**, it's clear his intent has always been to **ban as many Muslims** from the United States as possible. That's why Americans United continues to fight this policy.



In addition to our Brennan Center lawsuit, **we've also joined** Muslim Advocates and the Southern Poverty Law Center as plaintiffs in *Muslim Advocates v. Department of Homeland Security*, a lawsuit to compel the Trump administration to explain the process and qualification standards for obtaining waivers to the Muslim ban. And still active is **our lawsuit** that directly challenges

Muslim Ban 3.0 – *Iranian Alliances Across Borders v. Trump*, which was filed on behalf of individuals and organizations harmed by the ban.

The Muslim ban, which has no expiration date, continues to harm countless Americans and their family members abroad – parents are separated from children, husbands are separated from wives. And Trump's anti-Muslim rhetoric and this ban have emboldened not only hate crimes and hate speech against Muslims, but also violence and verbal attacks against other religious minorities and people of color. In their submissions to **Americans United's essay contest**, Rimpal Bajwa, a Sikh-American high school student from Washington, and Ariel Hall, a Muslim African-American high-schooler from Ohio, described how they and people in their communities have experienced intolerance as a result of the ban.

Americans United will continue to fight the Trump administration's attempts to undermine church-state separation and single out Muslims for disfavored status. Because religious freedom is for all of us, not just some of us.



Other Meetings of Interest in Metro Atlanta

The Atlanta Science Tavern has several meetings planned. Please check meetup page for more information. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaScienceTavern)

The SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety) meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. in Roswell. For more information, send an email to donnajgore@yahoo.com.

We Agnostics Atlanta meets on Tuesdays at 7:30 p.m. at the Galano Club, 585 Dutch Valley Rd NE, Atlanta, GA 30324. Club-house phone number: (404) 881-9188. This is similar to Alcoholics Anonymous group.

Marietta Skeptic/Humanist Meetup has various get-togethers and discussion groups. Several upcoming events. (www.meetup.com/Marietta-Atheists-Meetup)

The Peachtree City Humanists participate in social and educational activities such as dinners, lunches, coffees, outdoor recreation, discussion groups, and book clubs with topics that include science, psychology, philosophy. (www.meetup.com/Peachtree-City-Humanists-PTCH)

The Southern Crescent Freethinkers sponsor *Navigators*, *Owl & Ibis: A Confluence of Minds*, and meet for dinner, etc. Several upcoming events each month. (www.meetup.com/Southern-Crescent-Freethinkers)

Recovery from Religion - Morrow Chapter meets monthly at Barnes & Noble Booksellers Southlake, 1939 Mount Zion Road, Morrow, GA. Join the Meetup group for more information. There is no proselytizing of any kind allowed at these meetings. For more information and resources, please visit www.recoveringfromreligion.org. (www.meetup.com/Recovering-From-Religion-Morrow-Chapter)

There will be a **meetup for Decatur Atheists** Sun, Aug. 12, 6 pm, Thinking Man Tavern, 537 W. Howard Ave, in Decatur. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths) topic this month is "Church vs. State." The topic Leader is **Wally Nichols**, an attorney with experience in church and state matters. It will be held 7-9 pm, Mon. Aug. 13 at UUCG, 12 Bethesda Church Rd, Lawrenceville. (www.meetup.com/brights-295)

Atlanta Astronomy Club will meet on the third Friday at 7:30 pm each month at Fernbank Science Center, 156 Heaton Park Dr, Atlanta, GA 30307 unless otherwise noted. This month's meeting will be Aug. 17. Check website for more info. (www.atlantaastronomy.org)

Sunday Assembly Atlanta's upcoming assembly subject is "Robots Are Our Friends?" which will be held on Sun. August 19, 5:30 pm at First Existentialist Congregation, 470 Candler Park Dr

NE, Atlanta. The speaker is **Dr. Ayanna Howard** from GA Tech with a talk entitled "Robots and AI - Improving our Future or Leading us to Doom."

This is also a potluck supper. All are welcome. SAA is an extremely active community with a large number of upcoming events including rock chorus, secular support, mindfulness meditation, wonder club, urban wonder, book club, makers night out, volunteering, queer beyond belief group, public speaking series, trivia nights, etc. (www.meetup.com/Sunday-Assembly)

There will be a **meetup for Atlanta Atheists** Sun, Aug 26, 4 pm, 5 Seasons Brewing, 5600 Roswell Rd, Prado Shopping Center, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

Ethical Humanists of Atlanta:

Next meeting is Sun, Aug. 26 12:30-2 pm at Manuel's Tavern, 603 N. Highland Ave, Atlanta. "Our shared task is to live decently, compassionately, and caringly in the world we inhabit." Come join the conversation. Ethical living is the philosophy of making decisions for daily life which take into account ethics and moral values, particularly with regard to consumerism, sustainability, environmentalism, wildlife and animal welfare.

- Any recently made decision have you questioning its ethical or moral value?
- Maybe you're teetering or avoiding making a choice due to uncertainty.

There's no guarantee questions will be answered, nor an action plan fully evolved, but trust good conversation to occur. Come and let's learn from one another; building forward one step at a time. (www.meetup.com/Ethical-Humanists-of-Atlanta)

Black Nonbelievers will be tabling at Dragon Con again this year, beginning Friday Aug 31 through Monday Aug 4 at the Hilton, second floor, Downtown Atlanta. (www.meetup.com/Black-Nonbelievers)

Atlanta Skeptics has "Drinking Skeptically" on the first Friday of each month. 5 Seasons Brewing, Prado Shopping Center, 5600 Roswell Rd, Sandy Springs. (www.meetup.com/AtlantaSkeptics)

Atlanta Atheists has first Sunday meetups each month: the place varies. Check Meetup for info on the get-together. (www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Atheists)

Fellowship of Reason meets on the first Sunday of every month at 10:30 AM at AF Hall. There are meetings for book discussion, philosophy, a classic film course, and other events. (www.fellowshipofreason.com)

Freedom From Religion Foundation of Georgia does not have a meetup scheduled at press time. Check website or email for more information. (www.ffrfga.org - email is ffrfga@gmail.com)



Become a Member!

(Or renew your membership with this form or online at www.AtlantaFreethought.org!)

If you've enjoyed what you've read, we enthusiastically invite you to join the Atlanta Freethought Society. Every month you will get our acclaimed monthly newsletter, the Atlanta Freethought News, voting rights in the organization—and enjoyment of the superb speakers we have coming up, as well as the social and activist events that we sponsor!

Individual memberships: One person can become a member for \$50 per year.

Sustaining memberships: One person can become a sustaining member for \$100 per year.

Life memberships: Avoid the hassle of renewing every year. A life membership lasts a lifetime.

Paper newsletter: We encourage members to receive the newsletter by email. This avoids the printing and mailing expenses. But if you really want the paper version of the newsletter, just let us know and we will send it to you at no additional charge. (You can also pick up a paper newsletter at any AFS meeting.)

Thank you for your support! We look forward to your being with us in the coming months!

Annual dues are:

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Save time and postage by making a payment via **Paypal** to: afs@atlantafreethought.org

AFS Art Display Program

4775 N. Church Lane SE Atlanta, GA 30339
www.atlantafreethought.org afs@atlantafreethought.org

Person or entity displaying art: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

Email: _____

Description of artwork (subject, color, dimensions, weight, frame, price, materials, other info — list on separate page if necessary):

Display dates: from _____ to _____

Owner if other than above: _____

Address: _____

Phone(s): _____

Email: _____

Is artwork for sale? Yes / No \$ _____ Upon sale owner agrees to pay AFS a 33.3% fee.

Terms: All artwork displays will be submitted to Atlanta Freethought Society art committee for approval (afs@atlantafreethought.org). Installation & removal will be done by artist/owner overseen by AFS art committee. Damage to building will be repaired by artist/owner. The owner assumes all risk for artwork at all times. AFS will not be responsible for any damage or loss while artwork is in our possession.

Owner agrees to terms: _____

Signature/date _____

AFS Art Committee approval: _____

Signature/date _____

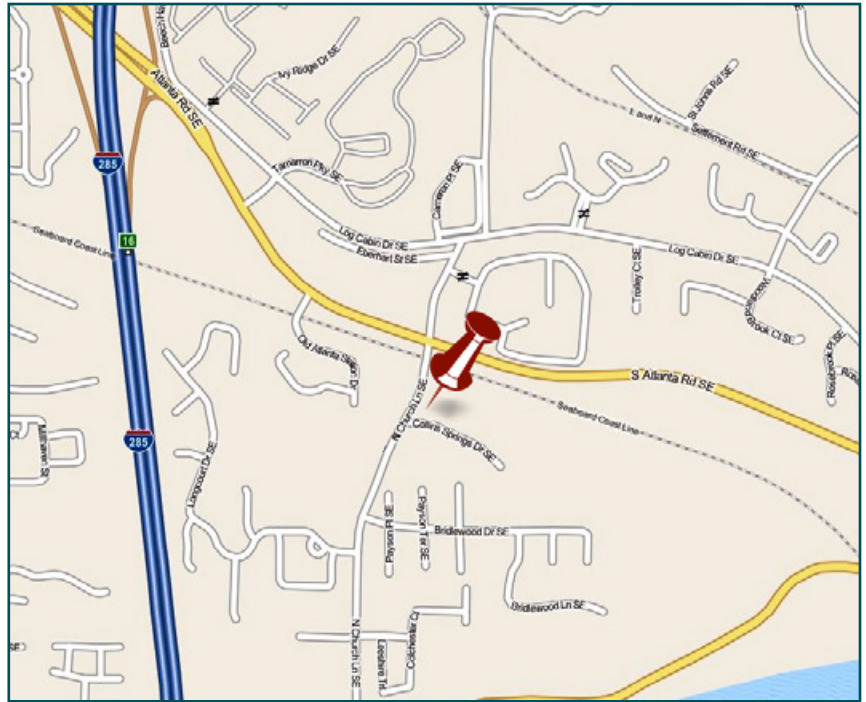
*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**August 12th meeting
1:00 at AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

Eli Sanders

ALSO POTLUCK LUNCH!



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