

**"Acts of the Apostles: Lesson 10" by
Faber McMullen, Union Grove Baptist
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"Sharing All things in Common"



Last week, in the wake of the lame man being healed, the officials hauled Peter before them and they demanded to know by whom and by who's authority the lame man had been healed. We examined together the fact that there is POWER.... Holy Ghost Power in the name of Jesus. This same group of accusers had been the

very people (the High Priest and his cronies) who had beaten Jesus on the night that He was betrayed, and they had watched the disciples scatter like scared sheep. They had even seen Peter deny that he knew Jesus three times. Now they saw these same men, filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking with all authority and power. Let me begin by reading where we left off last week.

The Believers Pray

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. "Sovereign Lord," they said, "you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: (He quotes David about the nations raging against Jesus)

²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus." ³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. (Acts 4:23-31, NIV).

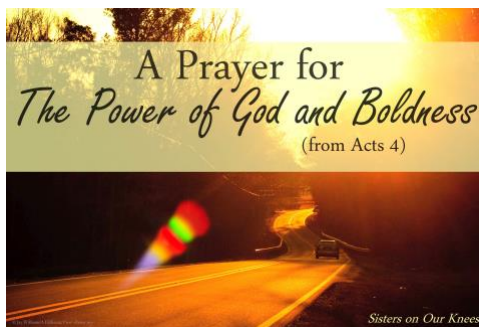
There response to the persecution was prayer. They all met and they prayed because the pressure was on. The text tells us that the "place where they were meeting was shaken. And, they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly." We then read an account of radical action that followed this new found boldness. We often read this passage concerning how the earliest Christians handled their possessions and we can rightfully wonder if this speaks to our actions today. What exactly were they doing, and how were they doing it? Is this a call to us to sell all that we have and to give up any ownership in private property? Is this a biblical call to end private property rights? What

exactly is this calling us to do? Please stand together with me as we read the focal passage for the day.

The Believers Share Their Possessions

³² All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. ³³ With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all ³⁴ that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales ³⁵ and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need. ³⁶ Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means "son of encouragement"), ³⁷ sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet. (Acts 4:32-37, NIV). Please be seated.

This passage tells us that we should act radically different from the world when we have had an encounter with Jesus. When we have a true encounter with Jesus, the needs within the Body of Christ should be foremost in our minds. As the old hymn says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." Things pale in comparison to the matchless grace of Jesus.



In the first scriptures we read a minute ago (Acts 4:23-31), when Peter and John went back to the people, they prayed: (1) giving glory to God as the maker of all of creation, (2) declaring that God had spoken to them through the Holy Spirit by David, (3) they prayed for power to speak His word with boldness, (4) they prayed that He would perform signs and wonders by them through the name of Jesus, and lastly (5) after prayer, they were all empowered by the Holy

Spirit and spoke the Word of God boldly. They were focused on God and the things of God.

In this setting of intensity of service to the Lord, those verses concerning the sharing of possessions happened. Their possessions no longer meant so much to them in light of what God was doing among them. What God was doing became more important than their individual stuff. This was an ongoing act of support for this Christian community which was undergoing severe persecution by the authorities. Their struggle was for survival. The text does not tell us that every person gave up all of his or her possessions. Rather, their gifts were freewill offerings. Each of us is called to look beyond ourselves to the needs of others.

We see this spirit of giving in our own body presently. Mary Carol helped Emily to come to Jesus, and now we see her helping Tiffany with a skin irritation in order to bring her comfort. We see Cassandra helping Rick with a sick horse, Donnie helping Cassandra

build a gate, Cassandra and Tim helping Mia move, Kathy bringing Miss Drunell to church and taking meals to the elderly, and many more instances of Christian charity that I will not take time to mention. We also see people in our church who give anonymous monetary gifts for specific needs of people in this body, etc... (The list goes on and on—you can think of more.) We have even seen those who have been helped financially come back when they are on their feet, desirous to start a benevolence fund in our fellowship. People who are not even members of our Church have given significant gifts for the ongoing ministry here at Union Grove (access to the neighbor's land next door, new chairs, driveway, storage shed, etc.)

It is important to note that this scripture does not tell us that in those earliest days of the church people were idle, living off of the possessions of the more wealthy. Rather, it means that sometimes difficult situations arise, and when they do, we can bring glory to God by being the feet and hands of Jesus by the giving of our time, talents, and treasure to others. It is a call from selfishness to selflessness. They were in it together.

The Holy Spirit united the early Church. They shared everything they had (nothing was withheld from God's use). If we are honest, even now we realize that what we think we own is not 'ours,' but belongs to God and is only loaned to us. We must listen carefully to hear how God would have us use the resources He has given to each of us. Because of that giving attitude, the apostles were able to concentrate on sharing the Gospel to the very ones who witnessed and participated in His crucifixion. This intensity of ministry was needful, because within 40 years Jerusalem would be destroyed by the Romans and the Church would be dispersed out of Jerusalem to the four corners of the earth.

I want to speak briefly on some confusion that might arise from this passage.



1 This scripture account is NOT a call to communism or socialism in a governmental setting. This account transcends political parties and ideologies. This is a call to the heart of individual believers. Political systems that have tried to impose these ideals on their citizenry do not have a good historical outcomes. Karl Marx, an avowed atheist who was the author of communism, borrowed Christian ideology for his own purposes. He said, "From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs." Neither this passage nor other scriptures authorize or instruct governmental systems to enforce collectivism which places societal dignity and value over the value and dignity of the individual. State or government-imposed suspension of private property rights and a requirement for equal distribution of resources has always resulted in repression, control, and ultimately death (Stalin, Mao, Pol Pot, etc.) The text calls for individual sentiments led by the Holy Spirit to minister to the physical needs of others in the Body of Christ. When God is in something, the dignity of the individual is preserved and venerated.

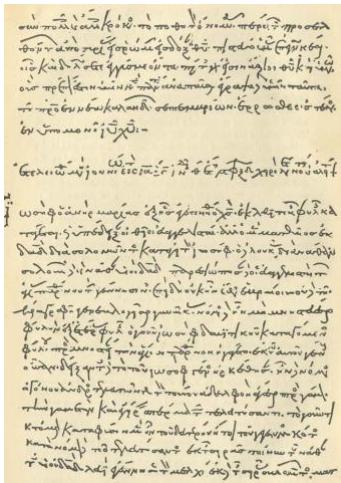


2 This passage is NOT a call to communism, or even communalism in a private setting or in a faith setting (i.e. a church). Christians have tried for centuries to live in community and share all goods in common. That can be a very good thing. This has worked to some degree for limited amounts of time in such expressions as primitive monastic communities, American Shakers, communities of nuns and priests, and even today in such Anabaptist communities as the Hutterites, certain Amish groups, etc. I have been fascinated by these communities and I have spent considerable time not only interviewing some of them, but watching Youtube documentaries on them, and other things. Without exception (as well intentioned as they are) with time they always have an element of division, jealousy, envy, and dysfunction within them. This is because they are started and maintained by fallen sinners of which we all are. Humans are imperfect so what we try to accomplish is imperfect. God calls us to unity, not to uniformity.



3 This passage is NOT even a call to financial equality among Christians. Scripture does not support in any way that everyone in the church should have the same amount of wealth. Jesus even tells us we will always have the poor among us. It does tell us that we should be really careful in how much "stuff" we allow to take over our lives. Jesus told Nicodemus who was a wealthy educated man that he

needed to be "born again." He did not tell Nicodemus to give away his "stuff" and more importantly he didn't tell him to give his "stuff" to the disciples. This definitely does not call for Christians who have accumulated possessions to support others in a wasteful or non-productive lifestyle. Charity within the Body of Christ can sometimes be difficult to figure out exactly.



One of the earliest Christian writings we have is called the "Didache." It was discovered in 1873 and was an instruction manual for new Christian converts. It is dated at late first century or early second century. It is not scripture, but interestingly, it bears witness of some of the earliest practices of the church. I quote:

- “Let your gift to charity sweat in your hands until you know to whom to give it” (1.6).
- “Do not be one who reaches out your hands to receive but draws them back from giving” (4.5).
- “Do not shun a person in need, but share all things with your brother, and do not say that anything is your own” (4.8).

It is saying yes have a selfless heart, but be careful unto whom you give charity. You are responsible to God for the charity you give. Hold the money tightly until you know that you know you're supposed to be giving it. Also, be careful not to be a person on the look for a handout. Such an attitude will keep even you from giving, and God requires us all to give. You might be poor or in need, but that sort of heart attitude will make you a

selfish person. You see, we forget that there are selfish people. Some are rich and some are poor. Remember, the Didache is not scripture, but it is early commentary.

4 This passage IS saying that we are to be very aware of each other's needs and we are to be very willing to help meet the needs of others in our community of faith. This should be done as the Holy Sprit instructs us in our hearts. I think this is definitely saying that none of us should allow another in this body to ever go hungry. Likewise we should do our best to help others have a roof over their heads. We are to have a relationship with our possessions that is radically different from the world.

Let me now make this personal to myself and give you an illustration. This does not mean that I should not have a large swimming pool or that I should sell a portion of the land which I administer to make sure everyone in the church has a swimming pool the size of my swimming pool. It means that I should realize my swimming pool which has been entrusted to me belongs to the Lord as do all of my possessions. Sandy and I should be ready and willing to use it for His Glory and we do. You should have that same spirit in you.



STEWARDSHIP
Time ♦ Talent ♦ Treasure

This does mean that there is no reason that anyone among us should be without food. It is showing us a heart attitude that ALL of us (both rich and poor) should have with regards to how we act as stewards of the material possessions that God has put in each of our lives. Whatever time, talent, and treasure you

have is God's gift to you. How you use it is your gift to God.



Church, this is not a call to "equality of stuff we own," rather it is a call to selflessness in our attitudes and our living with one another. It is not a call to us to enable each other to act crazy or live foolishly or to contribute money down a rat hole. It is not a call to each of us to give what we have to someone in our group who just wants some of our "good stuff." It is a call to realize that all of our time, talent, and treasure belongs to God and it is a call to live our lives as though we believe that.

This morning let us be so filled with the Holy Spirit that we each will no longer see our possessions as our own, but rather as belonging to God. Let us each be open to the Holy Spirit setting us on fire to be willing to let God move our selfish hearts to help others in our body when we are called to do so. Let us pray.

Union Grove is one of the oldest Baptist communities of faith in the State of Texas dating back to 1844. Pastor Faber McMullen may be reached by email at uniongrove362@gmail.com or by snail mail at: 15301 FM 362, Navasota, Texas 77868.

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