

November 06, 2006

MORE BLESSED TO GIVE THAN RECEIVE???

This coming Sunday, we will have our Ingathering to meet some special needs that we have as a church family. As most of us already know, a door has opened for us to acquire 2 other properties surrounding our church. As we look toward our future and what God might have in store for our church and our school, these properties could be very important in giving us room to grow. Thus, we as a church voted to pursue these opportunities and we as a church voted to have an "Ingathering" to help meet the financial need.

As we pray and prepare for this Sunday, I would point us to two different but related texts in the book of Acts. The first is from the description of the very first church meetings. In Acts 2:44-47. It says, *"And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they {began} selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."*

The second is from Acts 4:32-35. It says, *"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. And with great power the apostles were giving witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need."*

Now these texts have been used through the ages to support a number of wrong ideologies, like communal Christianity or material asceticism. However, these texts also demonstrate some very poignant principles for the biblical church. **First**, there was great unity and gladness among them when it came to the issue of giving. Contrast that with the fact that most marital troubles and most church troubles originate in some form with disagreements over resources. This was not true for the early church. They were "cheerful givers" in the truest sense. They recognized that all they had belonged to God and was to be put at His disposal. They were ready to trust Him to meet both their needs and the needs of the church through them.

Second, their unity and gladness came from hearts that were experiencing the magnificent presence and power of God. In our day-to-day lives, we have been trained by our culture to think "money makes the world go 'round," or "money = happiness." As Christians, we need to retrain our minds to delight in the reality of God rather than in money and material comforts. Money and material things are not evil, but to love those things is evil. If we can change our perspective and arrive at a place where God is our ultimate delight, then we will view our resources in a whole new light; we will store up treasure in heaven rather than treasure on earth. We will see money and possession as tools to be used for the glory of God.

Finally, their sacrificial spirits were living testimonies to the greatness of God and most certainly played a part in their witness. God's priorities were evident in them, and God "was adding to their number day by day." I know we all have responsibilities, and I know many of us are already giving sacrificially. My prayer is that we would never look upon the call to give with a sense of disdain or burden. "The earth is the Lord's and all it contains." God will certainly display His wonders and meet our needs as we surrender to Him. His will shall be accomplished as we gather together and "Gather-In" according to His leading. It is indeed better to give, because in sacrificial giving, we behold the very heart and love of God.