Is Communism Biblical?
Scripture: Acts 2
Code: BQ101311

“And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together” (Acts 2:44–46)

In these early days, before strife and divisions affected the church, **all those who had believed were together.** They possessed not only a spiritual unity but also a practical oneness. That they **had all things in common** does not, as some imagine, indicate communal living. The first Christian fellowship was not a commune, nor does the passage offer support for such a notion. The family, not the commune, is the basic social unit in God’s design.

Such sharing and mutual meeting of the needs of pilgrims was a longstanding tradition in Israel during the great religious feasts. The inns could not accommodate the vast influx of people to Jerusalem during those feast times. As a result, the common people opened their homes and shared their resources with the visitors. Many members of the early church were such pilgrims, saved while visiting Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost. They now stayed to be a part of the new work of God. It was only basic Christian love for those who lived in the city to share with them. Additionally, some in the fellowship had no doubt lost their livelihoods due to their profession of faith in Christ. The rest of the fellowship met their needs. And others were just the poor believers who always needed help.

That this was not a primitive form of communism is evident from the imperfect tense (Denoting continuous past action) of the verbs translated **selling and sharing** (cf. 4:34). They did not at any point sell everything and pool the proceeds into a common pot. Such a principle for Christian living would have obviated the responsibility of each believer to give in response to the Spirit’s prompting (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–2). Further, it is clear from verse 46 that individuals still owned homes. What actually happened was that personal property was sold **as anyone might have need.** It was an indication of immense generosity, as people gave not only their present cash or goods, but also their future in acts of sacrificial love to those in need. And it is clear from Peter’s words to Ananias in Acts 5:4 that such selling was purely voluntary. Ananias and Sapphira sinned not by refusing to part with their possessions but by lying to the Holy Spirit. Finally, in no other church described in Acts was this pattern of selling property repeated. Second Corinthians 8:13–14 describes a similar kind of generosity to the Jerusalem poor.

Sharing was not limited to material things but included spiritual benefits and ministry as well. **Day by day** they continued **with one mind** to meet in **the temple.** They went to the Temple for the hours of prayer (cf. 3:1), and, no doubt, to witness. They had every right to continue to use the Temple, since Jesus had claimed it as His Father's house. They are still found going to the Temple in Acts 21:26 and probably continued until it was destroyed in a.d. 70. Nor had the hostility of the Jewish leaders reached the point where the believers were put out of the Temple. The phrase **with one mind** again expresses the unity the first fellowship experienced.

Their times of fellowship were not limited to the Temple, however. They also **were breaking bread from house to house,** and **taking their meals together. Breaking bread** refers to the Communion service, the **taking** of **meals together** to the love feast that accompanied the Lord's Supper. They modeled the principles laid down by Peter, "Be hospitable to one another without complaint" (1 Peter 4:9), and Paul, "At this present time your abundance being a supply for their want, that their abundance also may become a supply for your want, that there may be equality; as it is written, 'He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little had no lack'" (2 Cor. 8:14–15). The apostle John extends this command to all believers:

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 beholds 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. (1 John 3:16–18).

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2013 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).