

## All Things in Common

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March 2004

When Jews from the far-flung regions of the Roman Empire committed themselves to the Lord en masse, it created a unique community with unique needs. Many were likely unprepared for an extended stay in Jerusalem, having come merely for the feast, and others perhaps were from the lower rungs of the socio-economic ladder. Most would have been alienated from social mechanisms that would have provided amply for their needs due to their declared allegiance to Jesus of Nazareth.

Thus the first church is a mixture of strangers, yet of Jewish kinship, who are standing together against persecution, material need and the challenge of reorienting themselves to a whole new context of living. How do they respond? *“Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need”* (Ac 2:44-45).

It is admirable to yield control of ownership of material things for which one has labored and perhaps has future plans or sentimental attachment. But this generosity has roots in something other than mere humanitarianism. It is evidence of oneness of spirit, of identification with others apart from personal acquaintance, reciprocal benefit or some other self-gratifying motive. Such sharing originates with common conviction, foundational beliefs that strike at the heart of how we define ourselves in relation to others.

When we see in another the same recognition of our divine Creator, when we see evidence that our brother is as wholly dependent upon the Lord’s mercy as we are, when we observe godly humility, sorrow for sin, a fearless regard and insatiable desire for truth, and a fervent desire for heaven, then a natural affinity blossoms.

So, we will not only share our goods but will *“rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep”* (Rom 12:15). We will gladly emulate later Jewish disciples who *“endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains ...”* (Heb 10:32-34).

Further, we will yield our insistence upon “our way or the highway” (Rom 12:10; Phil 2:2-3) because we crave the common possession of peace and unity. We will share credit and praise for jobs well done and faith courageously expressed: *“Receive (Epaphroditus, jj) ... in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death ...”* (Ph 2:29-30). Most of all, we will share the forgiveness that we have so abundantly received from God (Eph 4:32).

And in all this “commonness” we might even share a nasty virus, which several did last week. But if that is the price to pay to associate with those who make life richer and stronger, so be it.