

They Had All Things In Common

By Frank Febus

Acts 4:32-5:1

32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but *they had all things common.*

33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,

35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, *and laid it at the apostles' feet.*

This scripture and those similar to it have inspired a number of Christian groups to follow this first century practice. A short list of Christian groups that live communally are: the Children of God, the Jesus People, the Farm, and the Twelve Tribes. They use scriptures that will be listed in this article for the authority to live a communal life. At first glance these scriptures are very compelling in their simplicity and directness. A closer inspection of the Word depicting the first generation of believers will clear the air on this controversial subject.

Our first reaction to these very persuasive scriptures is usually, “should I be following this way of life to be a complete “Christian?” In doing a little research for this article, I discovered that a few of these groups do feel that it is a matter of salvation for a believer to live this way. This places the practitioners of this doctrine in a very exclusive position, at least in their view.

Are we living selfish lives in not conforming to this pattern practiced by the first Apostolic Church? In order to answer this question properly we must first examine the greater pattern established in the rest of the bible.

Prov 13:4

4 The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but *the soul of the diligent shall be*

made fat

Prov 10:4-5

4 He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich.

5 He that gathereth in summer is a wise son: but he that sleepeth in harvest is a son that causeth shame.

These two scriptures reflect the biblical philosophy that God rewards the efforts of those who are diligent in whatever endeavor an individual participates in. On the other hand, there is a huge penalty for those who are lazy or put forth a paltry effort. There is not a whiff of evidence that the bible teaches or supports communal living.

The redistribution of food stuffs and care for the less fortunate was an important part of the Mosaic Law.

The burden of this redistribution to those who lived in poverty was squarely placed upon the shoulders of the general population of Israel.

It was so close to the heart of God that he tied it to the ceremonial law of tithing.

Deut 14:27-15:1

27 And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.

28 At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase the same year, and shalt lay it up within thy gates:

29 And the Levite, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) *and the stranger, and the fatherless, and the widow, which are within thy gates*, shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Deut 26:12-13

12 When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine increase the third year, which is the year of tithing, and hast given it unto the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled;

13 Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed

things out of mine house, and also have given them unto the Levite, *and unto the stranger, to the fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me*: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them:

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The Law of Moses was very clear on the treatment of widows, orphans, and strangers. The protection and wellbeing of these people was so important to the Lord that it was incorporated into the moral law that was given at

Mt. Sinai.

Ex 22:21-28

21 Thou shalt neither vex a stranger, nor oppress him: for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt.

22 Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.

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through the idea of looking down or browbeating]; to depress literally or figuratively

KJV -, deal hardly with, defile, exercise, force, gentleness

23 If thou afflict them in any wise, and they cry at all unto me, I will surely hear their cry;

24 And my wrath shall wax hot, and I will kill you with the sword; and your wives shall be widows, and your children fatherless.

25 If thou lend money to any of my people that is poor by thee, thou shalt not be to him as an usurer, neither shalt thou lay upon him usury.

26 If thou at all take thy neighbour's raiment to pledge, thou shalt deliver it unto him by that the sun goeth down:

27 For that is his covering only, it is his raiment for his skin: wherein shall he sleep? and it shall come to pass, *when he crieth unto me, that I will hear*; for I am gracious.

Deut 24:17-22

17 Thou shalt not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge:

18 But thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in Egypt, and the LORD thy God redeemed thee thence: therefore I command thee to do this thing.

19 *When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands.*

20 When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

21 When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow.

22 And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing

There was an obvious disparity between the have and have-nots in biblical history. Jesus referred to an eternal principle in Mark 14:7-8

7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. NIV

It is obvious that provision was made for the poor in New Testament times. We should keep in mind that the apostles taught out of the Torah and knew the importance of maintaining a provision for the poor.

James 1:27-2:1

27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

1 John 3:17

17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?

The total omission of compulsory tithe paying in the young church is curious to say the least. To view my article, [The Tithe Our Possession](#) go to our web site at www.fullfilledprophecy.net. It is listed under “articles.”

As I stated earlier, the ceremonial and moral law made a provision for the widows, orphans, and the stranger. The fulfillment of that principle in the Apostolic Church was not communal living arrangements. It was not practiced in any other region other than Jerusalem.

The haves and the have nots were still a reality of life throughout the writings of the apostles. Lydia was a seller of purple. Purple was a special dye extracted from certain species of shell fish that was used exclusively for the clothing of the very wealthy. She was obviously very well off. Evidence of wealthy believers are chronicled in 1 Tim 6:17-19

17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life

If the church at Ephesus (where Timothy was an elder) practiced communal living; Paul would not have asked them individually to give to an offering for those in need. The leadership would have provided the funds upon his request..

Resources were running out at Jerusalem and Paul had determined that an offering be sought from the churches. The wording of the following scripture clearly states the fact that the saints varied in their ability to contribute to the welfare of their brethren at Jerusalem. That does not reflect an equality of economic means touted by communal Christians.

Acts 11:29

29 Then the disciples, **every man according to his ability**, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea:

2 Cor 9:5-7

5 So I thought it necessary to urge the brothers to visit you in advance and finish the arrangements for the generous gift you had promised. Then it will be ready as a generous gift, not as one grudgingly given.

6 Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. 7 ***Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give***, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

More evidence the economic model the Jerusalem brethren practiced was not utilized in the other churches is found in:

1 Cor 16:1-3

16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

2 Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, ***as God hath prospered him***, that there be no gatherings when I come.

3 And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

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Again we see evidence that finances were **unevenly distributed**, not uniformly shared.

The land, the inheritance and their possession.

It is evident that the church at Jerusalem was breaking with biblical tradition when they liquidated their personal real estate and laid the proceeds at the Apostles feet. According to the Law of Moses the land could be sold only for a period of time, ending at the next Jubilee. A person could never be disenfranchised of his inheritance permanently. Every fifty years the land that was sold had to be restored to the family of ownership.

The Apostolic Church clearly understood the law governing land and inheritance. They also knew that the Lord warned them of the coming wrath upon Jerusalem. They preached the soon coming of the Lord and prepared themselves for that great event by pooling their assets. The great exodus out of Jerusalem was greatly anticipated by the Apostolic Church.

Luke 21:20-22

20 And when ye shall see Jerusalem compassed with armies, then know that the desolation thereof is nigh.

21 Then let them which are in Judaea flee to the mountains; and let them which are in the midst of it depart out; and let not them that are in the countries enter thereinto.

22 For these be the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled.

KJV

The liquidation of these personal assets has been copied without true understanding of the whole picture. One can only imagine the personal devastation realized when a person wakes up one day to discover the folly of following such notions.

Law concerning the restoration of land inheritance.

Lev 25:23-28

23 The land shall not be sold for ever: for the land is mine; for ye are strangers and sojourners with me.

24 And in all the land of your possession ye shall grant a redemption for the land.

25 If thy brother be waxen poor, and hath sold away some of his possession, and if any of his kin come to redeem it, then shall he redeem that which his brother sold.

26 And if the man have none to redeem it, and himself be able to redeem it;

27 Then let him count the years of the sale thereof, and restore the overplus unto the man to whom he sold it; that he may return unto his possession.

28 But if he be not able to restore it to him, then that which is sold shall remain in the hand of him that hath bought it until the year of jubilee: and in the jubilee it shall go out, and he shall return unto his possession.

The Pentateuch distinguishes clearly between real and personal property, the fundamental idea regarding the former being the thought that the land is God's, given by Him to His children, the people of Israel, and hence, cannot be alienated (Lev 25:23,28). In order that there might not be any respecter of persons in the division, the lot was to determine the specific piece to be owned by each family head (Num 26:52-56; 33:54). In case, through necessity of circumstances, a homestead was sold, the title could pass only temporarily; for in the year of Jubilee every homestead must again return to the original owner or heir

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The Apostolic church fully understood that their inheritance was not tied to Middle

Eastern real estate.

Heb 11:15-16

15 And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.

16 But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: **for he hath prepared for them a city.**

10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God

Rev 21:1-3

21:1 And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.

2 And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

3 And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

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The Apostolic church inherited the new earth, a cherished inheritance, an eternal possession, the body of Christ.