

## New Testament Christianity equal to Socialism?

by Hendrik Joubert

One of the objections raised to discourage a return to New Testament Christianity is the idea that it would require us to adopt a socialistic system where everyone had everything in common. **And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. Acts 4:32.** If this was the only verse on the subject of personal property rights one would be justified to so believe. More importantly would be the need for one to act upon that belief in obedience to God. However this description of a generous attitude among the first Christians is not all the Bible has to say concerning individual ownership.

What then does the Bible teach us concerning individual ownership? In **Acts chapter 4** we learn of individuals who sold their property and **brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. Acts 4:37.** A couple loved the hype caused by such generosity and sold their property, but kept back some of the price. **But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, <sup>2</sup> and kept back some of the price for himself, with his wife's full knowledge, and bringing a portion of it, he laid it at the apostles' feet. Acts 5:1-2**

Should one stop reading here, you may conclude that they were required to sell their property and bring the money to the apostles. However, the details which follow reveal simple facts concerning individual ownership, and what sin they were charged with. **"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." Acts 5:4.**

Their sin obviously was not that they did not turn over all the money; they did not even have to sell their property to start with. After they sold it they did not have to turn over any of the money they received for it. Desiring personal glory they decided to lie about the matter, and that was their sin.

The statement of their sin is another serious aspect deserving of our attention. They were guilty of lying not to man, but to God. When we contribute to God's cause we are giving directly to God. Lying about that amounts to lying to God directly. Equally, when we spend that money we are spending God's money. This should not cause paranoia, but discernment.

Poverty among the first Christians was a *new* problem for the *new* called out body of God, the church. They took care of it in a spontaneous way, with more specific instructions following later. The Christian is not required to give all, but **as he may prosper. 1 Corinthians 16:1-2.** This giving should be as he **has purposed in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7.**

Giving is an activity which originates in the heart. For this reason the Christian may be abused by others who wish to manipulate the Scriptures for their benefit. *You call yourself a Christian...* is a preface used by many who consider themselves *Christians*, but who fail to adhere to the doctrine of Christ on all aspects other than the ones they may benefit from.

First of all, it is clear that the collection among Christians were for Christians – **the collection for the saints. 1 Corinthians 16:1. For and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in . Romans 15:26.** Consider the relevance of the statement: **But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Matthew 6:33.** God takes care of His own in this practical way.

From the next statement it becomes obvious that the individual cannot transfer personal responsibilities onto the church: **If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed. 1 Timothy 5:16**

The Christian should use every opportunity to help his neighbor, but even in using his personal finances, give preference to Christians. **So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith. Galatians 6:10.** Assistance should not be given indiscriminately as is suggested by the following statement: **...if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 2 Thessalonians 3:10.** Love may require us to act differently from what the world expects of the Christian – especially when it involves those we love.