

Keith Sharp and “Riverside Kate” of Groundwork Atlanta: “The Chattahoochee River and You”

AFS has the honor to have an Atlanta activist leader, Keith Sharp, backed by his wife, ‘Riverside Kate’ as producer, of **Groundwork Atlanta** talk with us. The talk, as Keith Sharp described it: “We are planning to discuss the 100-mile **Chattahoochee RiverLands** plan, and the 5-mile Riverwalk Atlanta portion of that proposal, together with the connections to the Silver Comet Trail and Atlanta Beltline. We’ll also briefly discuss two of the sites along the Riverwalk — Standing Peachtree and the Chattahoochee Brick Company land.”



Keith Sharp



We most often hear talks on religion, freethought, philosophy, and science, but we’re delighted that we’ll learn some local geography and history, and glad it will be from such well-regarded folks. Having great programs like this one for our members and visitors always makes us proud, and we expect to continue doing that throughout 2023 and beyond.

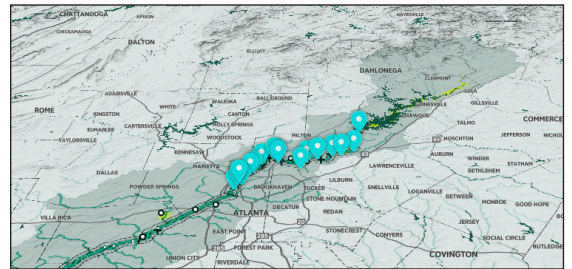


The Sharp program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of Zoom-and-in-person-based socializing starting about 12:30 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time in the US, for any interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M.

Calendar

- Oct. 8 General Meeting Live/Online 1 pm
- Nov 12 Potluck 11:30 am
- Nov 12 General Meeting Live/Online 1 pm

All events are combo Live/Zoom unless noted and are subject to change.



(EDT) on Sunday, 8 October, via Zoom and at AFS Hall.

We welcome those who are not freethinkers but who just want to know more about freethought, secular humanism, skepticism, local history and geography, and church & state. All freethinkers are of course welcome—and we hope that they will decide to join as members in due course.

The Blumner program, free and open to the public, will be preceded by a few minutes of Zoom-and-in-person-based socializing starting about 12:30 P.M. Eastern Daylight Time in the US, for any interested. The program will start at about 1 P.M. (EDT) on Sunday, 10 September, via Zoom and also at Atlanta Freethought Hall.

If you are joining us via Zoom, the meeting link is below:

**AFS October 8 Meeting
Oct 8, 2023 1:00-2:30 PM (EST)**

To join Zoom meeting go to this link:
us02web.zoom.us/j/89006560911
Also at Atlanta Freethought Hall



Programs and Speakers

All programs are on the second Sunday of each month at AF Hall, 4775 N. Church Lane SE, Atlanta, GA, 30339 and also presented online (see link on page 1). Programs start at 1:00 PM, but feel free to arrive at 12:30 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. Announced events are subject to change.



8 Oct	Keith Sharp
12 Nov	Kenan Holland on Freethinking and Cooking
10 Dec	TBA
14 Jan	TBA
11 Feb	TBA

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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.

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Richard G. Lee—Charlatan? You Decide

By Ed Buckner • Letters to a Free Country • edbuckner.substack.com

Was **Thomas Jefferson** a Christian and a Promoter of Christianity? And, to Repeat, Do Lies of Omission Still Count as Lies?

Oh—Related Question—Is **Richard G. Lee** of Cumming, GA, a Charlatan? You Decide.

Lee, an Atlanta area preacher, the founding pastor of **First Redeemer Church** in Cumming, GA, is also the president of **There's Hope America**—a group that will, on request, e-mail anyone a “Patriot’s Daily Devotional.” And I receive this every day.

Sometimes it is in fact actually a devotional—a prayer offered to readers for inspiration. Sometimes it is in some way a quick defense of Christianity as the one true path allegedly set out by God.

When it is either of these two things, I am always in disagreement with the points made, but not interested, usually, in debating them or rebutting them. These kinds of things are not reasonably arguable, not clearly tied to facts. I generally have no interest in persuading Christians that they should abandon their faith, even though I think it’s misguided.

But fairly often the daily “devotional” is instead a claim, explicit or implicit, about Christian nationalism—some point or effort transparently intended to support the idea that the US is and should be a Christian nation, historically, logically, or both. These I read with greater care and these I take serious issue with, because these matters should be fact-based. And with these there has been, in my experience, a consistent pattern, a deceptive pattern, that makes some narrowly true point (most often providing a quotation that is accurate), but that omits the greater context, the broader—and opposite—truth.

The most recent of these—just two days ago—was this. It accurately quotes **Thomas Jefferson** in a letter to **Benjamin Rush** in 1803—

September 20 - “The Moral Precepts of Jesus”

In a letter to Dr. Benjamin Rush in 1803, President Thomas Jefferson made this statement:

The practice of morality being necessary for the well-being of society, He [God] has taken care to impress its precepts so indelibly on our hearts that they shall not be effaced by the subtleties of our brain. We all agree in the obligation of the moral precepts of Jesus, and nowhere will they be found delivered in greater purity than in His discourses.

These were indeed words **Jefferson** wrote to **Rush**, but it seriously omits crucial things. Most specifically it neglects to even hint that **Jefferson** was on record as thinking, for example, that **Jesus** was a great teacher and reformer of Judaism but was not divine, did not rise from the dead nor die for anyone’s sins, and in fact that **Jesus** had never even claimed to be divine (and **Jefferson** denied that the trinity—the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost—made any sense at all).

Anyone who has taken the time to read **Jefferson**’s words with any care knows that he wrote, for example, that he (**Jefferson**) explicitly rejected

the immaculate conception of Jesus, his deification, the creation of the world by him, his miraculous powers, his resurrection & visible ascension, his corporeal presence in the Eucharist, the Trinity, original sin, atonement, regeneration, election orders of Hierarchy etc.

These words were in a letter to **William Short** on 31 October 1819—when **Jefferson** was 76—link to that letter below.

So when **Jefferson** recommended the teachings of **Jesus**, he assuredly did not mean the same thing that **Richard G. Lee** means by that.

I have written on this subject—**Jefferson** as not really a Christian (on 17 April)—and several times on the broader perennial problem—telling truths that omit the context

that give them the real—opposite—meaning. In my long experience many Christian nation mythologists—**Newt Gingrich**, **Nelson Price of Cobb County, GA**, and others have engaged in this apparently dishonest approach.

Quite often in my recent experience, **Richard G. Lee** has played this game. I’ve pointed it out in posts on the 9th of June regarding **Ben Franklin** supposedly introducing prayer at the Constitutional Convention; on the 16th of June (regarding **George Washington**’s prayer as **General Washington**; and again on the 28th of August about the leaders—especially **Elizabeth Cady Stanton**—of the woman’s suffrage movement.

The recent **Thomas Jefferson** quotation seems to be to be part of a fraudulent pattern—what would be expected from a charlatan rather than an honest historian or promoter of the truth. For more on **Jefferson**, see these letters of his—

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-40-02-0178-0001>

<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-32-02-0102>

<https://www.csun.edu/~hcfl1004/jefflet.html>

I am, of course, not a believer and thus don’t take seriously the alleged words of the “Ten Commandments of God.”

But it seems to me that a preacher would take the Ninth Commandment,

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. —Exodus 20:16

to mean that lying by omission is immoral.

You decide.



Keith Sharp




Kansas librarians get the boot after including rainbow image for the Autism Rights Movement in a book display

by Rob Boston • AU.org • Wall of Separation

Two librarians in Sterling, Kan., who were fired after they incorporated a rainbow image into a display are suing, asserting that the library board is hostile to diverse points of view.

The lawsuit was filed by the former librarians, **Kari Wheeler** and **Brandy Lancaster**, and two patrons, **Samantha Corwin** and **Audra Asher**, reported the *Topeka Capital-Journal*.

The display, erected in June, was intended to acknowledge and celebrate diversity. Among the items used was a multi-colored infinity symbol, which is often used to promote awareness of autism and neurodivergent individuals. (See an example [here](#): ) A temporary employee at the library assumed the display was connected to LGBTQ+ rights and went ballistic.

Anti-LGBTQ+ rant

The lawsuit asserts that the temporary employee, **Ruth Splitter**, complained about the display and issued an “anti-LGBT diatribe.” She continued to rant even after being told the symbol was connected to the autism/neurodiversity communities.

Splitter took her complaints to board member **Michelle Miller**, who ordered Wheeler, the library director, to remove the display, remarking, “I do not want any kind of rainbow display (aside from solely colors focused) especially in this month. We have a conservative town and as a library do not need to make political statements (see Target and Budlight [sic] as negative examples). I certainly do not want the library to promote LGBTQ agendas.” She later added, “I am totally fine with diversity of skin color display, just not represented with rainbow colors.”

Jessi Dobson, a city employee who attends the same church as Miller, also weighed in. She texted Miller about the display, saying, “This is not okay”

and insisting that seeing the rainbow logo made her sick.

Librarians are terminated

Wheeler removed the display, but the board met in July and voted to terminate her and Lancaster, the assistant librarian, saying they had lost confidence in the two.

The lawsuit asserts that the board has engaged in other examples of anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment, including a claim that Miller objected to purchasing an award-winning book for the collection because it contained a nonbinary character.

We’ve come to quite a pass when Christian Nationalists can charge that any use of a rainbow is evidence of the “LGBTQ agenda” (whatever that is) and use it as justification for firing someone. Even if the display had been meant to show support for LGBTQ+ members of the community, and to direct people to books that include LGBTQ+ themes or characters, that shouldn’t be a punishable offense.

Let this incident serve as a warning to the good people of Sterling. They might want to pay closer attention to their town’s library board. Some of the people on it apparently have intolerant views and fail to grasp the central mission of a public library: to serve everyone in the community.

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How Americans view religion is changing. The government needs to adapt to, not resist, this shift.

by Rob Boston • AU.org • Wall of Separation

In America these days, more houses of worship are closing than opening. **A 2019** study by Lifeway Research analyzed 34 Protestant denominations and found that while 3,000 new denominations opened that year, a larger number, 4,500, shut down.

“Even before the pandemic, the pace of opening new congregations was not even providing enough replacements for those that closed their doors,” said **Scott McConnell**, executive director of Lifeway Research.

A growing trend

This trend bothers some people, and not just religious conservatives who have long considered attendance at (preferably right-leaning) congregations as essential to America’s survival. **E.J. Dionne**, a progressive Catholic and *Washington Post* columnist, **expressed concerns recently**, arguing that as the social bonds provided by religion erode, growing numbers of people will become isolated. Other commentators have asserted that because houses of worship provide so many social services in America, if they continue to close, Americans will lose access to needed services.

Dionne identifies what he considers to be a problem, but he doesn’t offer a solution. And that’s where we start to wander into a potentially troubling area: If what houses of worship have to offer is so vital, some might argue, the taxpayer needs to start propping them up.

But that’s the wrong answer. If a growing number of Americans have decided, for whatever reason, to step away from organized religion, it’s not the job of the government to persuade them differently. If we are indeed facing a significant cultural shift in how Americans view houses of worship, the government needs to adapt to it, not resist it.

Examining other models

It’s time to start looking at other models. Scholar **Phil Zuckerman** has examined countries in Scandinavia that are largely secular but where people report high degrees of happiness. Denmark and Sweden, two nations Zuckerman has focused on, have low crime rates, egalitarian policies, excellent public schools and strong social programs – all while most of their

populations express indifference toward organized religion.

One of the reasons people in these nations may be so happy is that they feel secure. In the face of a serious life crisis – loss of a job, addiction, mental health issues, etc. – there’s likely to be a government-run program to help them. In America, people are often left to rely upon a tattered safety net of government services augmented by “faith-based” programs that may make them uncomfortable by engaging in heavy-handed forms of proselytism or discriminating against certain groups of people.

It’s not Americans United’s job to applaud or assail these current trends concerning attendance at houses of worship. After all, the whole purpose of the First Amendment was to give Americans a choice: to attend services or not as guided by conscience. If growing numbers of Americans have decided to walk away from organized religion, that is absolutely their right and none of the government’s business.

But it would be short-sighted not to recognize that if current trends continue, the day will come when houses of worship simply won’t have the bandwidth to act as the main provider of social services, let alone the glue that holds society together.

“Faith-based” initiatives were **problematic from the start** for lots of reasons. Americans’ shifting attitudes about church attendance will force us to confront their continued viability eventually. It would be best if we started now.

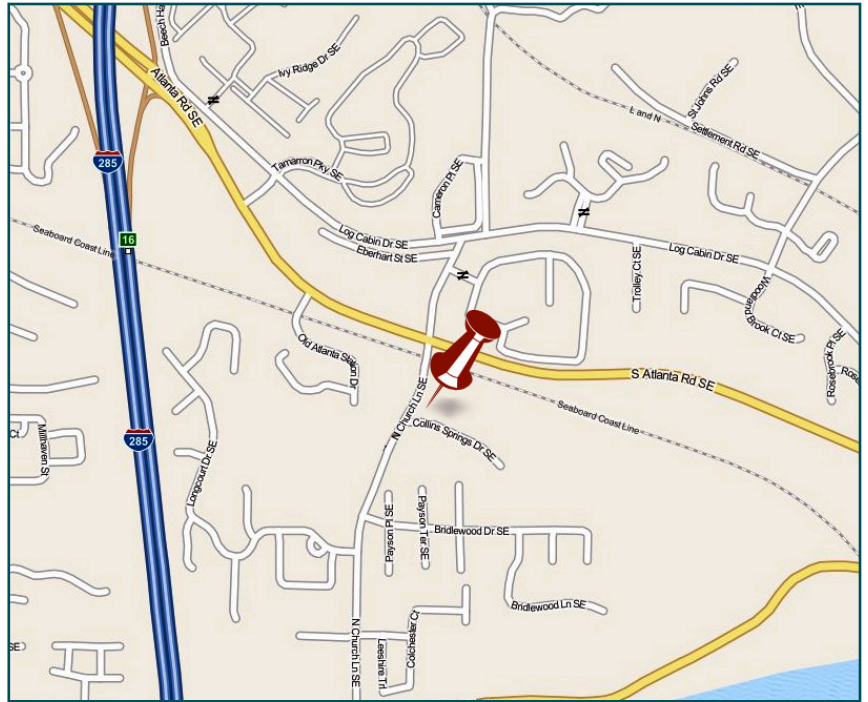


*Dare To Think
For Yourself!*



**AF Hall
4775 N. Church Lane SE
Atlanta, GA 30339**

**Keith Sharp
10/8/23 1:00 pm EST
(also via Zoom)**



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