

## Acts 2:44-45

"And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and they sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need" (Acts 2:44-45).

The above verses tells of the unity of Jerusalem saints: of their love and devotion to God and to each other. There was a closeness and enthusiasm that often comes at the beginning of any new work and there was a peculiar uniqueness about this group of disciples: there was not another group like them anywhere else in the world!

The claims is sometimes made that the first Christians practiced "communism." Through the centuries there have been communities of people who have attempted to "restore" this "facet" of the Jerusalem Church. Sad experiences have arisen from such attempts: consider the debacles of the group in south America--all committed suicide, and the more recent "Waco" incident.

Several passages from Acts show that there was a common sharing together by these saints although it would be improper to call their practice "communism." Consider just a few passages which show their common concern. Acts 4:32--"And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own: but they had all things common." Acts 6:1-2, tells of the murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the "daily ministrations." Read also Acts 4:34-37; 5:1-5. Nevertheless, there is no requirement by the Holy Spirit that all must be as these Christians did: sharing all things in common. Consider these following reasons.

1. There is no evidence of the practice anywhere other than Jerusalem that the "disciples sold their possessions and had all things common." To the contrary, the evidence rules against such a practice. The brethren in all the congregations give every indication that they maintained their separate homes and resources. Consider Rome. The origin of the Roman church is shrouded in mystery: Roman Catholicism teaches that Peter founded the church but there is no real historical evidence for this. There were sojourners from Rome in Jerusalem on Pentecost and some of them MAY have been converted and carried the gospel back to Rome but that would be mere conjecture (Acts 2:10). Some at Rome evidenced the possession of spiritual gifts which indicates that they had been in contact

with some of the apostles; for Paul gave instructions concerning the use of these gifts (Rom. 12:6-8). Still, the Roman brethren were deficient in the gifts and Paul longed to visit them that he might impart gifts to them (Rom. 1:11). As one reads the sixteenth chapter of the Roman letter and see the many different individuals whom Paul salutes there, he find that no less than five times Paul greets various brethren who had their own, distinct household (Rom. 16:5, 10, 11, 14, 15).

What was true in Rome was true in other churches as a close reading of apostolic epistles reveals. All being sustained "from a common fund " was NOT practiced in any place other than Jerusalem, IF ONE AGREES it was practiced there. If such was required by the Holy Spirit, why did He not rebuke all of the various congregations who obviously were living in violation of such instruction?

2. In the various letters, instructions are given to wealthy brethren as to the proper use of their resources, but no where are the rich commanded that they must sell all their possessions and have all things in common with all other disciples. They were warned not to allow riches to make them high-minded, nor were they to allow themselves to be consumed with the uncertainty of riches. Rather, they were to be rich in good works, willing to share their possessions with others (1 Tim. 6:17-18). Christians were warned not to be lovers of money because it would bring many sorrows (1 Tim. 6:9-10). They were told not to show partiality between rich and poor (James 2:1f). Yet, they were never charged that they must dispose of all their property and all share from a common fund.

3. Evidence shows that even in Jerusalem there were no commands that brethren "sell their possession to have all things common." When Ananais and Sapharia sold their property and lied about what they had given, Peter said, "While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in thy power?" (Acts 5:40). Peter's questions show that personal ownership of property continued in Jerusalem and that brethren were not commanded to sell their possession and have "all things in common."

4. Further, even in Jerusalem some still maintained their personal dwellings, having servants, etc. When Peter was imprisoned by Herod, prayer was made by the church for him. Some brethren met at the house of Mary, John Mark's mother, and were praying. Peter came to her home to give instructions to pass on to James and knocked at her door. Rhoda was a servant girl and left him standing outside while she joyfully told the brethren he was there (Acts 12:1-17)!

Thus, while we are not required to practice "having all things in common" to serve God, the record of the unity and compassion of the Jerusalem church is remarkable. Their willingness to sell their possession and divide to those who were in need is praiseworthy. Their speedy selection of servants to wait tables for all, Greek or Hebrew, reflects Jesus' Word, "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (Jn. 13:35).

Jim McDonald