

Dr. Jack L. Arnold
Biblical Giving

Lesson 4
GIVING IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

ALL THINGS IN COMMON Acts 2:44-45

All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need.

These early Christians loved each other so much they were willing to depart with their material goods to make sure the physical needs of a brother were taken care of. Undoubtedly after the Day of Pentecost, the Jewish religious establishment began to make it difficult for Christians, so that it became difficult to get a job and be a part of the Jewish society as a Christian. Apparently many of these converted Jews to Christ from all over the Roman Empire stayed in Jerusalem because this is where the excitement was at the time. They did not have enough money to live on. There was a need for a common fund. They established a pool and when one of the saints had a need, the Apostles distributed the monies appropriately to meet these basic needs.

These verses do not say that all the Christians in Jerusalem sold everything they had and put it into the common treasury. They sold just enough and gave it “***to anyone as he had need.***” They sold as the need arose. Certainly this verse does not teach that it is wrong for a Christian to own property or amass wealth. It only teaches that the early Christians did whatever was necessary to meet the needs of their brothers and sisters in Jerusalem.

This verse does not teach Christian communism or socialism, for this sacrificial giving was voluntary and not in any way forced upon the people. Furthermore, the distribution was not done equally for some Christians received more aid because they had a greater need. The Bible in many places teaches the right of owning private property, and nowhere does it teach that a person must abolish all his wealth to be a Christian. While these verses do not support any form of communism or socialism, it does teach the gospel did penetrate into the economic realm of believers so they were gladly willing to depart with possessions for the cause of Christ. The Bible does teach, however, the wise stewardship of the Christian’s wealth in the furtherance of the gospel. God expects His people to give liberally as He has prospered them, and promises them more prosperity (material and/or spiritually) if they will give liberally in obedience to His command.

MEETING GENUINE NEEDS Acts 4:32, 34-35

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. . . There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.

The early Christians met the genuine needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ. These verses show the concern Christians had for one another, and their willingness to sacrifice for another Christian when there was a true need – food, housing, clothing, job, etc. Again it says distribution was made “***to anyone as he had need.***”

These verses do not teach it is a Christian responsibility to take care of all the poor in the world. The Christians met the needs of their fellow believers and this made a big impact upon the unsaved world. Believers taking care of one another is consistent with Old Testament teaching, for the prophets were concerned about political and social action within Judah and Israel and not the world in general. Nowhere do we read of the Israelites establishing a poverty program for the Babylonians or Assyrians. In the New Testament, there is to be social concern first for believers in Christ, and then concern for the unsaved world.

We are not told that these Christians sold everything. In some cases, this might have happened, but more than likely, they sold a portion of their possessions, and the total sum would make up the common treasury to meet the needs of the saints in Jerusalem. The money was brought to the Apostles and they had the undisputed and absolute control over how the money would be distributed. One Christian did not give to another Christian directly but indirectly through the common fund, and only the Apostles had the wisdom as to how the money should be distributed.

The local church must always be ready to help a fellow Christian with a genuine financial need. If the church does not do this, it is a clear evidence that the life of Christ is not fully manifested in its midst. **If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him (1 John 3:17)? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, “Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,” but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it (James 2:15-16)?**

These early Christians had their values straight. Material possessions were secondary to them and the dominating force was the life of Christ flowing through them to others. They were unselfish when there was a genuine need. They had the attitude that all that they had was from God and nothing was exclusively theirs. Therefore, they did not hold on to earthly possessions but shared them for God and with others.

HELPING BROTHERS IN NEED Acts 11:29-30

The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

The Gentile churches, hearing of the plight of their Jewish brethren, sent a love gift to help meet the needs of the brethren in Jerusalem. It was a free will offering **“according to his ability.”**

There certainly is a biblical precedence for Christians that God is prospering to help those that are in need of financial help. Needs should be made known but no giving should be done by compulsion or out of guilt. It must always be voluntary.

Again we see the gift was brought to the elders, and the elders distributed the gift as they saw fit. It was not emotional distribution but planned distribution. The elders also distributed it because this way they could guarantee absolute ethics and honesty. Whenever a gift is received, it should be handled with the utmost of integrity.

TITHING IN THE BOOK OF ACTS

The concept of the tithe is not mentioned in Acts. However, that does not mean the early church did not practice tithing. Silence, in this case, is strong evidence that the early church never stopped tithing, but the emphasis was more on voluntary offerings.

Again, these early Christians were all Jews who were converted to Christ and they would have naturally tithed, but they took Christ's teachings to the maximum and gave sacrificial offerings over and above the tithe.

“In conclusion, when these Jews became Christians, they would have naturally transferred their economic loyalty from Judaism to Christianity. It is no wonder that we see such generous people among these Christians in Jerusalem. They were in the habit of giving regularly and systematically. It was a part of their religious training and commitment. Furthermore, when they understood the grace of God, it appears that they not only calculated tenths, but also on occasion generously gave the total profits from the sale of certain properties.

Though the tithe system is never mentioned in the New Testament, it certainly influenced these Jewish Christians. In turn, church history reveals that these Old Testament giving patterns influenced the Gentile community, as pagans also became Christians. Though the tithe laws were never perpetuated in Christianity as they were in the Old Testament, they have served as a model to Christians for regular and systematic giving.” (Dr. Gene Getz, A Biblical Theology of Material Possessions).