

"THEY HAD ALL THINGS IN COMMON."

"And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people." – Acts 2:44-47.

SUCH was the spontaneous sentiment of the early Church: selfishness gave place to love and general interest. Blessed experience! And without doubt a similar sentiment, more or less clearly defined, comes over the hearts of all who are truly converted. When first we got a realizing sense of God's love and salvation, when we gave ourselves completely to the Lord and realized his gifts to us, which pertain not only to the life that now is, but also to that which is to come – we felt an exuberance of joy, which found in every fellow-pilgrim toward the heavenly Canaan, a brother or a sister, in whom we trusted as related to the Lord and having his spirit; and we were disposed to deal with them all as we would with the Lord, and to share with them our all, as we would share all with our Redeemer. And in many instances it was by a rude shock that we were awakened to the fact that neither we nor others are perfect in the flesh; and that no matter how much of the Master's spirit his people now possess, they "have this treasure in earthen vessels" of human frailty and defection.

Then we learned, not only that the weaknesses of the flesh of other men had to be taken into account, but that our own weaknesses of the flesh needed constant guarding. We found that whilst all had shared Adam's fall, all had not fallen alike, or in exactly the same particulars. All have fallen from God's likeness and spirit of love, to Satan's likeness and spirit of selfishness: and as love has diversities of operation, so has selfishness. Consequently, selfishness working in one has wrought a

desire for ease, sloth, indolence; in another it produced energy, labor for the pleasures of this life, self-gratification, etc.

Among those *actively* selfish some take self-gratification in amassing a fortune, and having it said, He is wealthy; others gratify their selfishness by seeking honor of men; others in dress, others in travel, others in debauchery and the lowest and meanest forms of selfishness.

Each one begotten to the new life in Christ, with its new spirit of love, finds a conflict begun, fightings within and without; for the new spirit wars with *whatever form* of selfishness or depravity formerly had control of us. The new "mind of Christ," whose principles are justice and love, asserts itself; and reminds the *will* that it has assented to and covenanted this change. The desires of the flesh (the selfish desires, whatever their bent), aided by the outside influences of friends, argue and discuss the question; urging that no radical measures must be taken – that such a course would be foolish, insane, impossible. The flesh insists that the old course cannot be changed, but will agree to slight modifications, and to do nothing as extreme as before.

The vast majority of God's people seem to agree to this partnership, which is really still the reign of selfishness. But others insist that the spirit or mind of Christ shall have the control. The battle which ensues is a hard one (Gal. 5:16,17); but the new will conquers, and self, with its own selfishness, or depraved desires, is reckoned dead. – Col. 2:20; 3:3; Rom. 6:2-8.

But does this end the battle forever? No; –

"Ne'er think the victory won,
Nor once at ease sit down;
Thine arduous task will not be done
Till thou shalt gain thy crown."

Ah, yes! we must renew the battle daily, and help divine implore and receive, that we may finish our course with joy. We must not only

conquer self, but as the Apostle did, we must keep our bodies under. (1 Cor. 9:27.) And this, our experience, that we must be constantly on the alert against the spirit of selfishness, and to support and promote in ourselves the spirit of love, is the experience of all who likewise have "put on Christ" and taken his will to be theirs. Hence the propriety of the Apostle's remark, [R1861 : page 205] "Henceforth know we no man [in Christ] after the flesh." We know those in Christ according to their new spirit, and not according to their fallen flesh. And if we see them fail sometimes, or always to some degree, and yet see evidences that the new mind is wrestling for the mastery, we are properly disposed to sympathize rather than to berate for little failures; "remembering ourselves lest we also be tempted [of our old selfish nature in violation of some of the requirements of the perfect law of Love]."

Under "the present distress," therefore, while each has all that he can do to keep his own body under and the spirit of love in control, sound judgment as well as experience and the Bible tells us that we would best not complicate matters by attempting communistic schemes; but each make as straight paths as possible for his own feet, that that which is lame in our fallen flesh be not turned entirely out of the way, but that it be healed.

(1) *Sound Judgment* says that if the saints with divine help have a constant battle to keep selfishness subject to love, a promiscuous colony or communism would certainly not succeed in ruling itself by a law utterly foreign to the spirit of the great majority of its members. And it would be impossible to establish a communism of saints only, because we cannot read the hearts – only "the Lord knoweth them that are his." And if such a colony of saints could be gotten together, and if it should prosper with all things in common, all sorts of evil persons would seek to get their possessions or to share them; and if successfully excluded they would say all manner of evil against them; and so, if it held together at all, the enterprise would not be a real success.

Some saints, as well as many of the world, are so fallen into selfish indolence that nothing but necessity will help them to be, "not slothful in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord." And many others are so selfishly ambitious that they need the buffetings of failure and adversity to mellow them and enable them to sympathize with others; or even to bring them to deal *justly* with others.

Such communities, if left to the rule of the majority, would sink to the level of the majority; for the progressive, active minority, finding that nothing could be gained by energy and thrift, over carelessness and sloth, would also grow careless and indolent. If governed by organizers of strong will, as Life Trustees and Managers, on a paternal principle, the result would be more favorable financially; but the masses, deprived of personal responsibility, would degenerate into mere tools and slaves of the Trustees.

To sound judgment it therefore appears, that the method [R1862 : page 205] of individualism, with its liberty and responsibility, is the best one for the development of intelligent beings; even though it may work hardships many times to all, and sometimes to many.

Sound judgment can see that if the Millennial Kingdom were established in the earth, with the divine rulers then promised, backed by unerring wisdom and full power to use it, laying "judgment to the line and righteousness to the plummet," and ruling not by consent of majorities, but by righteous judgment, and as "with a rod of iron" – then communism could succeed; probably it would be the very best condition, and if so it will be the method chosen by the King of kings. But for that we wait; and not having the power or the wisdom to use such theocratic power, the spirit of a sound mind simply bides the Lord's time, praying meanwhile, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." And after Christ's Kingdom shall have brought all the willing back to God and righteousness, and shall have destroyed all the unwilling, then, with love the rule on earth as it is in

heaven, we may suppose that men will share heaven's mercies in common, as do the angels now.

(2) *Experience* proves the failure of communistic methods in the present time. There have been several such communities tried for many years; and the result has always been failure. The Oneida Community of New York is one, whose failure has long been recognized by sensible people. Another, the Harmony Society of Pennsylvania, soon showed that the hopes of its founders met failure, for so much discord prevailed that it divided. The split-off, known as Economites, also located near Pittsburg. It flourished for a while, after a fashion, but it is now quite withered; and possession of its property is now being disputed in the Society and in the courts of law. The leading men in the Community have about died out, and the unintelligent and ambitionless who clung to them for a home, a living and a head, are likely to be gulled into the control of Cyrus Teed, a false Christ, who would like to handle their money. And other societies are starting now, which will be far less successful than these, because the times are different: independence is greater, respect and reverence is less, majorities will rule, and without wiser leaders are sure to fail. Wise worldly leaders are looking out for themselves, while wise Christians are busy in other channels, – obeying the command, "Go thou and preach the gospel."

(3) *The Bible* does not teach Communism, but does teach loving considerate Individualism, except in the sense of family communism – each family acting as a unit, of which the father is the head and the wife one with him, his fellow-heir of the grace of life, his partner in every joy and benefit as well as in every adversity and sorrow.

True, God permitted a communistic arrangement in the primitive Church, referred to at the beginning of this article; but this may have been for the purpose of illustrating to us the unwisdom of the method; and lest some, thinking of the scheme now, should conclude that the apostles did not command and organize communities, *because* they lacked the wisdom to concoct and carry out such methods. For not a

word can be quoted from our Lord or the apostles advocating the communistic principles; but much to the contrary.

True, the Apostle Peter (and probably others) knew of and cooperated in that first communistic arrangement, even if he did not teach the system. It has been inferred, [R1862 : page 206] too, that the death of Ananias and Sapphira was an indication that the giving of all the goods of the believers was compulsory; but not so: their sin was that of *lying*, as Peter declared in reviewing the case. While they had the land there was no harm in keeping it if they got it honestly; and even after they had sold it no harm was done: the wrong was in misrepresenting that the sum of money turned in was their *all*, when it was not their all. They were attempting to cheat the others, by getting a share of their *all* without giving their own all.

As a matter of fact, the Christian Community at Jerusalem was a failure. "There arose a murmuring" – "because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations." Although under the Apostolic inspection the Church was pure, free from "tares," and all had the treasure of the new spirit or "mind of Christ," yet evidently that treasure was only in warped and twisted earthen vessels which could not get along well together; because while all were blemished, all were not blemished in the same manner and degree.

The apostles soon found that the management of the community would greatly interfere with their real work – their commission to preach the gospel – "That repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name, beginning at Jerusalem." So they abandoned those things to others. The Apostle Paul and others traveled from city to city preaching Christ and him crucified; but, so far as the record shows, they never mentioned Communism and never organized a Community: and yet St. Paul declares, "I have not shunned to declare unto you the whole counsel of God." This proves that Communism is no part of the gospel, nor of the counsel of God for this age.

On the contrary, the Apostle Paul exhorted and instructed the Church to do things which it would be wholly impossible to do as members of a communistic society – to each "provide for his own;" to "lay by on the first day of the week" money for the Lord's service, according as the Lord had prospered them; that servants should obey their masters, rendering the service with a double good will if the master were also a brother in Christ; and how masters should treat their servants, as those who must themselves give an account to the great Master, Christ. – 1 Tim. 5:8; 6:1; 1 Cor. 16:2; Eph. 6:5-9.

Our Lord Jesus not only did not establish a Community while he lived, but he never taught that such should be established. On the contrary, in his parables he taught, – that all have not the same number of pounds or talents given them, that each is a steward and should individually (not collectively, as a commune) manage his own affairs, and render his own account. (Matt. 25:14-28; Luke 19:13-24. See also James 4:13,15.) And, when dying, our Lord commended his mother to the care of his disciple John, and the record of John (19:27) is, "And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home." John, therefore, had a home; so had Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Had our Lord formed a Community he would, doubtless, have commended his mother to it instead of to John.

Moreover, the forming of a Commune of believers is opposed to the purpose and methods of the Gospel age. The object of this age is to *witness* Christ to the world, and thus to "take out a people for his name;" and to this end each believer is exhorted to be a burning and a shining light before men – the world in general – and not before and to each other merely. Hence, after permitting the first Christian Commune to be established, to show that the failure to establish Communes generally was not an oversight, the Lord broke it up, and scattered the believers everywhere, to preach the gospel to every creature. We read, – "And at that time there was a great persecution against the Church which was at Jerusalem; and they were *all scattered abroad* throughout

the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles," and they went everywhere preaching the gospel. – Acts 8:1,4; 11:19.

It is still the work of God's people to shine as lights *in the midst* of the world, and not to shut themselves up in convents and cloisters or as communities. The promises of Paradise will not be realized by joining such Communes. We advise all TOWER readers to have neither part nor lot in such communities. The desire to join is but a part of the general spirit of our day against which we are forewarned. (Isa. 8:12.) "Trust in the Lord, and wait patiently for him." He will establish righteousness and equity in the earth. "Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things, and to stand before the Son of Man." – Luke 21:36.
