

Giving and Distributing In the Church

Acts 4:32-35

Introduction:

1. In a recent study with Ricardo Lavori we were reading from Acts 4 and 5, about giving and distributing in the church.
2. The passage that we have just read is the second mention in Acts of giving and receiving in the church at Jerusalem. The first is in Acts 2 shortly after the first sermon. See 2:44-45.
3. The practices begun here obviously set a precedent for the first century churches and for us as multiple incidents of this practice are illustrated throughout Acts and the epistles.
4. There is much for us to learn here about money, our personal finances, the church, personal budgeting, the use of money in the church, giving, how much to give, and a whole host of things, in these writings.
5. I would like to survey some of these teachings with you tonight.

Discussion:

- I. One of the first observations I would make from Acts 4:32-35 is that the funds collected were for the “needy among them” (34).
 - A. These funds were NOT collected for use by unbelievers.
 1. It is the expectation of the world that “churches” are benevolent organizations for the world. This may be true of the denominations and other religious organizations of the world, but such is not the case for the church of God.
 2. “Can you help me with my electric bill, my water bill, etc. The electric company told me to call churches.”
 3. I do not mean to be harsh and insensitive, but as I read Scripture it is not the church’s purpose to be a benevolent organization to the world. Why not call the hospital to pay your electric bill? Why not call the school system?
 - B. The limitation to believers is evident elsewhere in the record.
 1. Acts 11:27-30: The church at Antioch determined to send to the relief **of the brethren** living in Judea.
 2. 1 Cor. 16:1-2: Now concerning the collection **for the saints**, as I directed the churches of Galatia.
 3. 2 Cor. 8:1-4: The churches of Macedonia begged to participate **in the support of the saints**.
 4. Rom. 15:25-26: Paul has collected funds and is now on his way to Jerusalem **serving the saints**. Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor **among the saints** in Jerusalem.
 - C. We are not privileged to withhold help from those we have the responsibility to help (2 Cor. 8:4; 9:5; Prov. 3:27-28).
- II. Second observation: These funds were collected from owners of property (Acts 4:34).
 - A. Sacrifice was required.
 - B. The one for whom sacrifice is made almost never understands the sacrifice another

makes. There may be an expression of thanks, but usually no comprehension of how much it cost the giver. Thanksgiving is appropriate.

- C. But you cannot give on the expectation that receivers are going to understand your sacrifice.
- D. Yet in the case of Joseph, called Barnabas, there was recognition. This led to the situation with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5).
 - 1. Seeking the exaltation that Barnabas had received they lied.
 - 2. This illustrates that the church at Jerusalem was not composed of perfect people.
 - 3. Often our imperfections show up when it comes to money. They supposed they could use their money as powerful to receive some exaltation.
 - 4. It is easy for sin to infiltrate the use of money. Acts 5 illustrates this on the side of the giver. Whether recipient or giver Satan tempts us. I have heard Christians say, "If the church doesn't do _____, I will stop my giving." This was used as a threat to get their way.
 - 5. Sometimes there are temptations that the poor face.

III. Third observation: The giving by the saints was not something demanded by the poor.

- A. Some seem to have a sense of entitlement—"You should help me."
- B. Scripture teaches that we should first help ourselves.
 - 1. Eph. 4:28.
 - 2. 2 Thess. 3:6-12.
- C. Scripture teaches that family has responsibility before the church.
 - 1. 1 Tim. 5:8.
 - 2. 1 Tim. 5:16
 - 3. There is a distinction between the family responsibility and the church's responsibility.
- D. Some would come to the church seeking help without recognizing the family responsibility.

IV. Fourth observation: Giving was done voluntarily.

- A. This is evident in Acts 4 and 5.
 - 1. Ananias had control of his property and retained control after it was sold (5:4).
 - 2. Barnabas also had such control.
- B. Voluntary contributions are evident in 2 Cor. 8:1-6.
- C. Reflecting the "sincerity of your love" as following the example of Christ (2 Cor. 8:7-9, 24).
- D. Cheerful giving, not grudgingly or under compulsion is what God calls for (2 Cor. 9:7).

V. Fifth observation: The leaders of the church were responsible for the distribution.

- A. They laid the money at the apostles' feet (Acts 4:37).
- B. They sent in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders (Acts 11:30).

- C. This means that the leaders of the church had responsibility as stewards to use the funds appropriately. This is a serious responsibility.
- D. Little more is said about this in Scripture, but these leaders become stewards of the funds collected. Who is going to be helped? How much is this person(s) to receive by comparison to what another receives? 2 Cor. 8:14 indicates that such contributions are to be distributed so that there is some equality, but the church is not a commune. Scripture allows for the right of individual ownership. The prohibitions against stealing and coveting suggest a right of individual ownership (Ex. 20:15, 17; Eph. 4:28; as well as the passages we are now studying in Acts 4-5; 2 Cor. 8-9).

VI. Sixth observation: Planned giving or budgeting is necessarily implied in Scripture.

- A. Laying by in store on the first day of every week and doing so “as he may prosper” necessarily implies budgeting (1 Cor. 16:2).
 - 1. This passage denotes regularity is called for.
 - 2. As he may prosper indicates proportional giving. Giving a percentage means that giving is done according to income.
 - 3. As the income goes up the giving goes up; as the income goes down the giving goes down proportionally.
 - 4. Giving according to ability implies the same (2 Cor. 8:11). It is according to what a person has (2 Cor. 8:12). It would seem that some plan to not have much and to not be able to give much. This begs the question!!! It is not appropriate to plan to have little so that you don’t have to help much. Contrast Eph. 4:28. Practically speaking this means that you need to work to be a contributor. Go to school. Get training. Work diligently. It requires effort and energy. Planning and hard work. We cannot sit on our laurels and expect others to graciously take care of us. Graciousness to the poor is commended in Scripture (Prov. 19:17). Laziness is not (Prov. 20:4, 13).
- B. Each must do just as he has purposed in his heart. This implies having made a deliberate decision.

VII. Seventh observation: God supplies so that we might have to give (2 Cor. 9:8-11).

- A. Yes, God has given us good things to enjoy (1 Tim. 6:17).
- B. But also to use in His service (1 Tim. 6:18-19).

Conclusion:

- 1. There are many other observations that could be made from these passages.
- 2. Not all the questions that we might have about the use of what God has given us are answered for us. I think purposefully so.
- 3. God intends for us to use these principles and apply them in wise ways to demonstrate compassion on those in need, to honor the Lord with what He has blessed us with, to budget to plan, to work, and to give.

4. But it is not God's intention for us to feel guilty when someone seeks to take advantage of a gracious heart. That is evil and it is wrong for us to encourage such. "If anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat either" (2 Thess. 3:10).