

## Sharing Not Socialism—Acts 2:44-45—4/7/2024

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Today we resume our studies in Luke's foundational NT history in the book of Acts & so let's read Acts 2:37-47 to begin. [READ]

We resume our study & yet I'm skipping verse 43 to come back to it next week after today's message is more topical.

Next week, we'll cover Acts 2:43-47 in expositional sequence.

1<sup>st</sup> we need to grasp what Acts 2:44-45 do & do not describe—as today's title says—it describes sharing & NOT socialism.

We must be clear on that because these verses are misused as support for some utopian form of communism or socialism.

But that is opposite of the meaning of the text.

Since many in our country promote the errors of socialism & excuse it as a caring path to equity or justice, we must beware.

We must be warned of misuse of biblical texts to manipulate or guilt trip people into following the lies of socialism.

I want you to be able to refute such lies & errors & especially any that claim biblical support for socialism.

By understanding this week what verses 44-45 do & do not depict, we will be ready to cover all of verses 43-47 next week.

When I say that Acts 2:44-45 depict sharing, not socialism, I mean they describe individual Christians *freely choosing* to be sacrificially generous to meet *real needs* of fellow Christians.

A lot is packed into what I just said—hear it again—Acts 2:44-45 describe individual Christians *freely choosing* to be sacrificially generous to meet *real needs* of fellow Christians.

In other words, this is not a system for wealth redistribution to force some supposed *equity* of *outcomes* for the population.

This is not taxation or regulation of money & property & possessions for rulers to decide what is best for everyone.

Those would be examples of socialism, which is government power over money & property to control the economy & redistribute wealth.

In socialism, the administration & production of goods & services are governed not by private businesses or citizens, but by a ruling group that makes decisions for everyone.

If that sounds like the loss of freedom, it is.

So kids, socialism is bad—it's taking away your freedom & the money you earn or stuff you have to give it to others.

Communism is a total form of socialism where individuals own NO private property & the government controls the economy.

Socialism appeals to concern for the poor & contempt for the rich as it claims to shrink the gap between the rich & poor.

And socialism appeals to greed & covetousness in those with lower incomes with claims that everyone can have equal incomes.

So it's often packaged with claims of equity & justice.

But listen—equity in **results** is not a right goal because some people work harder than others & deserve better results.

So socialism is wrong because it undermines & contradicts the biblical principles of hard work & sowing & reaping.

It is right to have equal treatment under the law & to provide freedom for equal opportunity, but that is not the same as equal outcomes.

Yet the cries for equal outcomes in our time are the lies of socialism cloaking greed & covetousness & often also hiding laziness.

And those are not truly biblical ideas of justice.

Justice is not forcing results or outcomes to be equal.

Such claims of justice—or social justice—are often unjust because they sinfully steal from some to give to others.

Such partiality or special treatment is wrong for the poor or the rich.

As Leviticus 19:15 warned Israel, “*You shall do no injustice in judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor nor defer to the great, but you are to judge your neighbor fairly.*”

So it is not ok to steal from one person to give to another & that is surely not what was modeled in the early church in Acts.

The statutory & case laws for OT Israel & the Proverbs could further inform economic policies to promote good & punish evil in the limited role Romans 13 says government has.

But what’s obvious is that the stealing & coveting the feeds socialism breaks the 8<sup>th</sup> & 10<sup>th</sup> commandments in Exodus 20 & other Scriptures.

So the economic & government alternative is capitalism where private property laws like those in Exodus 22 make sense.

And since God’s laws for Israel & Proverbs advise some governance of economies, I’m also not promoting a totally unregulated capitalism.

But my goal today is not to offer an all-encompassing biblical doctrine of economics & so I’ll let that introduction suffice.

In addition to seeing what Acts 2:44-45 does not model, I want you to see the wisdom & desirability of what it does model.

What is modeled is sacrificial generosity with fellow Christians in **voluntary giving** to meet the **basic needs** of others.

So to encourage biblical giving & warn against unbiblical governance, I’m going to outline **5 lessons inherent in Acts 2:44-45** that we’ll also support from the rest of Scripture.

The 1<sup>st</sup> of those we see in verse 44 so read that again. [READ]

Point #1 is that **practical faith** is part of sharing, not socialism.

The giving to meet needs that happened here was by **believers**.

Verse 44 refer to **all those who had believed**—that’s this 1<sup>st</sup> point that **practical faith is part of sharing, not socialism.**

Their faith in Jesus joined them to other believers devoted to the Apostles’ teaching & fellowship & communion & prayer.

We unpacked those mutual commitments from verse 42 after the Holy Spirit had granted them new life that united them with each other.

They loved like 1<sup>st</sup> John 3:16-18 says, “*We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world’s goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.*”

That’s **practical faith** that is shown in the way love is shown.

These believers had trusted Jesus’ work to reconcile them to God to make them brothers & sisters in God’s family.

God’s grace had made them gracious to one another as they lived out the faith James later described as proven by works.

James 2:15-16 says, “*If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,” and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?”*”

James was calling for the practical faith seen in the sharing in Acts 2.

Verse 44 says they were being into the same, unified together.

As Ephesians 4:4-6 says, “*one body & one Spirit, ... called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God & Father of all who is over all & through all & in all.*”

They were like-minded & loved to be together as they shared life & viewed everything as belonging to God in Christ.

In that sense, they had all things in common.

That does not mean they sold everything & had some socialistic corporate ownership of all things & no longer made their own choices.

No. They still owned their own property & possessions.

They did not sign all rights of ownership over to the church or to the Apostles & they especially did not give it to the government.

Nor was it forcefully taken from them or coerced or pressured.

As 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 5 explains, families were still responsible to provide for their own, especially widows who had no means to provide.

A man who failed to do so was worse than an unbeliever.

And in addition to providing for their own families, their practical faith moved them to give sacrificially to meet the needs of others.

We see that next in verse 45—read that again. [READ]

Lesson #2—Private ownership is part of sharing not socialism.

#1, practical faith is part of sharing, not socialism.

And lesson #2, private ownership is part of sharing, not socialism.

As I said before, socialism is government control of production & distribution, of making stuff & selling & buying.

Socialism—especially in its extreme form of communism—does not allow for or encourage private ownership.

But clearly here in verse 45 & in other passages after this in Acts, these believers owned property & possessions.

That’s what is meant by ‘private ownership’—it means you own your stuff—you own your tools & land & home & vehicles & animals & whatever other assets were common in that day or in our time.

Throughout Scripture, even when Joshua allotted the land in a theocratic government, each family had their own portion.

And giving & sharing with others was always from **private ownership** & individual freedom, not from force or coercion or public ownership.

That kind of economic system promotes the gracious choices of **generosity** like we see in the early church in Acts.

They understood, as Psalm 24 says, that God owns everything & God alone gives the power to make wealth as Deuteronomy 8:18 says.

They knew the Proverbs promote work & generosity & condemn complaining & lazy living & they knew as Jesus said in Luke 10:7, “*the laborer is worthy of his wages.*”

As Ecclesiastes 5:19 says, “*as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God.*”

So private ownership of riches & wealth gained by labor is a gift from God, a reward to rejoice in with thankfulness to God.

And listen—private ownership is **also** the path to generosity.

Think of it—if believers in Acts 2 did not have property & possessions, they could not have sold them in order to give.

Those 3 words in verse 45—***their property & possessions***—show how private ownership in this text does not promote or model socialism.

Private ownership continued in chapter 4-6 as believers sold property & possessions only as necessary to meet basic needs.

So having all things in common did not mean they stopped owning stuff & surrendered all to the church or the Apostles.

This was not some religious form of socialism & it is certainly not a reason to think socialism is a good form of government.

Even in Acts 5 when Ananias & Sapphira sold a piece of property & lied about its price in what they gave, the issue was that they lied, not that they didn't give the full price.

Acts 5:4 says Peter even told Ananias, "*While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not under your control? Why is it that you have conceived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.*"

Do you hear the language of private ownership there?

It remained his own before it was sold & it was under his control even after it was sold.

So his giving was not forced or coerced or required & it was not under the control of Peter or the church or the Apostles.

So be clear that it's not wrong to have property & possessions & it's not wrong to work to earn money to manage wisely.

Kids, listen—it's good to work to earn money & have stuff to share & that's why God gives abilities to provide for ourselves & others.

You older saints can share such lessons with younger people.

Money is not evil in itself—it's not sinful to be wealthy.

That's one of the lies of socialism—that being rich is bad.

But let's get this straight—1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:10 does say that the LOVE of money is the root of all sorts of evil.

It's not money itself that is evil, but the love of it, the craving for more so that you are not content.

The context in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4:8-10 says, "*If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.*"

Get what Paul was warning about—the love of money, the desire to get rich, & the discontentment with food & covering.

And that defines our needs—see that?—we need food & covering, meaning food to sustain us & clothing & shelter to protect us.

With those we should be content.

Anything beyond that is luxury that we should not be discontent about not having, that we should not covet or crave to get rich & have.

We should not love money in a way that we always want more & are never content with what we have.

And all of that is in the heart, isn't it?

So money & property & possessions in themselves are not evil.

Loving them & living for them & wanting more & more is evil.

But the flip side of having money & property & possessions is that having them is what enables you to **GIVE**.

Working to earn & own is good when it is done to glorify God & be faithful & provide for your family & give to the Lord.

So note that as point #3, planned stewardship is part of sharing.

Point #3, planned stewardship is part of sharing not socialism.

**Practical faith, private ownership & planned stewardship** are what enable sharing to meet the needs of others.

That's what's implied in verse 45 as they ***began selling their stuff***—they managed it & sold things as needed to help others.

This was not communal single church ownership of all things.

Instead, it was each member continuing to work & manage what was theirs knowing that God owns it all & it was a privilege & joy to give.

So it was planned stewardship, meaning faithful management by each household to be freely able to give as needs arose.

And you know that's the opposite of stealing, right?

In the context of putting off sin & putting on right practices, Ephesians 4:28 contrasts stealing with working & giving.

Ephesians 4:28: *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.*

That's what was happening in Acts to produce sharing—it was voluntary, free-will giving, to care for others.

It was not taxation or seizure of property for the common good.

They **chose** to sell property—as Peter told Ananias in Acts 5—it was his choice to sell & the money was under his control.

I trust you are beginning to see how practical faith, private ownership & planned stewardship are vital to **fuel sharing**.

And I trust you are seeing what biblical generosity looks like.

I trust you are learning how it is more blessed or happy to give than to receive as Jesus is quoted in Acts 20:35 as having said.

If you are, then you will want to give more—and as you give more, you will realize that God is gracious to provide more.

If that sounds crazy, turn to 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 9:6-12 to read about sowing bountifully & being richly supplied. [READ]

Verse 12 says all this supplying & all sufficiency in everything & abundance are about fully supplying the needs of the saints.

In other words, you cannot outgive give—He will supply.

Such lavish promises of God's provision support bountiful sowing & cheerful giving & purposeful choices to give.

Jesus gave a similar promise in Luke 6:48 when He said: *“Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.”*

That's what Proverbs 11:25 says: *“The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered.”*

If we know this, why would we ever want to sow sparingly?

If we know this, why would we give grudgingly or under compulsion?

We should embrace the joy of stewardship as in the parable of the talents in Matthew 25 as we trust God for His reward.

And as we turn back to Acts 2, realize that what Paul described in 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8-9 is what was happening in Acts 2.

You cannot force that—you cannot manipulate or systematize it or institutionalize it or make it a government regulation.

You cannot do so because NT giving is from a heart of love & joy in the Gospel & generosity like God has been gracious with us.

We see that as a regular pattern in the imperfect tense of the verbs in Acts 2:44-45, which means it was ongoing as a periodic practice when such needs arose.

It was not that everyone sold everything immediately or that everyone sold something every day, but that they were ready & willing to do so.

As needs arose, these believers responded from their personal wealth & earnings as they continued to work to provide.

Acts 4:34-35 illustrates how this continued as *“there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles’ feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.”*

As the shepherds of the church, the Apostles knew the needs & guided the giving to meet needs.

Such periodic giving is freed up & fueled by planned stewardship that is ready to give when needs arise & that leads to a 4<sup>th</sup> lesson.

1<sup>st</sup>, practical faith, 2<sup>nd</sup>, private ownership, & 3<sup>rd</sup>, planned stewardship prepare the way, 4<sup>thly</sup>, **for purposeful generosity.**

Lesson #4 is that purposeful generosity is part of sharing not socialism.

#4, purposeful generosity is part of sharing, not socialism.

Think of it—when did these periodic opportunities to give arise?

When there was need—that’s when—when a fellow Christian had a real & verifiable need.

So this was not taxation or forced giving for no reason.

Rather, the sacrificial selling of property & possessions had purpose to specifically share with needs in the church.

The reference to all & anyone in verse 45 are in the church, the believers who were together & had all in common in verse 44.

So this was not poverty alleviation for the masses by government taxation or by the church as an outreach.

This was within the body of Christ.

This was also not giving to those who needed to learn to work & not be idle as Paul later confronted in 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians.

These were needs—food & shelter, daily provision & structure.

So this giving was not to make everyone have the same amount of stuff in some kind of socialist redistribution of wealth.

This was not seeking some supposed equity of outcomes or incomes.

The idea is that out of labor to provide flows spiritual ministry of voluntarily & sacrificially sharing to meet real needs.

And if you have needs, then it's your responsibility to ask for help.

Otherwise, how did the believers in Acts 2 know of needs?

Those who had need must have been working to provide & reached a place where they knew they needed help.

That's a vulnerable place & it requires humility to admit any failures & receive counsel as you ask for help.

But in the relationships of the church, help can be sought & given & everyone can be blessed in being a part of that.

In that way, you might note a 5<sup>th</sup> lesson for today—#5, note that personal responsibility is part of sharing not socialism.

Under socialism, you don't feel the weight of your own choices because someone else is deciding what you need & get.

So it steals motivation & kills drive & undermines hard work & disincentivizes personal responsibility.

But that's not what was happening in Acts 2—each was responsible.

So listen—if you are a church member who has real needs, you should make those known to your church family.

You should work as hard as you can to provide & then if you have needs for food & covering, you must make those known.

You need to tell people & ask for prayer & counsel & help.

For the church to be a caring, generous community, those who have needs must ask for help.

And I don't mean the church is a handout station for anyone who comes by with no accountability or follow up.

What's described here is first & foremost care for the church body & then any outreach would be above & beyond that.

So if you are a member of this church & have needs, please don't steal someone else's joyful opportunity to give.

Don't be so self-sufficient to rob God of a chance for glory by showing that HE is all sufficient as He provides for you.

And remember that when your needs are met, what you do with the extra will either free you or restrict you from giving more.

And as Jesus said in Matthew 6:20, we want to “*store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal.*”

That's the eternal investment strategy that never fails.

So if you waste resources, you may miss out on eternal investments & pleasures of relationships where you can worship God by giving.

In Luke 12, Jesus illustrated the foolishness of living to accumulate wealth in this life & give none of it away.

1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 6:17-19 says to, “*Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.*”

Listen—I don't know what you give but I do know I've seen needs met when they are presented & I thank God for you.

I thank God for how many of you give to God's work in this church and in missions and to individual needs and much more.

I want that to continue to shine abundantly through us as well.

The giving community of verses 44-45 was made aware of the needs of the church & we want to keep you aware on ongoing needs.

Viewing everything as belonging to God protects us from wasting time and money on things with no eternal value.

When we really treasure God and His Gospel and His promises and His people, we will be eager to give however we can.

So I encourage you in that.

As you live out (1) practical faith, (2) private ownership, (3) planned stewardship, (4) purposeful generosity, & (5) personal responsibility, I pray that you are grateful for the joy of giving as God designed.

2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 8:9 gives the spiritual motivation for giving when it says, *“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.”*

That’s in the context of lavish examples of giving encouraging the joyful pursuit of sacrificial giving that God supplies.

It shows us that, as with every other area of life, **the Gospel** is the motivation for this area of giving as well.

So it’s fitting to close by remembering how Jesus gave Himself for us.

If you do not know Him, don’t try to buy your way to God—turn from your sin & trust Christ to bring you to God.

Jesus is God the Son who became a man to live perfectly & die sacrificially & rise victoriously & He alone can reconcile us to God.

When we trust Jesus, He counts His life as our righteousness to reach God & He counts our sins as paid for in His death.

He gives that freely to all who turn from sin to faith in Him.

We’d love to lead you to Him as the greatest Giver of all so please ask someone to help you after the service.

For now, seek Him & watch this ceremony.

And if you do know Jesus, let’s remember all He gave for us.

We take the bread & cup to honor His body & blood given for us.

What a gracious Savior!

Let’s all take a minute quietly to seek Him & thank Him & then I’ll lead us in prayer as we approach the Lord’s Table.