

Online Potluck Meeting in May

Another month under quarantine (despite what our Governor says), and because we are left up in the air for bringing in speakers, we decided to just have a Mother's Day virtual potluck lunch with all you fine folks because we miss your faces! Be sure to grab some lunch and eat it with us, because Zoom sessions always feel like a party.

Board member, newsletter editor, and of course, former AFS President **Steve Yothment** has set up a Zoom session for us to visit each other for Sunday, May 10 from 1:00-3:00 p.m. He said he will open it up at 12:30 if people want to log in early.

Below is the meeting invitation as generated by Zoom. Log in with a computer, tablet, or smart phone; they allow telephone-only access if you prefer. You also have the option to join online and change out your background or even just not turn on your camera!) Best of all, it's free!



There are other science and secular groups in the metro Atlanta area who will have virtual sessions as well, such as **Sunday Assembly Atlanta**, **Black Nonbelievers**, **Fellowship of Reason**, **Ethical Humanists of Atlanta**, **Peachtree City Humanists**, **Southern Crescent Freethinkers**, and maybe **GUST (Gwinnett: Understanding Secular Truths)**. If you haven't made it to any of these meetings because they are out of your area, perhaps you may enjoy attending one and getting to know your friendly metro-ATL secular folks!

If you can't make it to the AFS Zoom meeting, that's okay. Be well, stay safe, protect yourself and the ones around you, mourn the ones we've lost, and we hope to see you soon. We hope all is well with you physically, emotionally, and financially. These are hard times and they are no joke.

AFS May Meeting May 10, 2020 1:00-3:00 PM (EST)

To join Zoom meeting click on link below:
<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85480777943>

Meeting ID: 854 8077 7943

One tap mobile

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Meeting ID: 854 8077 7943

Find your local number:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85480777943>

Calendar

- May 10 General Meeting on Zoom 1 pm
- June 14 Stay Tuned!

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

We question your beliefs because you are too afraid of a vengeful fictional character to do it yourself.



 **For the latest in upcoming AFS events, join our Meetup group!**
[meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society](https://www.meetup.com/Atlanta-Freethought-Society)

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.



May 10: Virtual potluck lunch on Zoom

June 14: Richard Dien Winfield (?)

July 12: TBA

August 9: TBA

September 13: TBA

AFS Email List

The AFS Announcements email list provides subscribers with reminders and updates on AFS activities. Send an email to AFS-Announce-subscribe@yahoogroups.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@yahoogroups.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
AFNews by email/USPS (indicate preferences).

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Subscriptions only are \$30 for 12 issues.

Please make checks and money orders payable to
Atlanta Freethought Society
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Visit our Meetup page at
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See AFS events and member views at:
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Steve Yothment



To *Marietta Daily Journal*, submitted on 2 May 2020

Dear editor:

Nelson Price's foolish column ("Did God send..." *Marietta Daily Journal*, Saturday, 2 May 2020—pasted in *below** for some out-of-town folks) engages in a debate reportedly started by Epicurus (341-270 BCE) as to whether the problem of evil makes it wise to believe in any god**. Theologians have offered dozens of arguments in defense of faith over this, called "theodicies," none of them successful as I see it.

The most illogical and unpersuasive of these defenses is the one Price offers: blame anything you don't like on something other than your god, credit anything you do to the god, and claim that anything you don't understand must be good even if it looks evil.

The MDJ can do better.

Regards,
Ed

***Nelson Price: Did God send the COVID-19 virus as a discipline, a punishment?**

Some left-wing pundits expressed a desire for such long before it occurred. Their desire for such was to cause a recession resulting in the defeat of **President Trump**. That is an expression of hate, strong hate, if they are willing for all to suffer in order to get their desire. Our dramatic dilemma may last long enough and be severe enough to result in that end.

On the right, many have prayed for God to turn America to its former morals and values. To do so, some major problem is believed to be necessary.

Then there are those who believe neither of these is the reason, but either can lead to that end. This school of thought holds God did not send the plague, but as in everything, God is very busy at work to bring the good out of it. So if people believe this and submissively humble themselves before God and ask that He bring the good out of it, it will serve a vital role.

In everything there is a God component. This pandemic has several components, for example some are: medical/scientific, economical, commercial, political, military, moral, and cultural. Our list for consideration normally ends there with the God/spiritual aspect, overlooked. If He is left out of this dilemma an opportunity will have been missed. Historically Christians have believed plagues were not the work of a furious and capricious God, but the product of a broken creation in revolt

against the loving God. Repeat: "...it is the product of a broken creation in revolt against the loving God."

Consider just a few plagues and their toll through history. The Black Death, 1347-1351, 200 million; Italian plague, 1629-1631, one million deaths; Spanish Flu, 1918-1919, 40-50 million; HIV/AIDS, 1985-present, 25-35 million; Swine Flu, 2009-2010, 200,000 deaths.

Jewish devotees are exposed to the story of the 10 plagues many times, often in the family Seders. They tend to view the plagues not just as a physical or historical events, but to consider them relevant metaphors for facing adversity.

During medieval plagues non-Christians noted the reaction of Christians. A century after a plague, the pagan Roman Emperor **Julian** complained bitterly of how "the Galileans" would care for even non-Christian sick people. The church historian **Pontianus** recounts how Christians ensured that "good was done to all men, not merely to the household of faith." The sociologist and religious demographer, **Rodney Stark**, claims that death rates in cities with Christian communities may have been just half that of other cities. Their faith and ministry to the sick prevented many deaths.

Christian groups were among the first to believe in and to create the hospitals in Europe as hygienic places to provide care during times of plague.

Numerous historians insist the plague was the reason for the rapid spread of Christianity. The way they ministered to the sick and faced the potential of death attracted people to the faith that sustained believers.

The Spanish flu is a case study in how viruses spread. It started in America among soldiers training for deployment in Europe during World War I. It spread to Europe, around the world, and back to America.

Do you have a faith strong enough to sustain you in a time of severe adversity? The unknown challenges to come might soon test it. Prepare well in the event this for you is the final exam.

****The Problem of Evil**

The gods can either take away evil from the world and will not, or, being willing to do so cannot; or they neither can nor will, or lastly, they are able and willing.

If they have the will to remove evil and cannot, then they are not omnipotent. If they can but will not, then they are not benevolent. If they are neither able nor willing, they are neither omnipotent nor benevolent.

Lastly, if they are both able and willing to annihilate evil, why does it exist?

—attributed to Greek philosopher
Epicurus (341-270 B.C.E.)

The Coronavirus and Church-State Separation: Here's some recent news

By Rob Boston / Wall of Separation Blog

[au.org](http://www.wallofseparation.org)

While some states are taking tentative steps to reopen certain services, much of the nation remains on lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. Here's a round-up of some recent news about the virus and its relationship to church-state issues:

- More than 68,000 people in the United States have died from coronavirus. As several media outlets have noted, that's higher than the number of U.S. soldiers killed in combat during [the Vietnam War](#), which lasted nine years. Nevertheless, [Jerry Falwell Jr.](#), president of Liberty University in Lynchburg, continues to minimize the pandemic and spread lies about it.

Appearing on a conservative radio show last week, [Falwell said](#) the media is putting out inaccurate numbers about the death toll because "they're counting everybody who died of old age and heart attacks and whatever." He also ridiculed the idea of people wearing masks in public places (which [is recommended by the Centers for Disease Control Prevention](#) and is a requirement in some parts of the country) and boasted that he's not doing it.

"You know I haven't changed anything I do," Falwell blustered. "You don't see people wearing masks around Lynchburg, Virginia ... except at the liberal grocery store ... It's like the liberals think they're going to live forever. I don't know, maybe they're afraid of what's going to happen to them when they die, I don't know."

A major uproar erupted when Falwell insisted on keeping Liberty University open and told students they were free to return to campus after spring break. Two staff members have since [tested positive](#) for coronavirus, and there have been reports of students being sick as well.

- Over the past few days, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* have editorialized about the pandemic's effects on First Amendment rights, and both endorsed a view promoted by Americans United: that during a public health emergency, the government can restrict worship services and secular gatherings equally.

"Bans like these are legal, as long as they are neutral and applicable to everyone," [observed The Times](#). "A state may not shut down only certain types of events, or prohibit speakers expressing only certain viewpoints. Under Supreme Court precedent, any infringement on speech or religion must be incidental to the central goal of the restriction, which in this case is clear: stopping the spread of the coronavirus."

[The Post agreed writing](#), "Churches, synagogues, mosques and other faith-based institutions are not self-contained communities. Their congregants may interact with neighbors, friends, lovers, grocery store personnel – and, if they get sick, health-care workers. A community's right to safety and health in the face of a potentially mortal threat cannot be collateral damage in an absolutist interpretation of constitutional protections."

- While Christian Nationalists are pushing to [reopen houses of worship](#), a new poll by the Pew Research Center [shows that most remain closed](#). More than 90 percent of Americans who attend services at least monthly say their houses of worship are closed. Furthermore, the suspension of in-person services has not led Americans to lose their faith. Forty-seven percent of Americans say their faith is unchanged as a result of the closings. Twenty-four percent say it has gotten stronger, while only 2 percent report that their faith has weakened. (The rest, 26 percent, said the question is not applicable because they aren't religious.)

- Is President Donald Trump's inept handling of the coronavirus crisis finally denting his standing among white evangelicals? Maybe. [A new poll](#) by Public Religion Research Institute shows that 66 percent of white evangelical Protestants hold a favorable view of Trump – a drop of 11 points since March.

Americans United remains on the job with staff working from home to defend separation of religion and government during these challenging times. Watch this space for updates.

Stay safe!

Secular Week of Action: Community Movement Builders COVID-19 Help

by [Mandisa Thomas](#), *Black Nonbelievers*

The Secular Week of Action exists to mobilize secular people to make positive changes in our communities. This week also serves to counter the National Day of Prayer, which is on May 7th of this year.

Please join us on Saturday, May 9th in volunteering with [Community Movement Builders](#), a member based collective of black people dedicated to creating sustainable self-determining communities through cooperative economic advancement and collective community organizing.

Between the hours of 11 am and 2 pm, we will assist with food deliveries in response to the COVID-19 crisis, as well as canvassing in the Pittsburgh neighborhood to determine who needs future help.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) will be provided for volunteers. Please let us know if you can attend by Thursday, May 7th, and try to arrive at 10:45 on Saturday. Also, please sport your BN swag if you have some.

If you have the symptoms of COVID-19, or any other ailment, please stay safe and remain at home!

We are also fundraising for CMB, BN, and Foundation Beyond Belief. Visit our GoFundMe campaign here: <https://charity.gofundme.com/o/en/campaign/secular-week-of-action-virtual-5k-for-bn-cmb-and-fbb>

Together, we can do our part during these tough times, and we also want to make sure we all remain healthy!!!

Congress authorizes another unconstitutional giveaway for religious worship in latest Coronavirus stimulus

atheists.org



“Congress must include these First Amendment protections in any future stimulus bills, particularly after the Small Business Administration **weakened** its own regulations, allowing the original \$350 billion in stimulus money to fund religious worship,” said **Alison Gill**, Vice President for Legal and Policy at American Atheists.

Longstanding SBA regulations had prevented “businesses principally engaged in teaching, instructing, counselling or indoctrinating religion or religious beliefs, whether in a religious or secular setting” from receiving **business** or **economic disaster loans**. However, **with its guidance on the Paycheck Protection Program from the CARES Act**, SBA suddenly indicated in early April that it would “decline to enforce these subsections.”

“If the SBA won’t do its job and protect the Constitution, Congress must finally step in,” said **Nick Fish**, President of American Atheists. “Congress is rushing to replenish Paycheck

Protection Program funds after countless businesses were unable to access these loans to preserve jobs. What we don’t know is how many well-heeled mega churches were able to secure government money to pay their pastors’ salary, while small businesses were left out in the cold.”

“Thousands and thousands of our supporters **have warned** Congress that these stimulus bills fail to adequately protect the constitutional separation of religion and government,” said Gill. “Accountability, transparency, and adherence to the Constitution are critical, especially in the face of a crisis.”

On April 23rd, the religious equality watchdog organization American Atheists condemned Congress’s failure to include necessary constitutional protections in the \$484 billion aid bill passed by the House of Representatives. As a result, the additional \$310 billion injected into the Small Business Administration’s Paycheck Protection Program can unconstitutionally fund religious worship.

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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!

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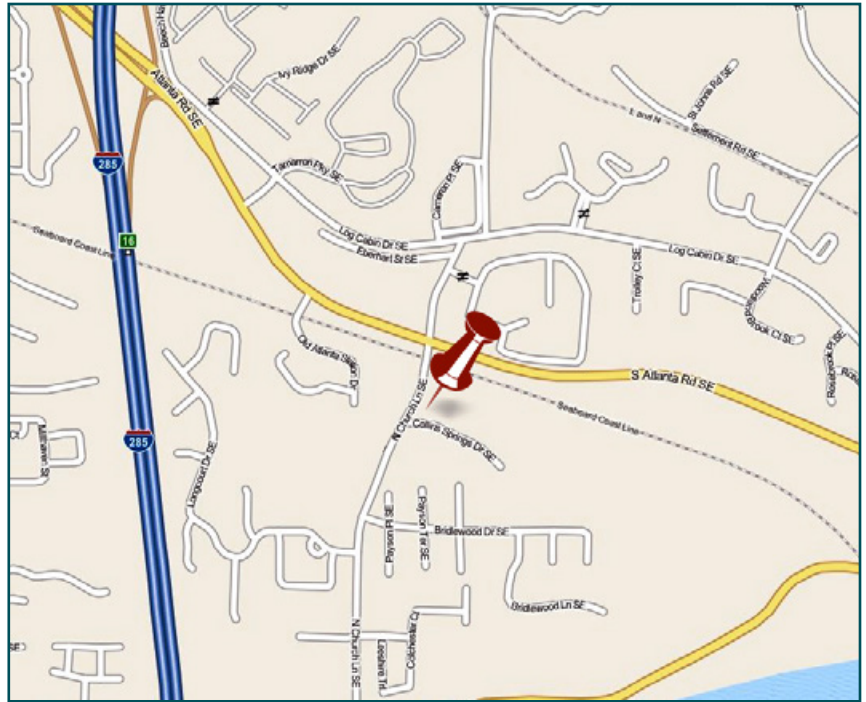
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*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



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**May meeting will
be held online.
Stay safe, y'all!**



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