

ACTS: ALIGNING WITH GOD'S SOVEREIGN WORK OF DISCIPLING

X. The Godly Versus Socialistic Use Of Material Resources

(Acts 4:32-37)

I. Introduction

- A. The book of Acts explains "the orderly and sovereignly directed progress of the kingdom message from Jews to Gentiles, and from Jerusalem to Rome," Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament, p. 351.
- B. Accordingly, we can learn much about aligning our ministry efforts with God's sovereign work from studying the Early Church era as it is presented in the book of Acts.
- C. Acts 4:32-37 is often believed to reflect the ideology and practice of Marxism, but in reality, it reflects true Biblical Christian love and unity quite opposite Marxism. We view the passage for our insight (as follows):

II. The Godly Versus Socialistic Use Of Material Resources, Acts 4:32-37.

- A. Marxism promotes the *forced* abolition of private property by the government regardless of what affliction it causes the owners. ("Goals, 'Communist Manifesto,'" learn-usa.com/transformation_process/hdn003.htm)
- B. However, what is described as having occurred in the Early Church in Acts 4:32-37 greatly contrasts with Marxism both in ideology and also in practice (as follows):
 1. Opposite a Marxist arrangement where the "haves" are forcibly made to lose their possessions by the government for the benefit of the "have nots," what violates the Exodus 20:15 prohibition against stealing and causes the "haves" to become angry and hurt, the Early Church believers were of one heart and soul in complete, willful spiritual unity, Acts 4:32a.
 2. Opposite a Marxist arrangement where the "haves" chafe under the government's forced confiscation of their properties, Early Church believers did not claim anything as being their possession, Acts 4:32b. [This practice did not occur later in churches elsewhere in the Roman Empire (cf. 1 Timothy 5:8) where it did among the believers right after Pentecost in Jerusalem likely since the latter "expected the Lord to return soon and establish His kingdom," a view that changed in time, Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 360.]
 3. Opposite a Marxist arrangement where goods are forcibly confiscated by the government from the "haves," owners of property willingly shared their material goods with fellow believers, Acts 4:32c.
 4. Opposite godless Marxism that extols the major sins of covetousness (cf. Exodus 20:17) and theft (cf. Exodus 20:15) as forcibly promoted by totalitarian leaders, Early Church believers enjoyed the blessing of seeing their spiritual leaders witness of Christ's resurrection with God's great gracious power, Acts 4:33.
 5. Opposite a Marxist arrangement where the needs of many are nevertheless often not filled, none of the believers in the Early Church lacked in material possessions, Acts 4:34a.
 6. Opposite a Marxist arrangement where corruption and greed are often the cause of an inefficient distribution of confiscated goods, in the Early Church, from time to time, owners of fields or houses would sell them and bring the monetary proceeds from the sale of these properties, laying them down at the apostles' feet, Acts 4:34b-35a NIV. Then, in great efficiency, these godly men would distribute the moneys out to individuals according to their individual needs, Acts 4:35b.
 7. An encouraging example of this practice was mentioned by Luke in Acts 4:36-37 (as follows):
 - a. The Mosaic Law prohibited Levites from owning land outside their houses and the pastures needed for their animals, for they were to spend time studying Scripture while living off the tithes of Israel's other tribes. (Numbers 18:20, 24 with Numbers 35:1-8 and Malachi 2:4-7; Ibid., p. 364)
 - b. However, a Levite named Joseph, who was also called "Barnabas," meaning "Son of Encouragement," owned land on the Island of Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea, and since that land was not in Israel, Jewish leaders may have thought it lawful for him to own. (Ibid.) Regardless, Barnabas sold that land and brought the money from the sale and laid it at the apostles' feet for distribution to needy believers, Acts 4:36-37.
 - c. For a Levite to sell what property he possessed, what had likely involved much effort for one who had been restricted to living off of tithes then to accumulate the moneys needed to make such a purchase, would have greatly encouraged other believers due to the evident personal sacrifice that was involved!
 - d. Significantly, nothing about Barnabas' act reflects a Marxist forced distribution of one's possessions!

Lesson: *The Early Church's sharing of goods was not based on Marxist ideology where such sharing is forced in the sins of covetousness and stealing, but it was a willful sharing that carefully distributed goods to those in need.*

Application: *May we not condone the forced distribution of wealth, but the willful sharing of wealth in godliness.*