

Principles of Economic Liberty ~ Session 2

Do Acts 2:44-45 and 4:34-35 indicate the early church practiced socialism? Also, how are the economic relationships of capitalism and socialism different? Let's have a look at these passages. Acts 5:1-11 also is pertinent to our discussion.

Group 1: Discuss these insights.

The spontaneous generosity of church members arose in a context of a community of committed believers who feared God, praised God, and were overcome with a sense of awe regarding what He was doing in their midst. Generosity is commanded in Scripture (here are three of many such passages: Prov. 11:24-25; Acts 20:35; 1 Tim. 6:17-19). When "giving" is coerced, it is not giving; nor is it charity. Socialism and its related systems advocate a forced redistribution of wealth and resources. **Contrast the outcome of spontaneous, voluntary giving in the church (God is glorified) to the outcome when transfer of wealth is forced by the government (the state is seen as the source of resources and gets credit for meeting needs). What additional things occur?**

Group 2: Discuss these insights.

When those involved in the early church "had all things in common" (Acts 2:44), none of the goods that made up the store of common resources was owned by the group from the outset; instead, each item of value, whether money or goods, was donated *freely and voluntarily*. Ownership of assets was transferred when the original owner donated or sold them. **Describe how God is glorified and relationships are strengthened within the church when giving to meet needs is voluntary. Contrast this scenario to what happens to relationships when the government taxes wealth and redistributes it to those deemed to be in need.**

Group 3: Discuss these insights.

The free and voluntary donations came from individuals and families who owned them privately. The government was not involved; nor was the community of believers considered to be owner of anything that was not donated. **What happens to relationships when someone assumes he owns something he really does not?**

Group 4: Discuss these insights.

Those who gave to meet the needs of fellow church members laid their donations "at the apostles' feet" (4:35). That makes it a "slam dunk" that the church didn't engage in socialism! Advocates of socialism want people's money to go to the government, not to the church! **Discuss: What happens when the state starts to meddle in the affairs of the church?**

Group 5: Discuss these insights.

Property rights and the right to voluntarily engage in economic transactions were explicitly affirmed, even while church still was using the common store approach. In Acts 5:1-11, Peter himself affirmed these rights. When donations were being made to the common treasury, Ananias and Sapphira, a husband and wife, sold a piece of property and brought a portion of the proceeds to the apostles. They claimed they were bringing the entire amount but actually held a portion back. Their primary offense wasn't failing to donate all of the proceeds, but lying about their gift. To their own peril, they lied to God Himself. **Discuss: How did Peter affirm property rights in Acts 5:3-4? What does the phrase "in your own control" mean in practical terms?**