

Christian Fellowship as Joint Equity

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Introduction

Popular Christian thinkers will spend hours exchanging theological blows with counterparts in highbrow circles of debate. Yet if either reversed their position in submission to the other, all proof of change would be practically imperceptible. Soteriology, determinism, theism, cosmology, and eschatology are all common examples. Then we have topics so compelling to behavioral change at the reversal, they can all be identified by the same ringing protest: “—if that’s true, too many lives and institutions would be upended in order to comply...” Remarriage, pacifism, spiritual gifts, and gender responsibilities are great examples. And so is the reevaluation of fellowship among Christians. Experience proves these topics are debated far less publicly and resolutely. Why is that? Are the casualties resulting from purely ideological battlefields more humane? Probably. But when costs are counted in relationships, money, and other observable forms of repentance, we tend to pull our punches in favor of empathy over debate. I would not deny the intended grace, so trust that any contempt detected in this paper is meant only for the propagators of competing views which challenge its position.

That Christians should be more charitable is as mild a saying as it is likely to be true. But the moment pastoral church leaders are asked to justify their consumption of charity could be the same moment we’re found scrambling for a defense we hardly knew was needed. This paper aspires to be that defense, and calls for a return to the right standard and the incrimination of those taking advantage of present circumstances.

Wanted or not, the Western world has materially benefited from the 20th century expansion of American credit and welfare systems backed by unrestricted lending. If any church on earth

could stand to ignore the needs of its poor and still expect them to show up with a smile, it's ours. That isn't to say the faithful poor cannot be found here, only that if American advantages were ever withdrawn, or offered exclusively in exchange for state-sponsored acts of worship, their pleas would amplify as the grotesque body of an undisciplined church is unveiled. The rejuvenation of meaningful fellowship will require more than platitudes or simple acts of kindness, but the reappraisal of new testament law and ordinance. The stakes are high for this reason alone, even if Sunday morning headlines don't portend them.

This paper is ordered in four parts. Part 1 analyzes the earliest record of Christian fellowship and compares it with religious and pseudo-religious norms throughout history. Part 2 examines the Greek at the base of "fellowship" and other related key terms in the New Testament. And Part 3 evaluates the strength of arguments made by apostolic writers that communal sharing was a practical imperative, not just an expendable charm. If the first three parts of this paper establish the "who, what, and why," then the less pressing answers to "how and when" are found in the Part 4. By the end, it will be evident that the 1st century example of fellowship was the only one meant to endure despite its almost universal abandonment.

In contrast to observed behaviors in most churches today, early Christians practiced voluntary communal sharing patterned chiefly off of Jesus, whereby the prosperous supported the weak. This was the hallmark of true love seen in the Torah, among the apostles, in nuclear families, and even in the nature of one's own body. Accordingly, Christian fellowship proves to be an effective, no-frills way to reduce poverty and promote spiritual devotion. Sadly, the church's posture toward the poor has become impotent. Money which could otherwise aid them is predominantly spent on professional staff and venues. This development is unnecessary and completely foreign to the biblical model communicated in the New Testament, as this paper intends to show.

Before getting underway, let me introduce a term crafted to emphasize the pragmatic aspects of fellowship in contrast to modern clichéd ones — joint equity. In business finance "equity" is the total net value capable of being distributed to the shareholders of a company if all its assets were

sold and its debts were repaid. “Joint” is taken from Romans 8:17 (Kings James Version) where Paul wrote that believers are in the process of being adopted as sons of God through the Spirit: “if children; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ.” When combined, “joint equity” encompasses both routine sharing and potential sharing as a function of the church’s readiness to give and receive under the headship of Jesus Christ.

Historical Appeal

Contemporary history tends to muddle our consideration of claims about ancient practices, people, or events. This is commonly acknowledged. Correspondence between scholars C.S. Lewis and Owen Barfield made famous this tension and fallacy, technically referred to as “appeal to novelty” which Lewis amusingly retitled “chronological snobbery.” He named it in this excerpt, which is entirely relevant to our consideration of an ancient institution among Christians.

Barfield never made me an Anthroposophist, but his counterattacks destroyed forever two elements in my own thought. In the first place he made short work of what I have called my "chronological snobbery," **the uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our own age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that account discredited.** You must find why it went out of date. Was it ever refuted (and if so by whom, where, and how conclusively) or did it merely die away as fashions do? If the latter, this tells us nothing about its truth or falsehood. From seeing this, one passes to the realization that our own age is also "a period," and certainly has, like all periods, its own characteristic illusions. They are likeliest to lurk in those widespread assumptions which are so ingrained in the age that no one dares to attack or feels it necessary to defend them. - C.S. Lewis, *Surprised By Joy*, (1955), Chap. 13.

Opposers of wealth redistribution conveniently depict early fellowship as exceedingly novel and fitting for the heyday. They grant flashes of Jesus’ influence but nothing so lasting as a flame. It may be asked, how could anything the church does now with its money be less than ideal for our time? Aren’t skeleton mothers and hungry folks happy with the soup nights and donations sponsored by leftover net incomes? What if we could demonstrate that ancient fellowship, now labeled radical or obsolete, transcended multiple intellectual climates in addition to the one common to the age of earliest Christians? This discredited practice would begin to look rather viable as opposers walk back their snobbery betraying a sunk-cost reluctance to change.

Before examining three primary historical examples of communal sharing during and before the New Testament church, let's study the primary passage scholars tend to either admire or equivocate concerning the collectivism in Acts.

Acts 1:3 To whom also he [Jesus] shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God: **4** And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but **wait for the promise of the Father**, which, saith he, ye have heard of me... **2:1** And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. **4** **And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues**, as the Spirit gave them utterance... **22** **Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs**, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: **36** Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that **God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ...** **38** Then Peter said unto them, **Repent, and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. **41** **Then they that gladly received his word were baptized:** and the same day there were added unto them **about three thousand souls.** **42** **And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship (G2842)**, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. **43** And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. **44** **And all that believed were together, and had all things common (G2839);** **45** **And sold their possessions and goods, and parted (G1266) them to all men, as every man had need.** **46** 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, **47** Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

- **G2842** - koinōnia, *koy-nohn-ee'-ah* From G2844; **partnership**, that is, (literally) **participation, or (social) intercourse**, or (pecuniary) benefaction: - (to) communicate (-ation), communion, (contri-), **distribution**, fellowship.
- **G2839** - koinos, *koy-nos'* Probably from G4862; common, **that is, (literally) shared by all or several**, or (ceremonially) profane: - common, defiled, unclean, unholy.
- **G1266** - diamerizō, *dee-am-er-id'-zo* From G1223 and G3307; **to partition thoroughly (literally in distribution, figuratively in dissension):** - cloven, **divide**, part.

This was a defining moment for the church as Jesus' successors waited on the promise of the Holy Spirit (see John 20:21; Mark 16:15; Matt 28:18; Luke 24:46). Shortly after his coming and subsequent mass conversions, we read that the church exhibited a form of collective sharing. Christians were first described as embracing the apostles' doctrine, and then their fellowship (Acts 2:42). This happens to be the foremost mention of the key term. To help readers differentiate

between doctrine and fellowship, Luke provides a concise description of their giving and receiving. Believers of the doctrine had “all things common” and many of them sold valuable possessions to help those in need. Furthermore, Luke makes it clear these converts did not invent the practice, but were imitators—in other words, the fellowship already existed separate from what they began to do also. Therefore, if anything more can be learned about Christian fellowship, we must study the forerunning ministry of Jesus Christ as the first historical appeal informing our understanding.

Since we wish to know the nature of fellowship between the apostles and Jesus in terms of more than just their shared theological beliefs (i.e., the “apostles’ doctrine” from Acts 2:42), we should focus on the parts which relate to money, treasure, needs, selling, giving, and receiving, etc. General teachings on these subjects are easily found in Jesus’ teachings, but the explicit instructions he gave the apostles are tremendously informative. These will help provide the historical basis for the fellowship testified to in Acts.

Jesus taught the disciples to think about money in two ways. First, he warned about the trouble or deceitfulness of riches. Second, he taught them to give alms. Jesus did not rejoice in the accumulation of wealth. That said, even a cursory analysis of what he taught suggests motives were centered on the souls of rich people as much as they were on the needs of the poor. Either way, Jesus taught that amassing wealth was a hindrance rather than a blessing.

Matthew 13:18 Hear ye therefore the parable of the sower. 19 **When any one heareth the word of the kingdom**, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catcheth away **that which was sown** in his heart. This is he which received seed by the way side. ... 22 **He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.** 23 But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Mark 4:18 And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, 19 And the cares of this world, and **the deceitfulness of riches**, and the lusts of other things entering in, **choke the word**, and it becometh unfruitful.

Luke 6:20 And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, **Blessed be ye poor:** for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 **Blessed are ye that hunger now:** for ye shall be filled... 24 **But woe unto you that are rich!** for ye have received your consolation. 25 **Woe unto you that are full!** for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep.

Luke 16:19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: **20** And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores... **22** And it came to pass, that **the beggar died**, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: **the rich man also died, and was buried;** **23** And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. **24** And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me... for I am tormented in this flame. **25** But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.

Luke 4:2 Being forty days **tempted of the devil**... **5** And the devil, taking him up into an high mountain, shewed unto him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. **6** **And the devil said unto him, All this power will I give thee, and the glory of them:** for that is delivered unto me; and to whomsoever I will I give it. **7** **If thou therefore wilt worship me, all shall be thine.** **8** And Jesus answered and said unto him, Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, **Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.**

Matthew 6:19 **Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth**, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal... **24** **No man can serve two masters:** **for either he will hate the one, and love the other;** or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. **Ye cannot serve God and mammon.**

The last excerpt about the conflict of service hits on the central tension between spiritual and material wealth. Jesus made it clear that forsaking some or even all material wealth or comfort would be an inevitable outcome of following him. If the choice to do so is eternally profitable with reference to his future kingdom, it's rather sympathetic he disparaged corruptible riches and appealed to more lasting forms of wealth. The rich young ruler speaking with Jesus presents the case in point recorded in all three synoptic accounts of Matthew 19, Mark 10, and Luke 18.

Matthew 19:16 And, behold, one came and said unto him, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? **17** And he said unto him, Why callest thou me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments... **20** **The young man saith unto him, All these things have I kept from my youth up: what lack I yet?** **21** **Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.** **22** But when the young man heard that saying, **he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.** **23** Then said Jesus unto his disciples, **Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.** **24** And again I say unto you, **It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.** **25** When his disciples heard it, they were exceedingly amazed, saying, Who then can be saved? **26** But Jesus beheld them, and said unto them, With men this is impossible; but with God all things are possible. **27** **Then answered Peter and said unto him, Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?**

Inside of just two replies Jesus surgically pinpointed the matter affecting the rich man. However, more instructive to our inquiry is the exchange which followed when some of the apostles doubted the success of their mission due to the growing implied costs. Even Peter seems to question the tradeoff (Matt 19:27) as if to say, will the juice be worth the squeeze?

Mark 10:28 Then Peter began to say unto him, **Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.** 29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, **There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's,** 30 **But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life.** 31 But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

Luke 18:25 For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26 **And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved?** 27 And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. 28 **Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee.** 29 **And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake,** 30 **Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.**

The subtle promise that “now, in this time” followers will benefit from an increase of houses, family, and land (in addition to future blessing) begs a real question. Most are familiar with the concept of ultimate heavenly restitution, but Luke and Mark tee up another: “How will anyone receive things forsaken in this life (e.g., houses, lands, family) before the end of the age?” We have already examined the cautions of wealth, now let’s turn to the parts which begin answering this question (expounded more fully in the logical appeal to fellowship in Part 3).

Almsgiving and supporting the weak make up a large part of what Jesus expected of followers. The sayings are neither few nor vague in the Sermon on the Mount and throughout the gospels. If riches are disparaged on one hand, a charitable disposition is honored on the other.

Matthew 5:40 And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, **let him have thy cloke also.** 41 And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, **go with him twain.** 42 **Give to him that asketh thee,** and from **him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away.** 43 Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. 44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, **do good to them that hate you,** and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you... 48 Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect. 6:1 **Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen** of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. 2 Therefore **when thou doest thine alms (G1654),** do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that

they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. 3 **But when thou doest alms (G1654)**, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth: 4 That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father which seeth in secret himself shall reward thee openly.

- **G1654** - eleēmosunē, *el-eh-ay-mos-oo'-nay* Mercy, pity esp. as exhibited in giving alms, **charity; the benefaction itself, a donation to the poor, alms**

Luke 6:38 Give, and it shall be given unto you; good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same measure that ye mete withal it shall be measured to you again.

Luke 12:31 But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. 32 Fear not, little flock; for **it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.** 33 **Sell that ye have, and give alms;** provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. 34 For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 10:25 And, behold, a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted him, saying, Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? 26 He said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? 27 And he answering said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; **and thy neighbour as thyself.** 28 And he said unto him, **Thou hast answered right: this do, and thou shalt live.** 29 **But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?** 30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. 33 **But a certain Samaritan,** as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, **he had compassion on him,** 34 And went to him, and **bound up his wounds,** pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, **and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.** 35 And on the morrow when he departed, **he took out two pence, and gave** them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; **and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.** 36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? 37 And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, **Go, and do thou likewise.**

Matthew 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: 32 And **before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another...** 34 **Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed** of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35 **For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in:** 36 **Naked, and ye clothed me...** 37 Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? ... 40 And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. 41 **Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed,** into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: 42 **For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink:** 43 **I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not...** 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

The sorrowful example of the rich young ruler is commonly cited, but we also have the cheerful example of Zacchaeus who gave in surrender to the Lord.

Luke 19:1 And Jesus entered and passed through Jericho. **2** And, behold, **there was a man named Zacchaeus... and he was rich.** **3** And **he sought to see Jesus** who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. **4** And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way. **5** And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, **Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house.** **6** **And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully...** **8** And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; **Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold.** **9** **And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house,** forsomuch as he also is a son of Abraham.

And Zacchaeus is not alone. There are plenty of others who traded professions or wealth to serve Jesus more closely. Consider the calling of the first apostles in Mark 1:18 and Luke 5:11, and the ministering women from Luke 8:2-3.

However, beyond the words we should examine his behavioral integrity. Did Jesus practice what he preached? Early accounts of his ministry tell of a vagabond taking shelter as it was given so that preaching, healing, and casting out demons might be prioritized.

Matthew 4:17 From that time **Jesus began to preach,** and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand... **23** **And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing** all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Mark 10:1 **And he arose from thence, and cometh into the coasts of Judaea by the farther side of Jordan:** and the people resort unto him again; and, as he was wont, **he taught them** again.

Luke 9:57 ...as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee withersoever thou goest. **58** And Jesus said unto him, **Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head.**

Luke 10:38 Now it came to pass, as they went, that he entered into a certain village: and a certain woman named Martha **received him in her house.**

Luke 19:5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, **Zacchaeus,** make haste, and come down; for to day **I must abide at thy house...** **7** And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That **he was gone to be guest** with a man that is a sinner.

Jesus benefited from room and board given by households wherein he stayed as a guest. But did he ever receive financial compensation (more than necessities) in exchange for his ministry? In

other words, was Jesus ever paid for the purpose of saving or spending as men commonly do? The answer is no. But this was the very parameter and transactional nature of his ministry – it was free.¹

Matthew 10:7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. **8** Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: **freely ye have received, freely give.**

If the limited details of Jesus’ solo missions seem less than perfectly informative to our historical interest in Christian fellowship, we still have the “rules of the road” dictated during his appointment of disciples to the same missional activities.

Matthew 10:1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease... **5** **These twelve Jesus sent forth**, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: **6** But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. **7** **And as ye go, preach**, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. **8** **Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.** **9** Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, **10** Nor scrip (**G4082**) for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. **11** And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy; and there abide till ye go thence. **12** And when ye come into an house, salute it. **13** And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. **14** And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. **15** Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrhah in the day of judgment, than for that city.

■ **G4082** - *pēra*, *pay'-rah* Of uncertain affinity; a wallet or leather pouch for food...

Mark 6:7 And he called unto him the twelve, and **began to send them forth** by two and two; and gave them power over unclean spirits; **8** **And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse:** **9** **But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.** **10** And he said unto them, In what place soever ye enter into an house, there abide till ye depart from that place... **12** And they went out, and preached that men should repent. **13** And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

Luke 9:1 Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. **2** **And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick.** **3** And he said unto them, **Take nothing for your journey, neither staves, nor scrip, neither bread, neither money; neither have two coats apiece.** **4** **And whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart.**

Luke 10:1 After these things the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before his face into every city and place, whither he himself would come. **2** Therefore said he unto them, **The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few:** pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest. **3** Go your ways:

¹ See “Financial Support for Christian Leaders”(christianpapers.net) for a comprehensive defense of this commandment as a complete prohibition on transacting the gifts of God.

behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. 4 **Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes:** and salute no man by the way. 5 **And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house.** 6 And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. 7 **And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire...**

Support for those sent to preach came via worthy households which provided places to rest and other needful things. These sent disciples were prohibited from carrying money or spare things. Want of resources was not a cause for stalling. Conversely, when Jesus and the apostles were stationed together in a single region they carried a purse, informed by John's gospel. These passages provide insight into their stationary handling of money. While the exact flows and balance of the purse is virtually unknowable, they must have been large enough so that Judas could embezzle without too great a fear of being discovered.

John 12:3 Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment. 4 **Then saith one of his disciples,** Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, which should betray him, 5 **Why was not this ointment sold for three hundred pence, and given to the poor?** 6 **He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.**

John 13:27 And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. 28 Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. 29 **For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor.**

John 12:5-6 proves the apostles were accustomed to pooling gifts. Because the supposed purpose of selling the perfume was to give alms, the motivations of this group cannot be easily maligned (except Judas, who was a thief for helping himself to this money). Additionally, although Mary could have sold the perfume privately to give alms, v. 6 hints at an emerging model whereby church leaders (comprised of the apostles at this point) received money for charitable redistribution towards the needs of the weak. The only other known use of this money was for provisioning basic necessities related to feasts of worship, cited in John 13:29.

We can now summarize three distinctives of Jesus' ministry and support.

1. Jesus' primary support when traveling was room and board as a short-term guest.
2. Jesus and his apostles never accepted financial compensation for spiritual work.

3. Charitable offerings to the ministry were added to a common “purse” scheduled for almsgiving or their collective needs involved with feasting and worship.²

Our historical appeal to Jesus’s ministry demonstrates that worldly riches were disparaged as a stumbling block to the kingdom and that the disciples gave to help the poor among them. This harmonizes with Paul’s statement to the Corinthians: “For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich” (2 Cor. 8:9). Jesus taught and modeled that tangible necessities could be received by traveling ministers, money could not be accepted for spiritual service, and that excessive wealth should be given away. Therefore, the behavior of early Christians in Acts 2 was a near-perfect imitation of the gestational period before Jesus’ death, wherein the apostles gave up assets (including time and labor) for over two years.

To ignore this connection or insist that it was completely novel betrays enormous apathy to the historical record. Remember, we want an informed perspective about whether the deep-seated sharing after Pentecost was just a flash in the pan, or something more abiding. So far, it looks much less like an invention, and more like a continuation of things modeled previously.

The second historical example we want to examine deals with Old Testament commandments concerning tithing in the land of Israel. Here we find an even wider appeal to communal sharing in a broad swath of biblical history. Curiously, examining the tithe also helps correct popular misconceptions used to justify the income and spending in churches today.

Before diving into the specifics, remember that the nation of Israel descended from a single family (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) and God expected them to operate with a zeal marked by brotherly love, regardless of tithing. Israelites were commanded to alleviate the poor and not to lend with interest or otherwise profit off disadvantaged brothers (Lev. 25:35–38). Given that the Torah is often caricatured as wholly strict and legalistic, these laws might smack more

² The purse could have been funded initially with contributions that Jesus and the apostles gave from their own wealth. Nevertheless, it remains that once money was committed to the communal purse it was not possessed by a single man, nor was it ever redistributed in the form of wages or salaries.

compassionate than otherwise expected. But the tithe itself reflected the very same compassion. It subsidized a disadvantaged subclass of the people who were tasked with spiritual ministry. Rather than presenting them as highly paid professionals, the law regarded the Levites as a disenfranchised tribe who, like the poor, required support in notably similar ways to early Christians supporting disenfranchised members of their own church family.

Misconceptions about the tithe must be corrected before this aspect of Israel's history can enrich our understanding of Christian fellowship. The tithe was not a comprehensive tax to pay for national government as we might think of income or sales taxes today. Instead, tithing was an agricultural ordinance levied specifically upon landowners to care for disadvantaged people. The largest, most recognizable group of citizens qualified to benefit from the tithe were Levites, who did not inherit large tracts of income-producing land like other tribes. Moreover, the tabernacle was not like a business wherein owners or workers enriched themselves (1 Sam. 2:12-36 chronicles the perils suffered by those who used it that way); it was a house of prayer (Jer. 7:11, Matt. 21:13). Even though the Levites were given cities in which to live (Num. 35, Jos. 20-21) receiving tithes made up for net economic shortcomings that the priests faced. This subsidized their focus on the administration and hard labor involved with the holy sacrifices and law.

Numbers 18:21 And, behold, **I have given the children of Levi all the tenth (H4643) in Israel for an inheritance, for their service** which they serve, **even the service of the tabernacle of the congregation...** 23 **But the Levites shall do the service** of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they shall bear their iniquity: it shall be a statute for ever throughout your generations, that **among the children of Israel they have no inheritance.** 24 **But the tithes (H4643) of the children of Israel... I have given to the Levites to inherit:** therefore I have said unto them, Among the children of Israel they shall have no inheritance... 31 **And ye shall eat it in every place,** ye and your households: for it is your reward for your service...

■ **H4643** - mah-as-ayr' From H6240; a tenth; especially a **tithe**: - tenth (part), **tithe** (-ing).

Leviticus 27:30 **And all the tithe (H4643) of the land,** whether of the **seed of the land, or of the fruit of the tree,** is the LORD'S: it is holy unto the LORD. 31 And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof. 32 And concerning the tithe of **the herd,** or of **the flock,** even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, **the tenth** shall be holy unto the LORD.

The tithe was the central support for priestly service in Israel and God's blessings were contingent upon following the associated commandments mediated by Moses (Deut. 14:29, 26:15, 28:15). And yet, despite the foreboding ultimatums the tithe was not described as something God forcibly took from Israel, but something He gave—"I have *given* the children of Levi all the tenth in Israel" (Num. 18:24). How did God come to possess the tenth part of the increase of the land in order to fairly give it? The answer lies with Jacob who vowed it freely to the LORD before the tribes of Israel (his sons) were even born.

Genesis 28:10 And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. ... **12** And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. **13** **And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed...** **15** **And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee,** until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of. **16** And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place... **18** And Jacob rose up early in the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillows, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it. **19** And he called the name of that place Bethel: but the name of that city was called Luz at the first. **20** **And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me...** **21** So that I come again to my father's house in peace; **then shall the LORD be my God:** **22** **...and of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee.**

In this way, the best scriptural definition of the tithe is one-tenth of the agricultural yield of the promised land which Jacob vowed to God before it was inherited, of which God received and redistributed to the less endowed. But let's not pass too quickly over the fact that tithes were agricultural commodities (grains, fruits, wines, oils), meaning their principal value pertained to satiation and nourishment, not money which can be easily wasted on lusts, stored as treasure, lent out, or borrowed against. Tithes met basic needs. Levites were not necessarily prohibited from converting them into money, it simply highlights the fundamental form was food and wine. Even during the pilgrimage feasts (one of the few times landowners could convert tithes into money), upon arrival to the holy place they reconverted it by purchasing oxen, sheep, wine, strong drink, or whatever else they desired to eat with their household, and the Levite with them (Deut. 14:26).

Deuteronomy 12:3 And ye shall overthrow their altars, and break their pillars, and burn their groves with fire; and ye shall hew down the graven images of their gods, and destroy the names of them out of that place. 4 Ye shall not do so unto the LORD your God. 5 **But unto the place which the LORD your God shall choose out of all your tribes to put his name there, even unto his habitation shall ye seek, and thither thou shalt come:** 6 **And thither ye shall bring** your burnt offerings, and your sacrifices, and **your tithes**, and heave offerings of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill offerings, and the firstlings of your herds and of your flocks: 7 **And there ye shall eat before the LORD** your God, and ye shall rejoice in all that ye put your hand unto, ye and your households, wherein the LORD thy God hath blessed thee... 17 **Thou mayest not eat within thy gates the tithe of thy corn**, or of thy **wine**, or of thy **oil**, or the firstlings of thy **herds** or of thy **flock**, nor any of thy vows which thou vowest, nor thy freewill offerings, or heave offering of thine hand: 18 **But thou must eat them before the LORD thy God in the place** which the LORD thy God shall choose, **thou**, and **thy son**, and **thy daughter**, and **thy manservant**, and **thy maidservant**, and **the Levite that is within thy gates**: and thou shalt rejoice before the LORD thy God in all that thou puttest thine hands unto. 19 **Take heed to thyself that thou forsake not the Levite** as long as thou livest upon the earth.

Deuteronomy 14:22 Thou shalt truly tithe all the increase of thy seed, that the field bringeth forth year by year. 23 And thou shalt eat before the LORD thy God, in the place which he shall choose to place his name there, the tithe of thy corn, of thy wine, and of thine oil, and the firstlings of thy herds and of thy flocks; that thou mayest learn to fear the LORD thy God always. 24 **And if the way be too long for thee, so that thou art not able to carry it;** or if the place be too far from thee, which the LORD thy God shall choose to set his name there, when the LORD thy God hath blessed thee: 25 **Then shalt thou turn it into money**, and bind up the money in thine hand, and shalt go unto the place which the LORD thy God shall choose: 26 **And thou shalt bestow that money for whatsoever thy soul lusteth after**, for oxen, or for sheep, or for wine, or for strong drink, or for whatsoever thy soul desireth: **and thou shalt eat there before the LORD thy God**, and thou shalt rejoice, thou, and thine household, 27 And the Levite that is within thy gates; thou shalt not forsake him; for he hath no part nor inheritance with thee.

We know the tithe supported the needs of the Levites on all occasions, whether at home or away at feasts. But it supported others, too. Poor people were clearly nourished with it as seen in chapters 14 and 26 of Deuteronomy. They describe a year called “the third year” and “year of tithing” in the Jewish calendar in which the tithe was shared with “the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow,” in addition to the Levite (Deut. 26:12).

Deuteronomy 14:28 At the end of three years thou shalt bring forth all the tithe of thine increase **the same year**, and shalt lay it up within thy gates: 29 And the **Levite**, (because he hath no part nor inheritance with thee,) and **the stranger**, and **the fatherless**, and **the widow**, which are within thy gates, **shall come, and shall eat and be satisfied**; that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hand which thou doest.

Deuteronomy 26:12 When thou hast made an end of tithing all the tithes of thine **increase the third year**, which is **the year of tithing**, and hast given it unto the **Levite**, **the stranger**, **the fatherless**, and **the widow**, that they may eat within thy gates, and be filled; 13 Then thou shalt say before the LORD thy God, I have brought away the hallowed things out of mine house, and also have **given them unto the Levite, and unto the stranger, to the**

fatherless, and to the widow, according to all thy commandments which thou hast commanded me: I have not transgressed thy commandments, neither have I forgotten them...

Leviticus 25:1 And the LORD spake unto Moses in mount Sinai, saying, **2** Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When ye come into the land which I give you, **then shall the land keep a sabbath unto the LORD.** **3** Six years thou shalt sow thy field, and six years thou shalt prune thy vineyard, and gather in the fruit thereof; **4** But **in the seventh year shall be a sabbath of rest unto the land**, a sabbath for the LORD: **thou shalt neither sow thy field, nor prune thy vineyard...** **18** Wherefore ye shall do my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them; and ye shall dwell in the land in safety. **19** And the land shall yield her fruit, and ye shall eat your fill, and dwell therein in safety. **20** **And if ye shall say, What shall we eat the seventh year?** behold, we shall not sow, nor gather in our increase: **21** **Then I will command my blessing upon you in the sixth year, and it shall bring forth fruit for three years.** **22** And ye shall sow the eighth year, and eat yet of old fruit until the ninth year; until her fruits come in ye shall eat of the old store.

Leviticus 25 introduces an important 7-year cycle which Israel followed when they came into the land. Israel did not work the land for increase or profit in the seventh year. Anticipating their natural concern for subsistence during this long observance, Moses assured them God would command a blessing in the sixth year and the land would produce so abundantly they would have enough for three years; these three years are identified as follows: the “seventh year” (the sabbath year), the “eighth year” (the first year of the next 7-year cycle, when sowing could resume), and the “ninth year” (the second year of the new cycle when they could harvest what was sown the previous year). This “ninth year” (the second year of any 7-year cycle) is the best candidate for interpreting the “third year” requirements in Deuteronomy 14 and 26. It marked the complete return to sowing *and* reaping in the 7-year cycle. At a minimum, in this year of remembrance landowners were required to share the tithe with the poor and the Levites. Whether regular tithes were always shared with the poor is an open question, making the liturgy of Deut. 26:12-15 read more like a memorialization of the sabbath, and less like a constraint on giving to the poor in other years. Even more open and complex to solve is whether Israel interpreted or followed the original instruction faithfully during the pre-temple, first temple, or second temple periods. These questions are beyond the scope of this paper and less useful to what we already know about Jacob’s vow and God’s benevolent redistribution of wealth.

This examination of Israel's tithe yields the following features:

1. The tithe was a free-will offering made by the progenitor of Israel (Jacob) to God.
2. God ordered Jacob's gift to be perpetually redistributed in order to support the economic disadvantages of the tribe of Levi, and the poor generally.
3. Tithes were agricultural goods from the increase of landowners who were commanded to give them for the nourishment of others.
4. Converting tithes into money was provisionally accepted when their transportation proved difficult, so long as they were reconverted back to provide nourishment.

In summary, our second historical appeal to fellowship examined tithing. The tithe was a predominant feature of the people of Israel who God selected and groomed to inhabit the land of Canaan. As shown, the tithe was God's redistribution of wealth to those who had the most need.

We have appealed to two historical examples of resource-sharing bearing the same traits as the earliest Christian communities in Acts 2. First, we examined the fellowship of Jesus during his earthly ministry. Second, we examined the law of sharing commodity wealth in ancient Israel. In our third and final appeal, let's examine the Essenes from the intertestamental period.

Not a great deal is written concerning the Essenes as a religious sect in Israel, but enough is known. And apart from whether it could be demonstrated that John the Baptist himself communed with the Essenes (scholars have noted the similarities between them) the New Testament doesn't openly mention them or their beliefs by name. Historically, they are most famous for their communal city called Qumran where the Dead Sea Scrolls were preserved and later found. Otherwise, Essenic obscurity harmonizes with scholarly agreement that they preferred a secluded, quiet, and unassuming life.

The Essenes were a mystic Jewish sect during the Second Temple period that flourished from the 2nd century BCE to the 1st century CE. The Jewish historian Josephus records that Essenes **existed in large numbers, thousands lived throughout Roman Judaea**. They were **fewer in number than the Pharisees and the Sadducees**, the other two major sects at the time. The Essenes lived in various cities but **congregated in communal life dedicated to voluntary poverty**, daily immersion, and **asceticism** (their priestly class

practiced celibacy). Most scholars claim they seceded from the Zadokite priests. - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Essenes>

Some scholars hold that Essenes established a monastic community at Qumrān in the mid-2nd century BC, probably during the reign of Simon (143/142–135/134 BC) but no later than the time of John Hyrcanus (135/134–104 BC). **Living apart**, like other Essenian communities in Judaea, the members of the Qumrān community turned to apocalyptic visions... They devoted their time to study of the Scriptures, manual labour, worship, and prayer. **Meals were taken in common** as prophetic celebrations of the messianic banquet. The baptism they practiced symbolized repentance and entry into the company of the “Elect of God.” - <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Essene>

Otherwise they are of the highest character, devoting themselves solely to agricultural labor... Moreover, **they hold their possessions in common**, and **the wealthy man receives no more enjoyment from his property than the man who possesses nothing...** They elect by show of hands good men to receive their revenues and the produce of earth and priests to prepare bread and other food. - Josephus, *Antiquities*, (93 AD), 18.18–22.

(75) Moreover, Palestine and Syria are not barren of exemplary wisdom and virtue. **In these countries lives no small portion of that most populous nation of the Jews.** There is a portion of those people called Essenes... (76) These men, in the first place, live in villages, avoiding all cities on account of the habitual lawlessness of those who inhabit them... (77) For they alone of **almost all men have become poor and destitute by deliberate action** rather than by any real deficiency of good fortune, but are nevertheless accounted very rich, judging contentment and frugality to be great abundance, as in truth they are. (79) There is not a single slave among them, but they are all free, **aiding one another with a reciprocal interchange of services...** (84) They also furnish us with many proofs of a love of virtue, such as **abstinence from all covetousness of money**, from ambition... and everything of that kind. **Lastly, they bring forward as proofs of** the love of mankind good-will, equality beyond all power of description, and **fellowship**, about which it is not unreasonable to say a few words. (85) **In the first place, then, there is no one who has a house so absolutely his own private property that it does not in some sense also belong to everyone.** For besides the fact that **they all dwell together in communities, the house is open to all those of the same convictions** who come to them from elsewhere. (86) **Then there is one treasury among them all, and their expenses are all in common. Their garments belong to them all in common, and their food is common through the institution of public meals. For there is no other people among which you can find common use of the same house, common adoption of one mode of living, and common use of the same table more thoroughly established in fact than among this tribe.** And is this not very natural? For whatever they receive for their wages after having been working during the day, they do not retain as their own, but bring it into the **common stock** and give any advantage that is to be derived from it to all who desire to avail themselves of it. (87) **Those who are sick are not neglected** because they are unable to contribute to the common stock, inasmuch as the tribe has in their public stock the means for supplying their necessities and treating their weakness, so that **from their ample means they support them liberally and abundantly.** - Philo, *Every Good Man is Free*, XII.75–87.

(2.119) **For there are three philosophical sects among the Jews.** The followers of the first of which are the Pharisees; of the second, the Sadducees; **and the third sect, which pretends to a severer discipline, are called Essenes.** These last are Jews by birth, and **seem to have a greater affection for one another** than the other sects have. (2.120) These Essenes reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence, and the conquest over our passions, to be virtue... (2.122) These men are **despisers of riches, and so very communicative** as raises our admiration. Nor is there anyone to be found among them

who hath more than another; for it is a law among them, that those who come to them must let what they have be common to the whole order,—insomuch that among them all there is no appearance of poverty, or excess of riches, but **every one's possessions are intermingled** with every other's possessions; and so there is, as it were, **one patrimony among all the brethren...** (2.127) Nor do they either buy or sell anything to one another; but every one of them gives what he hath to him that wanteth it, and receives from him again in lieu of it what may be convenient for himself; and although there be no requital made, they are **fully allowed to take what they want of whomsoever they please.** – Josephus, *The War of the Jews*, (75 AD), 2.119–2.127.

No other connections between the Essenes and early Christians are intended. But the existence of a sizeable group of religiously motivated people in this same region and time who maintained a system of communal sharing is relevant to our question about whether early Christian fellowship was novel. Note the lengths to which Philo substantiated his use of the term fellowship with a detailed description of their collective stock of property leveraged to help the poor. These ancient Judean practitioners of communal sharing defy any who might suggest early Christian fellowship was a discrete anomaly. Historians might agree this mode of living never became mainstream; nevertheless, they must concede that early Christians would have recognized it as a common regional alternative.

Because scripture and Jewish histories are so replete with examples of communal thought and behavior prior to Christianity, we need only briefly mention the Greek affinity too. The chief example is found in a prominent philosopher, Plato, who lived and wrote during the middle of the 4th century B.C. Plato's widely regarded work was titled *Republic* and in Books III and V we read about a set of theoretical arrangements designed to abolish and collectivize private property (and the family) as a necessary premise for the constitution of a utopian city called Kallipolis. The Socratic dialogue centers primarily around the Guardians who make up the city's ruling class.

“And how do the rulers in other states denominate the populace?” “Slaves,” he said. “And how do the rulers describe one another?” “Co-rulers,” he said. **“And ours?” “Co-guardians.”** ... “But what of your guardians. Could any of them think or speak of his co-guardian as an outsider?” “By no means,” he said; **“for no matter whom he meets, he will feel that he is meeting a brother, a sister, a father, a mother, a son, a daughter, or the offspring or forebears of these.”** “Excellent,” ... “Then, in this city more than in any other, when one citizen fares well or ill, men will pronounce in unison the word of which we spoke: ‘It is mine that does well; it is mine that does ill.’” ... **“Then these citizens, above all others, will have one and the same thing in common which they will name mine, and by virtue of this communion they will have their pleasures and pains in common.”** “Quite

so.” ... “Then it is the greatest blessing for a state of which the community of women and children among the helpers has been shown to be the cause.” “Quite so,” he said. “And this is consistent with what we said before. For we said, I believe, that **these helpers must not possess houses of their own or land or any other property, but that they should receive from the other citizens for their support the wage of their guardianship and all spend it in common.** That was the condition of their being true guardians.” “Right,” he said. ... “They should all rather, we said, share one conviction about their own, tend to one goal, and so far as practicable have one experience of pleasure and pain.” “By all means,” he said. “Then will not law-suits and accusations against one another vanish, one may say, from among them, **because they have nothing in private possession but their bodies, but all else in common?** So that we can count on their being free from the dissensions that arise among men from the possession of property, children, and kin.” ... “Then in all cases the laws will leave these men to dwell in peace together.” “Great peace.” “And if these are free from dissensions among themselves, there is no fear that the rest of the city will ever start faction against them or with one another.” “No, there is not.” **“But I hesitate, so unseemly are they, even to mention the pettiest troubles of which they would be rid, the flatterings of the rich, the embarrassments and pains of the poor in the bringing-up of their children and the procuring of money for the necessities of life for their households, the borrowings, the repudiations, all the devices with which they acquire what they deposit with wives and servitors to husband, and all the indignities that they endure in such matters, which are obvious and ignoble and not deserving of mention.”** “Even a blind man can see these,” he said. **“From all these, then, they will be finally free, and they will live a happier life than that men count most happy, the life of the victors at Olympia.”** “How so?” “The things for which those are felicitated are a small part of what is secured for these. Their victory is fairer and their public support more complete. For **the prize of victory that they win is the salvation of the entire state, the fillet that binds their brows is the public support of themselves and their children...**” - Plato, *Republic*, (380 BC), 5.463b-5.465d.

We have appealed to three Jewish historical examples and Plato’s *Republic* to show that communal sharing preceded the fellowship described in Acts. The incredible similarities cause us to believe that early converts understood joining the fellowship of Jesus’ followers meant entering a network of individuals who shared deeply to support the disadvantaged poor. In terms of their expectation for how long they were to follow this pattern, we can only speculate based on the durations of forerunning examples: Israel’s tithing lasted over a millennium, the Essenes persisted for over a century before the Great Jewish Revolt, and Jesus practiced it until his death. Furthermore, Christians were called to be ready for their Savior’s fiery return at any time, as they were continually provoked to remain steadfast in the faith and practice of the apostles. Nowhere does the New Testament suggest the standards handed down to them would change ahead of Jesus’ return. Instead, deviations from them appeared to be the primary markers of Christian profligacy disqualifying entrance into the kingdom.

Luke 18:7 And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? **8 I tell you that he will avenge them speedily.** Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?

2 Peter 3:1 ...I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: **2** That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour: **3** Knowing this first, that **there shall come in the last days scoffers**, walking after their own lusts, **4** And **saying, Where is the promise of his coming?**... **7** But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men... **9** The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. **10** But **the day of the Lord will come as a thief** in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. **11 Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness,** **12** Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God... **14** Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless... **17** ...beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.

Jude 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and **exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.** **4** For **there are certain men crept in unawares**, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, **turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness**, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

Not only do these passages warn against deviating from the apostolic tradition in general, it seems profoundly noteworthy to our inquiry that Jesus focused specifically on conduct affecting the afflicted portions of the church as the primary grounds for blessing or cursing at his return.

Matthew 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: **32** And **before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats:** **33** And he shall set the **sheep on his right hand**, but the **goats on the left.** **34** Then shall the King say unto them **on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:** **35** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: **36** Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. **37** Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? **38** When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? **39** Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? **40** **And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.** **41** Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: **42** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: **43** I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not...**45** ...Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it

not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

The sum of these historical factors helps to explain why initial descriptions of fellowship were rendered so matter-of-factly, an aspect of the New Testament which can be disconcerting to moderns sifting through centuries' worth of doctrinal and historical baggage. To a contemporary audience of tithing Jews familiar with Jesus or the Essenes, this form of fellowship would have been much simpler to identify and accept compared to audiences like ours. Thus, Acts 2 was an historic continuation of practices meant to curtail wealth inequality—not a passing fad, but a natural outgrowth of Jesus' ministry, Jacob's tithe, and Essenic tradition, all of whom garnered esteem in their own time.

Grammatical Appeal

In this section, we'll examine the grammar in the New Testament used to describe the brotherly love and charity in the community of early Christians after the ascension of Jesus. Fellowship is a major biblical term. Any tolerance for ultra-fluid definitions stemming from the backgrounds or impulses of modern interpreters is detrimental to its original value. Only by scouring the New Testament for associated terms, studying their definitions, and examining their intra-textual coherence will our confidence in the original intended meaning grow.

Unfortunately, "fellowship" today suffers from ever-changing, kaleidoscopic definitions, especially compared to "giving" or "sharing" or "common" whose definitions seem quite fixed. Our tendency to paint a wide range of activities with fellowship knows no bounds. That it can mean anything is how we now know it means nothing. Are we in fellowship if we affirm the same ideas? Does it mean sharing the same mission? Does it happen when you give spare change to a homeless man? Is it unique to religion? How does adding "Christian" affect it? Does it occur while sitting through a sermon? What about when Christians play golf and dine out – is that fellowship? Would New Testament authors condone this ambiguity? What if the original definition towers

over the topsy-turvy ones today? Would Christian leaders even care? In contrast to its modern disintegration, fellowship has an exceedingly narrow meaning and application in the Bible.

A simple survey of the New Testament will produce our first references to “fellowship” and etymologically similar terms (terms sharing the same root words). Considering the inflated use of the word today, its limited appearance in the New Testament is remarkable. However, examining these original contexts will help set the stage for a more comprehensive understanding. Then we can check later mentions in the New Testament to test whether authors changed, diluted, or expanded on the meaning of fellowship. Ultimately, we want a framework to discern whether any Christians can be described as having fellowship based on this careful hermeneutic.

First, consider the modern definition of the English word “fellowship” (not the definition of the underlying Greek term being translated, but the English-speaking definition).

fellowship - *noun*, 1. **companionship**, company 2a: **community of interest, activity, feeling, or experience** 2b: the state of being a fellow or associate 3: **a company of equals or friends: association**. 4: the quality or state of being comradely 5. **obsolete**: membership, **partnership**. - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fellowship>

fellowship - *intransitive verb*: to join in fellowship especially with a church member; *transitive verb*: to admit to fellowship (as in a church). - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fellowship>

The modern English definitions cited are quite broad, which is to be expected. Fellowship could just as well apply to friends out camping as it could to churchgoers adhering to strict beliefs and attendance. Note that modern dictionaries acknowledge obsolete forms or expressions of the term. The forerunner to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary provides a glimpse into some of these older attributes dating back to 1828.

fel’lowship, noun 1. **Companionship**; society; consort; mutual association of persons on equal and friendly terms; familiar intercourse. 2. Association; confederacy; combination. 3. **Partnership; joint interest**; as *fellowship* in pain... 5. **Frequency of intercourse**... 7. **Communion; intimate familiarity**. 8. In arithmetic, **the rule of proportions, by which the accounts of partners in business are adjusted, so that each partner may have a share of gain or sustain a share of loss, in proportion to his part of the stock**. - <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/fellowship>

Recent evolutions of English show the term fellowship has clearly gone from greater distinction to much less over time. The older definition included elements of intimacy, frequency in meeting, and more notably, the reckoning of corporate net income and stock. But the exceptional link is “partnership” which was perfectly analogous in 1828, but obsolete by today’s standard. How was partnership defined then?

PARTNERSHIP, noun, The association of two or more persons for **the purpose of undertaking and prosecuting any business**, particularly trade or manufactures, **at their joint expense**. In this case, **the connection is formed by contract; each partner furnishing a part of the capital stock and being entitled to a proportional share of profit**, or subject to a proportional share of loss; or **one or more of the partners may furnish money or stock, and the other or others contribute their services**. The duration of the partnership may be limited by the contract, or it may be left indefinite, subject to be dissolved by mutual agreement. 1. **Joint interest or property**. - <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/partnership>

Even though the 1828 definition expands a little more on property rights and interest among partners, modern dictionaries underscore the same thing pertaining to shared resources, capital, profit, and loss among business associates.

Partnership - *noun*, 1: the state of being a partner 2a: a **legal relation existing between two or more persons contractually associated as joint principals in a business** 2b: the persons joined together in a partnership 3: a relationship resembling a **legal partnership and usually involving close cooperation** between parties **having specified and joint rights and responsibilities**. - <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/partnership>

While modern lexicographers suggest the link between fellowship and partnership is now obsolete, joint interest in property was a leading way to understand fellowship as recent as the 19th century. All definitions of fellowship (new and old) include aspects of camaraderie and companionship, but the difference is revealed primarily in its detachment from partnership.

We have not yet explored the Greek term used in the New Testament, but the English has already helped frame a key question: what portion of Christian fellowship pertains to social companionship versus partnership (or joint equity)? Has fellowship only to do with friendship without regard to property, or is it singularly concerned with sharing things? If a blend is true, or resource sharing denotes the highest form of friendship, then we can explain some of the covetousness in churches by their degenerate grammar. And if a thorough analysis of the New

Testament demonstrates that fellowship is generally defined by both companionship and joint equity, then Christians who only affirm one (against the other) cannot really be said to have fellowship with one another.

The first mention of “fellowship” in all major English translations of the New Testament is found in Acts 2:42. This is where our grammatical analysis begins.

Acts 2:1 And when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. **2** And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. **3** And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. **4** And **they were all filled with the Holy Ghost**, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. **5** And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. **6** **Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together**, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language... **12** **And they were all amazed, and were in doubt**, saying one to another, What meaneth this?... **14** But **Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them...** **36** **Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.** **37** **Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart**, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do? **38** **Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized** every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost... **40** And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation. **41** **Then they that gladly received his word were baptized:** and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. **42** **And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship (G2842), and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.** **43** And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. **44** **And all that believed were together, and had all things common (G2839);** **45** **And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.** **46** **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, **47** Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

■ **G2842** - koinōnia, *koy-nohn-ee'-ah* From G2844; **partnership**, that is, (literally) participation, or **(social) intercourse**, or **(pecuniary - i.e., monetary) benefaction**: - (to) communicate (-ation), communion, (contri-), **distribution**, fellowship. Total KJV occurrences: 20 <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lexicon/g2842/kjv/tr/0-1/> (Strong's Definitions)

■ **G2839** - koinos, *koy-nos'* Probably from G4862; **common, that is, (literally) shared by all or several**, or **(ceremonially) profane**: - common, defiled, unclean, unholy. Total KJV occurrences: 12

The first half of the passage provides the reasons for all the conversions after Pentecost. The first mention of the Greek term koinōnia (translated “fellowship”) is found in verse 42. Strong's Exhaustive Concordance provides two defining attributes: (1) social intercourse, and (2) pecuniary

(monetary) benefaction. Additionally, the lexical entry indicates fellowship is synonymous with partnership, which we already know pertains to joint rights of property from Webster's dictionaries. So, the Greek conveys both joint equity and companionship. But considering their differences, let's look at the surrounding text for clues as to which carries greater weight, even if both are integral.

Just two verses later (in Acts 2:44) we are told these same Christians had all things in common. The underlying Greek word for "common" here is *koinos*, which means "shared in common (by all or several)."

Acts 2:42 And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship (**koinōnia**), and in breaking of bread, and in prayers... 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common (**koinos**)...

The adjective *koinos* is translated almost as many times to mean "shared" or "collective" as it is "profane" or "unclean." This latter definition does not appear to be in focus considering the etymological similarity and proximity to *koinōnia* just two verses prior, where the emphasis is on sharing doctrine, food, prayers, etc. We can be confident the author intended to connect this description to our acquaintance with *koinōnia*. New believers were together (the companionship), and they had all things in common (the partnership or joint equity). Therefore, the context supports an understanding of "fellowship" inclusive of social interaction as well as joint equity partnership. But the descriptions don't end there.

The legendary portrayals of the love and charity from early Christians immediately proceed from this. Not only did they just think that possessions were shareable, many proved it by selling costly ones and giving them away.

Acts 2:44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common (G2839); 45 **And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.** 46 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,

Before continuing with Acts for more detail on how Christians had "all things in common," let's explore how terms relating to fellowship (*koinōnia*) might have been used elsewhere by Luke

for greater definition and precedent. By looking at the Strong's Concordance entries near *koinōnia* (No. 2842) readers can find related terms. The only one used outside of Acts is found in Luke 5 - its transliteration is *koinōnos* (No. 2844).

Luke 5:1 ...he [Jesus] stood by the lake of Gennesaret... 3 And **he entered into one of the ships, which was Simon's**, and prayed him that he would thrust out a little from the land. And he sat down, and taught the people out of the ship. 4 Now **when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep**, and let down your nets for a draught. 5 And Simon answering said unto him, **Master, we have toiled (G2872) all the night... nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.** 6 And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes: and their net brake... 8 When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord. 9 For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken: 10 And so was also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, **which were partners (G2844 - *koinōnos*) with Simon.** And Jesus said unto Simon, **Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men.** 11 **And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook (G863) all, and followed him.**

■ **G2872** - *kopiaō*, *kop-ee-ah'-o* From a derivative of G2873; to feel fatigue; by implication to **work hard**: - (bestow) **labour**, toil, be wearied.

■ **G2844** - *koinōnos*, *koy-no-nos'* From G2839; a sharer, that is, **associate**: - companion, **fellowship**, partaker, **partner**. Total KJV occurrences: 10

■ **G863** - *aphiēmi*, *af-ee'-ay-mee* From G575 (to send); to send forth, in various applications: - cry, forgive, **forsake**, **lay aside**, **leave**, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, **remit**, suffer, **yield up**.

This passage has a lot more to do with Christian fellowship than first meets the eye. Luke used this related term *koinōnos* in v. 10 to describe the relationship between James, John, and Simon (Peter)—they were “partners” in fishing. According to the lexical entry, these men were in close association, even fellowship. Consider the audible and graphical similarity between the two terms: *koinōnos* *koy-no-nos'* (G2844) and *koinōnia* *koy-nohn-ee'-ah* (G2842). The entry for *koinōnia* (fellowship) admits origin to this term for “partners” seen first in Luke 5:10.

In addition to the historical basis of fellowship expressed in the exchange of paid professions for unpaid ones, we now have a grammatical appeal to the same feature. Jesus took several men who were partnered to catch fish and partnered them to catch men with the gospel. Consider how commercial enterprises pool capital, labor and skill to their collective ends... Peter, James, and John gave some of these things (maybe all) to follow Jesus. Based on Peter's reaction to the rich

man in Luke 18, their giving was not trivial. The spiritual quality of this heavenly partnership is distinguished by the deferred, eternal reward cashed out in the kingdom, contrasted with uncertain and corruptible wages in the world now.

Luke 18:18 And a certain ruler asked him, saying, Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?... 20 You know the commandments: ‘Do not commit adultery, Do not murder, Do not steal, Do not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother.’” 21 And he said, “All these I have kept from my youth.”... 22 Now when Jesus heard these things, he said unto him, **Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, and distribute unto the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me.** 23 And when he heard this, **he was very sorrowful: for he was very rich.** 24 And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 25 For it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God. 26 And they that heard it said, Who then can be saved?... 28 **Then Peter said, Lo, we have left (G863) all, and followed thee.** 29 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, **There is no man that hath left (G863) house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children, for the kingdom of God's sake,** 30 **Who shall not receive manifold more** in this present time, and in the world to come life everlasting.

■ **G863** - *aphiēmi, af-ee'-ay-mee* From G575 (to send); to send forth, in various applications: - cry, forgive, **forsake, lay aside, leave**, let (alone, be, go, have), omit, put (send) away, **remit**, suffer, **yield up**.

Discipleship and fellowship were associated with high costs from the beginning, evidenced by Peter in Luke 18:28 and by Jesus earlier in Luke 14:33. Sometimes these costs were counted in terms of relationships or behavioral reforms, but money itself cannot be ruled out considering the context of Luke 18 and the charitable examples in Acts 2-6.

Luke 5 and Luke 18 are critical pretexts to his narrative in Acts about fellowship. Coupled with a readiness to give up jobs, money, and family, Luke described the fellowship of the apostles as a sort of joint enterprise leading to everlasting wealth. So, when Acts 2:42-45 says early believers continued in the apostles' *koinōnia* fellowship, the selling of possessions and giving to the poor seems perfectly aligned. Apostolic and early Christian fellowship is therefore understood as the contribution of money, labor, and skill to meet the needs of fellow partners in the business of Jesus' free gospel and teachings. These charitable Christian acts were so central and relevant to Luke's description of the early church's fellowship, we are given even more detail about them two chapters later.

Acts 4:29 And now, Lord, behold their threatenings: and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word, 30 By stretching forth thine hand to heal; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus. 31 And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness. 32 **And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common** (G2839). 33 And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 34 **Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices** (G5092) **of the things that were sold,** 35 **And laid** (G5087) **them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution** (G1239) **was made unto every man according as he had need** (G5532). 36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37 **Having land, sold it, and brought the money** (G5536), **and laid** (G5087) **it at the apostles' feet...** 5:1 **But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession,** 2 **And kept back part of the price** (G5092), his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, **and laid** (G5087) **it at the apostles' feet.** 3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the **price** (G5092) of the land?

- **G2839** - koinos, *koy-nos* Probably from G4862; common, **that is, (literally) shared by all or several**, or (ceremonially) profane: - common, defiled, unclean, unholy.
- **G5092** - timē, *tee-may* From G5099; **a value, that is, money paid**, or (concretely and collectively) valuables; **by analogy esteem** (especially of the highest degree), or the dignity itself: - **honour**, precious, **price**, some.
- **G5087** - tithēmi, *tith'-ay-mee* A prolonged form of a primary word θέω theo; **to place** (in the widest application, literally and figuratively; properly in a passive or **horizontal posture**, and thus different from G2476, which properly denotes an upright and active position, while G2749 is properly reflexive and utterly **prostrate**): - + advise, appoint, **bow**, **commit**, conceive, **give**, **kneel down**, **lay** (aside, down, up), make, ordain, purpose, **put**, **set (forth)**, **settle**, **sink down**.
- **G1239** - diadidōmi, *dee-ad-id'-o-mee* From G1223 and G1325; **to give throughout a crowd**, that is, **deal out**; also to deliver over (as to a successor): - (make) distribute (-ion), **divide**, **give**.
- **G5532** - chreia, *khri'-ah* From the base of G5530 or G5534; employment, that is, an affair; also (by implication) occasion, demand, **requirement or destitution**: - business, **lack**, **necessary (-ity)**, **need** (-ful), use, want.
- **G5536** - chrēma, *khray'-mah* Something useful or needed, that is, **wealth**, price: - **money**, **riches**.

For the second time after Pentecost, Luke recounts the degree to which early Christians proved their fellowship by viewing the equity of their possessions as shareable against the needs of the church. Radical giving did not result in widespread poverty; instead, Luke describes the community as not having any who lacked.

After the first accounts of Christians selling possessions, Luke provides even more detail on how the value of sold property was transferred. Not only does Luke describe the mechanics of joint equity sharing, but he also lends a biblical perspective on property rights under this period of the new covenant. Such things are now fiercely debated in the context of political philosophies such as Communism or Democratic Socialism. An expanded discussion can be found in the last section of the paper titled “Practical Considerations.”

From all these primary accounts we can isolate the most relevant terms associated with “fellowship” and then scrutinize their appearance elsewhere for a comprehensive review of how other New Testament authors used them. In order of appearance, they are: *koinōnia* “fellowship” (G2842); *koinos* “common” (G2839); *timē* “prices” (G5092); *tithēmi* “laid” (G5087); *diadidōmi* “distribution” (G1239); and *chreia* “need” (G5532). Finding these exact or very closely related Greek terms in other books or epistles should indicate whether fellowship as joint equity sharing persisted beyond the early accounts of it in Acts.

The Greek terms mentioned above have been underscored and expanded upon over the next several pages. Just because Luke used these terms to describe fellowship in Acts doesn’t mean it must be invoked every other place they’re found in scripture; readers are free to cross-check passages not included here to find cases where fellowship is not in view.

The KJV translates Strong’s G2842 *koinōnia** in the following manner:

fellowship (12x), communion (4x), communication (1x), distribution (1x), contribution (1x), to communicate (1x)

Romans 15:25 But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. 26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution (G2842)** for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem. 27 It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, **their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.**

- In the context of writing to Christians in Rome about his travel plans and visitation, Paul discussed the task of bringing “carnal things” as “contribution” (fellowship) to Christians in Jerusalem who were lacking. He implied that despite the geographic distance between Macedonia and Jerusalem, Macedonians were debtors to the saints in Jerusalem for the spiritual blessings they had received. Here fellowship was directly equated to material support sans proximate companionship (considering the distance between these two groups). Additionally, the term “minister” in verse 27 is a Greek term from which we get

“deacons” today. It can be used broadly with regard to ministry; however, when the administration of resources is in view, there is a strong connection to Acts 6:1-3 and deacons appointed to distributing assets to the poor.

2 Corinthians 8:1 Moreover, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia; **2** How that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality. **3** For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves; **4** Praying us with much intreaty that **we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship (G2842) of the ministering to the saints.** **7** Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye **abound in this grace also.** **8** I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. **9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich...** **11** Now therefore perform the doing of it; that as there was a readiness to will, so **there may be a performance also out of that which ye have...** **13 For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened: 14 But by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want; that there may be equality: 15 As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.**

- Paul tells again the manner in which the Macedonians supplied offerings (material wealth, money) to be given to the impoverished saints in Jerusalem. In this part of the letter, Paul stirred up the spirit of grace in Corinth and anticipated their contribution of “fellowship.” This happens to be where we find the famous appeal to Jesus who, though he was rich, became poor. And note the callback in v. 15 to Luke’s description of fellowship in Acts 4:34 wherein nobody lacked. These are all connected and convey a strong indication that Paul understood Christian fellowship as something which produced material equality among believers through sharing.

Galatians 2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, **they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship (G2842);** that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. **10** Only they would that **we should remember the poor;** the same which I also was forward to do.

- This passage shows the conceptual linkage both Paul and Peter find between fellowship and giving to the poor. It’s also a nod to the great partnership swap in Luke 5 where some apostles went from the business of catching fish to catching men. We hear a faint echo of it by Peter; his would be unto the Jews, and Paul’s unto the heathen.

Communal sharing in the New Testament is sometimes described with terms not directly sourced in Acts, but closely related. They include: sugkoinōneō (G4790) which means “to have fellowship with, or become a partaker together with others,” and koinōneō (G2841) which means “be partaker, communicate, distribute.” In the Greek we see the etymological root koinō connecting them all. Both appear together in Philippians.

Philippians 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last **your care of me hath flourished again;** wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. **11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. 12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need...** **14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with (G4790 - sugkoinōneo) my affliction.** **15** Now ye Philippians know also, that in the

beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, **no church communicated** (G2841 - koinōneo) **with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.** 16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity (G5532). 17 Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. 18 **But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.** 19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

● In this letter Paul commended the readiness of Philippian believers to give and the actualization of it when they did “communicate” (verb form of fellowship, i.e. partner) with him concerning giving and receiving. In v. 15 Paul connects koinōnia with two other ideas, namely “giving” and “receiving.” These are direct references to Jesus’ commandments concerning generosity (see Luke 6:38; Mat. 5:42) and how the Father supplies needs to those who lack (see Mat. 7:7-11; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:28-30). Finally, note that the things sent to minister to Paul took care of his “necessity” (G5532) one of the Greek terms remaining on our list—the same used by Luke in Acts 2:45 describing how needs were alleviated through fellowship.

The next three terms on the list: “prices” timē (G5092); “laid” tithēmi (G5087); “distribution” diadidōmi (G1239) do not yield much independently. However, they are all found interwoven in the first letter of Paul to Timothy. The relationship between these terms in 1 Tim 5:3-16 and Acts 2-5 takes center stage in a related paper titled “Financial Support for Christian Leaders” on christianpapers.net where the passage is expounded in more detail.

The KJV translates Strong’s G5092 timē in the following manner:

honour (35x), price (8x), sum (1x), precious (1x)

The KJV translates Strong’s G5087 tithēmi in the following manner:

lay (28x), put (18x), lay down (12x), make (10x), appoint (6x), kneel down (5x)

The KJV translates Strong’s G1239 diadidōmi in the following manner:

distribute (2x), make distribution (1x), divide (1x), give (1x)

1 Timothy 5:3 **Honour** (G5091) widows that are widows indeed. 4 But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn... to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God... 8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith... 9 Let not a widow be **taken into the number** (G2639) under threescore years old, having been the wife of one man, 10 Well reported of for good works... 11 But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; 12 Having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith... 16 If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

■ G5091 - timaō, *tim-ah'-o* From G5093; to prize, that is, **fix a valuation upon**; by implication **to revere**: - honour, value.

■ G2639 - katalegō, *kat-al-eg'-o* From G2596 and G3004 (in its original meaning); **to lay down**, that is, (figuratively) **to enrol**: - **take into the number**.

● 1 Tim. 5 is widely regarded as instruction for how to aid widows who are no longer able to work for themselves. The term “honour” is used to distinguish those eligible to receive church aid, as opposed to those who are not. The qualifications are many, involving good works, age, and availability of kin. It follows that a 40-year-old widow known for good works should be refused “honour” and likewise a 65-year-old widow who has able-bodied children or nephews. Because of these two outcomes involving faithful widows, we know “honour” cannot signify general esteem or reverence (for why should either of them be refused it?). Something else is afoot. And considering the multiple references to financial aid in the text (“requite...”–v. 4, “provide...”–v. 8, “relieve...”–v. 16, and “charged...”–v. 16) money must be inherent to “honour” in 1 Tim. 5. Lexicons confirm this. G5091 timaō translated “honour” in 1 Tim. 5:3 is the verb form of G5092 timē translated “prices” in Acts 4:34, describing the value of possessions which were sold then. But that’s not the only grammatical connection 1 Tim. 5 has with Acts 4–5. We find a specialized term katalegō̄ (G2639) in v. 9 not found anywhere else. It’s a compound of two Greek terms (G2596 and G3004) each conveying their own meaning: to lay down, and to enumerate. Is it coincidental that in Acts 2:45, Acts 4:35 and Acts 5:2 we have examples of “prices” (honour) laid at the feet of church leaders to be divvied out to those in need—including widows in Acts 6? Was Paul instructing a completely new system of care for widows in Ephesus, or was he affirming the practical fellowship recorded in Acts, when needs were shared through a redistribution of wealth? The grammatical relationships are too strong to ignore.

The KJV translates Strong’s **G5532** chreia in the following manner:

need (25x), need (with G2192) (14x), necessity (3x), use (2x), needful (1x), necessary (1x), business (1x), lack (1x), wants (1x)

Acts 20:33 I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel. 34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities (G5532), and to them that were with me. 35 I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

● Paul appealed to Jesus’ instruction on giving and receiving, reminding them of his own example—how Christians should labour (as he did) and use earned income to support the weak. The opposite would be the intentional reduction of personal labor in order to receive aid from others who work hard.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; 11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; 12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; 13 **Distributing (G2841) to the necessity (G5532) of saints;** given to hospitality.

● Paul urged the church in Rome to “distribute” (G2841 - koinōneō̄, translated elsewhere as “be partaker” and “communicate” a directly related Greek term of fellowship) to the necessity of Christians (another reference to Acts 2:45 and Acts 4:35). Despite the many miles and years of separation from the early church at Pentecost, Paul nevertheless told these distant Christians to maintain the same fellowship reported by Luke.

Ephesians 4:28 Let him that stole steal no more: but **rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth (G5532).**

● Paul instructed the church in Ephesus that reformed Christians should secure jobs in order to give to those in need, all in the context of his description of them being “sealed” and “forgiven” and “members” and “renewed” in fellowship as believers (Eph. 4:23–32).

1 John 3:16 Hereby perceive we the love of God, because **he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.** 17 **But whoso hath this world's good (G979), and seeth his brother have need (G5532), and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?** 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

■ **G979** - bios, *bee'-os* A primary word; life, that is, (literally) the present state of existence; **by implication the means of livelihood:** - good, life, living.

● John reproved the idea that Christians can demonstrate fellowship merely through verbal niceties. If Jesus was willing to give his body in exchange for securing eternal life for his followers, how can they not willingly lay down the product of their labor to improve the lives of partners in the faith?

The point of examining these Greek terms in the latter parts of the New Testament was to determine whether a continuance or departure from original practices occurred. Avoiding this work conveniently permits their redefinition in spite of first clear uses. But as we have seen, nothing was abated. The grammatical analysis substantiates the historical witness of the 1st century church, that it maintained a readiness to share wealth in partnership with believers.

Logical Appeal

Now let's evaluate logical arguments presented in the New Testament which demonstrate that fellowship was primarily concerned with balancing deficits in Christian communities. So far, we've examined ancient history and New Testament grammar without reference to modern practices. Roman Catholics and Protestants by and large do not exhibit the fellowship of the first church in Jerusalem, or other Christian communities founded shortly thereafter. Instead, nearly all the money collected in today's congregations are referred to as "tithes" and "offerings" used to borrow against, pay salaries, hire speakers, buy training programs, donate to other organizations, and make rent. Members in need are not directly supported with this money in any meaningful way. That's where state welfare programs or other other charitable organizations come into play (who are often not even Christian). Otherwise needs simply go unmet while fellow believers sitting next to them in church don't hear about it. Because of this, fellowship has become a stripped-down word used to promote the equity of Christians in social terms only.

Leaders can't be bothered with simplistic appeals to old world ideas of sharing to help the weak—they've got a booming business to run, and risks to manage. A risky business it is. Church budgets are laden with recurring expenses on real estate and other obligations undreamt of by the early church. While leaders play make-believe hooking their pound of flesh like redux priests of a bygone era, the poor stockpile affection for whoever's left to help—typically governments and charities outside the church. Ever wanting more, a tenth of one's income is of course minimally expected. This amounts to pittance for the rich and a relative fortune for the poor. Christian fellowship has been hijacked, sucked dry, and replaced with social recreation by those who insist spiritual growth happens in high-end buildings, through trained speakers, and at the cost of others. This is all sustained by the notion that Christian households are isolated earning units without any obligation to financial support others (except the clergy).

This extravagant nonsense is challenged by three attestations in the New Testament which work together to form the strongest logical argument for understanding Christian fellowship as joint equity. First, Jesus promised that followers who forsake rich standards will receive a multitude of homes, families, and lands in this life (not just the next). Second, Jesus and the apostles figuratively taught that Christians ought to act like members of a single household and family, even going so far as to reckon other believers as though they were parts of their own body. And third, they encouraged followers to view good works (commonly associated with selfless giving) as evidence of spiritual gratitude and a covering for past sins. By working through these individually to underscore the arguments, the logical appeal to joint equity fellowship will show itself superior to the rest.

Christians quote widely from Mark 10, Luke 18, and Matthew 19 concerning the promise made to those who forsake wealth and natural affections in obedience to God.

Matthew 19:28 And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That **ye which have followed me, in the regeneration** when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, **ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.** **29 And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.** **30** But many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first.

This passage (along with its counterparts in Mark and Luke) record Jesus' response to the apostles who felt the mounting costs of followership. He redirected the focus onto life after resurrection. While that is certainly encouraging, other accounts expand on the hundredfold return of houses, family, and lands forming a genuine riddle that can only be solved with a proper understanding of Christian fellowship. Opposers of radical Christian sharing do not have an adequate answer to it. Consider the text, paying close attention to v. 30 in each passage.

Mark 10:28 Then Peter began to say unto him, Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee. 29 And Jesus answered and said, Verily I say unto you, **There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake,** and the gospel's, 30 **But he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands,** with persecutions; **and in the world to come** eternal life. 31 But many that are first shall be last; and the last first.

Luke 18:24 And when Jesus saw that he was very sorrowful, he said, How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God! 25 For **it is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.** 26 And they that heard it said, **Who then can be saved?** 27 And he said, The things which are impossible with men are possible with God. 28 Then Peter said, Lo, we have left all, and followed thee. 29 And he [Jesus] said unto them, Verily I say unto you, **There is no man that hath left house, or parents, or brethren, or wife, or children,** for the kingdom of God's sake, 30 **Who shall not receive manifold more in this present time, and in the world to come** life everlasting.

Jesus had just told the rich man to sell his possessions and follow him. How could he have received many more material things during his life (prior to immortality) if he chose to obey and get rid of possessions? Matthew's version places the emphasis on everlasting life; however, both Mark and Luke indicate something more about the promise of contemporary benefits preceding ultimate restoration. It's impossible to answer this question without appealing to communal sharing among believers. Only the total equity of resources common to thousands of households can dwarf the wealth of one, even one who is rich. The fellowship recorded in Acts stands as a direct fulfillment of Jesus' statement here.

The apostles doubted whether wholesale conversions could ever flow from such costly giving. Yet in Acts we read about many Christians (among thousands) who sold their possessions to distribute money to those in need (Acts 2:41-45; 4:4; 4:32-35). The nature of these possessions were lands and houses (clear references back to Mark 10:29 and Matt 19:29).

Acts 2:43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. **44 And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45 And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.**

Acts 4:32 And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: **neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.** **33** And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. **34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold,** **35** And laid them down at the apostles' feet: **and distribution was made** unto every man according as he had need.

Christians who were closest to Jesus' teachings from this period clearly perceived this was a normal response to the call of repentance and salvation as disciples. Just because we do not see this type of assembling and sharing in churches today does not mean we are excused to ignore the answer to this riddle. Also, houses and lands were not the only things multiplied and shared among believers; Jesus also said lost relatives would be replaced by the support of new brothers, sisters, children, and parents. This is the perfect segue into the second scriptural argument requiring examination.

The New Testament is full of language signifying those who consider themselves covenanted with Jesus are in the process of joining a new family and household. While our final constitution as sons and daughters of God won't occur until the resurrection of our bodies, it's quite clear we must behave as though it already has. The following scriptures demonstrate these things.

John 1:10 He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. **11** He came unto his own, and his own received him not. **12 But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God,** even to them that believe on his name: **13 Which were born (G1080),** not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but **of God.**

- **G1080** - gennaō, *ghen-nah'-o* From a variation of G1085; to procreate (properly of the father, but by extension of the mother); figuratively to regenerate: - bear, beget, be born, bring forth, **conceive**, be delivered of, gender, make, spring.

1 John 3:1 Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, **that we should be called the sons of God:** therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not. **2 Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be:** but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. **3 And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself,** even as he is pure.

Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: **4** According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that **we should be holy and without blame**

before him in love: 5 **Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself**, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Ephesians 2:17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father. 19 **Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God**;

Romans 8:13 For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die: **but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.** 14 **For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.** 15 For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; **but ye have received the Spirit of adoption**, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. 16 **The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God**: 17 **And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him**, that we may be also glorified together.

Matthew 12:46 While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him. 47 Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee. 48 **But he [Jesus] answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?** 49 **And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!** 50 **For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.**

The concept suggests that Christians need to consider themselves part of the family of God through Christ; but what implications would this have concerning fellowship? Regardless of religious persuasion, secular governments operate with a basic rule that parents should provide for their family. Judges compel divorced men to provide alimony for the needs of their children. Authorities remove children from homes whose physical needs are being neglected. These very same parents often face criminal prosecution. Husbands and fathers who fail to provide for the needs of their family face brutal ridicule and ostracism. These are secular, non-religious judgements which stem from an apparent universal standard that heads of household are responsible for the physical well-being of its juvenile occupants. The scriptures themselves scorn men who do not live up to this expectation.

1 Timothy 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

What impact does this have on Christians being told they are members a new spiritual family? It follows we are supposed to treat one another in ways similar to a natural family. A good father works to supply the needs of his wife and children which include shelter, clothing, food, and

medicine. He may also sell assets to secure these ends. But which father stashes paycheck after paycheck while the kids go hungry, or his wife goes cold? If he said, “I love my family—I spend time with them in person and we share similar beliefs,” would we not still consider him hateful? What is love if not the outpouring of material support to those we claim to care about?

John 13:33 Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you. **34** A new commandment I give unto you, **That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.** **35** By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

1 John 3:17 But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, **how dwelleth the love of God in him?** **18** My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.

1 John 4:20 If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? **21** And this commandment have we from him, **That he who loveth God love his brother also.**

Romans 12:9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good. **10** Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

And if this metaphor involving the nuclear family fails resonate, Jesus and the apostles provided another. The analogy of the church as a single human body comprised of various parts (or members) is sourced from one of Jesus' last and probably strongest exhortations for us to care for one another.

Matthew 25:31 When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: **32** And before him shall be gathered all nations: and **he shall separate them one from another**, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: **33** And he shall set the **sheep on his right hand**, but the **goats on the left**. **34** Then shall the King say unto them **on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:** **35** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: **36** Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick (G772), and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. **37** Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? **38** When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? **39** Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? **40** And the King shall answer and say unto them, **Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.** **41** Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, **Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels:** **42** For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: **43** I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick,

and in prison, and ye visited me not. 44 Then shall they also answer him, saying, **Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee?** 45 Then shall he answer them, saying, **Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.** 46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

- **G772** - asthenēs, *as-then-ace'* From G1 and the base of G4599; **strengthless** (in various applications, literally, or figuratively and morally): - more **feeble**, impotent, **sick**, without strength, **weak** (-er, -ness, thing).

Here's how the logic flows: the degree to which someone cares for Jesus' brethren (fellow Christians) becomes the measure by which he cares for Jesus himself. Therefore, the brother and Jesus are reckoned to be the same regarding due care. The two are expressed as one. This metaphor is used by Paul on occasion to drive home the point that endowed members of the church should care for the weaker and less fortunate.

1 Corinthians 12:12 **For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.** 13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 14 **For the body is not one member, but many.** 15 If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 16 And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; is it therefore not of the body? 17 If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? 18 **But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.** 19 And if they were all one member, where were the body? 20 **But now are they many members, yet but one body.** 21 **And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need (G5532) of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need (G5532) of you.** 22 **Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble (G772), are necessary:** 23 **And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour (G5092); and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.** 24 **For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more abundant honour (G5092) to that part which lacked (G5302):** 25 **That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another.** 26 **And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.**

- **G5532** - chreia, *khri'-ah* From the base of G5530 or G5534; employment, that is, an affair; also (by implication) occasion, demand, **requirement or destitution**: - business, **lack, necessary (-ity), need** (-ful), use, want.
- **G772** - asthenēs, *as-then-ace'* From G1 (as a negative particle) and the base of G4599; **strengthless** (in various applications, literally, or figuratively and morally): - more **feeble**, impotent, **sick**, without strength, **weak** (-er, -ness, thing).
- **G5092** - timē, *tee-may'* From G5099; **a value, that is, money paid**, or (concretely and collectively) valuables; **by analogy esteem** (especially of the highest degree), or the dignity itself: - **honour**, precious, **price**, some.

Romans 12:3 For I say... to every man that is among you, **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly**, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. **4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office:** **5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.** **6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us**, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; **7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching;** **8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.**

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, **bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;** **13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.** **14 And above all these things put on charity**, which is the bond of perfectness. **15 And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.**

Some might contend these passages have no bearing on the topic of fellowship, but the choice language stands to disagree. Paul certainly uses Jesus' metaphor to advance edification with spiritual gifts (tongues, healing, etc.); however, in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12 he cites charitable giving as well. Moreover, in 1 Corinthians 12 Paul's grammar calls back not only to Matthew 25 by caring for the weak (G772) but also to Acts 4 and 1 Timothy 5 with terms like "need" (G5532) and "honour" (G5092) in primary passages instructing on fellowship.

Paul argues there are some in the church who are more like the face or head of the human body (i.e., "comely parts"). Others are like the cruder parts. How so? Our face and head are not considered indecent, needing to be covered in public; moreover, as parts of the body, they are more intricately crafted to serve higher functions like seeing and reasoning. Thus, they are naturally esteemed greater in relation to other body parts serving mundane things, like walking and reaching with the legs and torso. Educated professionals in the church tend to be more influential and valuable such as the eyes of the body; however, less refined laborers might compare to the legs or torso. The eyes and head have no pressing need for being covered, but they go out of the way to drum support for the legs and torso. These are figures. For who avoids purchasing pants to cover his legs? And who doesn't warm the central part of their body first with a coat? So should the leaders of the church (acting as the central nervous system and conscience) promote the welfare of

the whole body. Anyone who doesn't feed or clothe himself is considered deranged; how much more the rich Christian who disregards the needs of the poor in the body of believers?

Finally, the third logical appeal pertains to how benevolence covers past sins, purifies the heart, and casts out fear. In no way does this imply that spiritual forgiveness comes through anything but faith in the sacrificial atonement of Jesus. But in Moses' covenant (having patterns fulfilled in Jesus) we see an array of sacrifices ministered at the altar. Some were compulsory, others voluntary. Some atoned for sin, and others expressed thanksgiving, or made peace. Each type of offering (or oblation) was conducted with different rules and purposes. Rather than delineating all the typology, sufficient to our inquiry is the association of compassion with old testament sacrificial offerings.

Philippians 4:10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last **your care of me** hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity... 14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, **that ye did communicate (G4790 sugkoinōneō) with my affliction.** 15 Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, **no church communicated (G2844 koinōnos) with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only.** 16 For even in Thessalonica **ye sent once and again unto my necessity...** 18 But I have all, and abound: I am full, **having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.** 19 But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus. 20 Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever.

Ephesians 5:1 Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; 2 And **walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.**

1 John 3:14 We know that **we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren.** He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. 15 Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. 16 **Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.**

1 Peter 4:7 But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer. 8 **And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves: for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.**

Where does the idea originate that compassionate works compare with offerings under the old covenant which minister to sin? Like almost everything the apostles wrote, the idea emerged from Jesus' teachings. But there are older references to it in Proverbs and the prophets as well.

The sacrificial system from Moses was described as having limited utility (Hebrews 10:1-4) and in categorical importance, it ranked lower compared to weightier matters.

Hosea 6:6 For I desired mercy, and not sacrifice; and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings.

Isaiah 1:10 Hear the word of the LORD, ye rulers of Sodom; give ear unto the law of our God, ye people of Gomorrah. **11 To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me?** saith the LORD: **I am full of the burnt offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he goats.** **12** When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? **13 Bring no more vain oblations**; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting...

Proverbs 16:6 By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD men depart from evil.

Proverbs 19:17 He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the LORD; and that which he hath given will he pay him again.

Proverbs 21:3 To do justice and judgment is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.

This prioritization does not mean sacrificial works under the law of Moses were superfluous, only that they had to harmonize with God's higher calling and expectations of Israel. Isaiah stipulated that the sacrifices were foul when ministered from a heart of sin, variance, and covetousness. Jesus clearly preferred commitments on both fronts.

Matthew 23:23 Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! **for ye... have omitted the weightier matters** of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: **these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone**.

John 15:12 **This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you.** **13 Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.**

Furthermore, charitable works covering past sins (1 Pet. 4:7) appears connected to the woman who washed Jesus' feet and the elevation of similar acts above other rites.

Luke 7:36 And one of the Pharisees desired him that he would eat with him. And he went into the Pharisee's house, and sat down to meat. **37** And, behold, **a woman in the city, which was a sinner... brought an alabaster box of ointment,** **38 And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment.** **39** Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself ...if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: **for she is a sinner.** **40** And Jesus answering said unto him, **Simon, I have somewhat to say**

unto thee... 41 There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. 42 And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? 43 Simon answered... I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most... 44 ...Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears... 45 Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. 46 My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. 48 And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven... 50 ...Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.

Matthew 9:11 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, **Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners?** 12 But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, **They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.** 13 **But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice:** for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance.

Jesus linked the woman's kindness to her faith, which saved her and prompted a declaration of forgiveness. If we doubt what qualifies as loving, charitable work, we need only to look at Jesus as the primary example. He left his job and home to help the lowly and preach the gospel of the hope of the Kingdom and used his power to heal the sick and feed the poor. He gave up heaven's finest comforts to dwell among us in the flesh; to be tempted, mistreated, and murdered. If Jesus diligently gave everything to make up for our shortcomings, how can we regard the fellowship of the early church as anything less than the most exemplary thing to follow? Which is more to a man, his possessions or his life? Jesus commands readiness to lose both (Luke 14:26-33) so only selfish unbelief remains in the one who turns up his nose at fellowship modeled perfectly.

This paper has presented three discrete appeals legitimizing Christian fellowship as joint equity sharing—not just social interaction, or affection. Historically, fellowship originates from the giving of Jacob's tithe to God and its redistribution to the needy in Israel. And the communal behavior exhibited by early Christians was hardly novel. The Essenes were a well-regarded segment of the Jewish people who held all things common in their devotion to God. Additionally, the multi-year period of Jesus ministry proved the effectiveness of a heavenly perspective on giving and receiving. Original audiences and readers of the apostolic witness would have been more familiar and accepting of these historical realities than us today. Grammatically, New Testament authors

expounded the same Greek terms which define fellowship as partnership sharing. Their consistent use proves the continuance of fellowship well after Pentecost. Finally, the logical appeals of the apostles are strongest in their effect on the conscience, especially considering Jesus' own kindness and generosity. In them are found a full accounting of the invitation to join God's household with all blessing and assurance in tow. We see a mighty relationship between good works and past sins, reflecting the power of Jesus' sacrifice on the hearts of men. Care for the poor is counted the same as care for Jesus; and only those who properly esteem Jesus will know him in the Kingdom.

Practical Considerations

Practical issues involved with fellowship were purposefully postponed so as not to put the cart before the horse. Making a bunch of starting assumptions and racing headlong into a critique of the machinery is reckless. The sick ought to spend less time fussing over methods, intervals, and side-effects of treatments compared to understanding a doctor's primary diagnosis first. Otherwise, we risk abandoning a sound conclusion over hair-splitting secondary things. Speculating over exactly how early Christians shared is a low-stakes game with low-stakes prizes compared to knowing the basis of their legendary commitment in the first place. However, now that we have established the hallmark of their love was fellowship modeled after Jesus and the apostles, let's safely wade into practical considerations.

Two critical factors impacting practical applications of fellowship are private property and free will, both of which are affirmed in the New Testament. If minimized, then we risk falling victim to cult persuasions or totalitarian political philosophies. If overstated, then we risk wanton luxury, division, and a heinous disregard for the poor. The most impressive thing about Christianity wasn't its charity per se, but the global influence it had despite such sacrificial ideology. This achievement is directly linked to a balanced appeal to freedom and reason. Jesus pricks a man's conscience to affect his will; whereas despots and religious cults tend to demean critical and independent thought to implant a collective conscience that can be preyed upon. To show that giving was completely

voluntary at the individual level, let's examine Peter's confrontation with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5. Then we can enumerate other interesting and practical questions about communal sharing for those inclined to practice it.

Acts 4:34 Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as **many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them**, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, **35 And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.** **36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas... 37 Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.** **5:1** But a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, **2 And kept back part of the price (G5092), his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.** **3** But Peter said, Ananias, **why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price (G5092) of the land? 4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power (G1849)?** why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? **thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.** **5** And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost: and great fear came on all them that heard these things... **7** And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. **8** And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much? And she said, Yea, for so much. **9** Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out. **10** Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

- **G5092** - timē, *tee-may'* From G5099; **a value, that is, money paid**, or (concretely and collectively) valuables; **by analogy esteem** (especially of the highest degree), or the dignity itself: - **honour**, precious, **price**, some.

- **G1849** - exousia, *ex-oo-see'-ah* From G1832 (in the sense of ability); privilege, that is, (subjectively) **force**, capacity, competency, **freedom**, or (objectively) mastery (concretely magistrate, superhuman, potentate, token of control), delegated influence: - authority, **jurisdiction**, **liberty**, power, **right**...

Contrasted with Barnabas, Ananias and his wife Sapphira sold a possession but were unwilling to give the entire price of it. Rather than settling their priorities and being honest, they chose to lie and tell the apostles they gave the whole price. Setting aside speculations about their motives, an important premise is observed in Peter's reply: "whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?" To argue all property was collectively owned by the church would be swallowed up by Peter's statement; however, Luke nevertheless stated they had all things in common, "them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common" (Acts 4:32). But even here we still see a nod to private ownership because they were only *saying* the

things they possessed were not their own. To resolve the tension, the law of non-contradiction would suggest that possessions remained under the power and jurisdictional authority of individuals until given away;³ however, in a community characterized by lots of giving, they could be described as having “all things in common” without implying they incorporated under civil law. The distinction recedes into pure abstraction if we focus only on observable behavior, for their confessional readiness to give and actual giving overwhelmed any practical meaning of private ownership, even if scripture nevertheless affirms its abstract reality.

To take it a step further, we can infer that the ownership rights did in fact transfer upon receipt by the apostles who acted on behalf of God. Because in the case of Ananias (v. 4) the defrauded party was not men (i.e., the apostles) but the Holy Spirit. This introduces God as a principal in the process of redistribution, which corresponds with Jacob’s voluntary tithe being redistributed by God to the Levites and to the poor. It also corresponds directly with Matthew 6 about how the Father cares for those in need.

Matthew 6:25 Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment? **26** Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; **yet your heavenly Father feedeth them.** Are ye not much better than they? **27** Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? **28** And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: **29** And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. **30** **Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith?** **31** Therefore take no thought, saying, **What shall we eat?** or, **What shall we drink?** or, **Wherewithal shall we be clothed?** **32** (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) **for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.** **33** **But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.**

Matthew 7:7 **Ask, and it shall be given you;** seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: **8** For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened... **11** **If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?**

³ Acknowledgment of individual ownership is also expressed by Paul in 2 Cor. 8:11 - “which *ye have*.”

At least during the current timeframe of the new covenant under which we live, a Christian retains ownership of his possession until it has been voluntarily given out of regard for Jesus. Upon receipt by church leaders, the property comes under the ownership of God who directs them to distribute it to those hungering for righteousness who lack basic needs. This is the way property rights are upheld, as choice and conscience find harmony in Jesus' sayings.

Having established that property rights and free will are integral to the foundations of Christian fellowship, we will go on to enumerate a variety of practical guidelines based on scripture, many of which form responses to common questions or concerns.

1. Non-obligatory giving. Individuals are never under any general compulsion to sell possessions as a requirement of acceptance to the church. Nevertheless, leaders do appear obligated to advocate for the poor and encourage the community's benevolence toward them out of esteem for Christ's own sacrifice. The following passages demonstrate the balance between self-determined giving and the provocation of leaders to keep the poor in mind.

Acts 5:3 But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land? **4 Whiles it remained, was it not thine own? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power?** why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

2 Corinthians 9:1 For as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you... **6** But this I say, **He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.** **7** Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver. **8** And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work:

1 Corinthians 12:25 That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. **26** And **whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.**

2 Corinthians 8:3 For to their power, I bear record, yea, **and beyond their power they were willing of themselves;** **4 Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.** **5** And this they did... **6** Insomuch that we desired Titus... he would also finish in you the same grace also. **7** Therefore, as ye abound in every thing... **see that ye abound in this grace also.** **8 I speak not by commandment,** but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love. **9 For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.** **10** And herein **I give my advice:** for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. **11 Now therefore perform the doing of it;**

that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have. 12 For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

Galatians 2:9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, **they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship;** that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. 10 **Only they would that we should remember the poor;** the same which I also was forward to do.

2. Resources should balance. Those with lesser incomes and expenses should not be burdened to alleviate the financial shortcomings of those with greater incomes and expenses. The point of fellowship in Paul's mind was to promote equality, or economic balance, across a spectrum of material and spiritual need. In this way, Christians with lesser means should never be provoked to supply greater material wealth to Christians who already have enough or more. The net effect should be the overall reduction of material need among believers, permitting them to continue undistracted in spiritual devotion. Rampant poverty or polarizing inequalities in the church are sure signs fellowship is not being practiced. That said, we should avoid getting distracted by disingenuous crusades over the annihilation of global poverty—"for ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always" (Mat. 26:11).

2 Corinthians 8:13 For I mean **not that other men be eased, and ye burdened:** 14 **But by an equality,** that now at this time **your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want: that there may be equality:** 15 As it is written, **He that had gathered much had nothing over; and he that had gathered little had no lack.**

3. Eligibility. Receivers of redistributed wealth are generally those whose legitimate needs stem from poverty, or poverty inducing conditions. The Bible doesn't provide an exact science of discrimination, but it does offer guidelines. Widows, elders, orphans, and the sick or frail are specific examples of those eligible. Additionally, famine created legitimate needs among 1st century churches. Finally, not only must the beneficiaries of communal sharing have actual needs, but there must be a qualitative assessment of morals as well. Jesus said the Father will meet the needs of those who are seeking after righteousness and the kingdom. Those sinning actively in unbelief should not receive benefaction within the body of Christ until they conform to his standards. Supporting scriptures are listed below. This is a common concern among those who are

inclined to give but who worry they are enabling bad behavior. Church leaders affirmed this concern. They counseled not to allow irresponsible or unbelieving people to partake in fellowship.

Acts 20:34 Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me. **35** I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to **support the weak (G770)**, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

- **G770** - astheneō, as-then-eh'-o From G772; to be **feeble** (in any sense): - be **diseased, impotent folk** (man), (be) sick, (be, be made) **weak**.

James 1:27 Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the **fatherless** and **widows** in their affliction...

1 Timothy 5:3 Honour widows that are **widows indeed**... **9** Let not a widow be taken into the number under threescore years old... **11** But the younger widows refuse... **16** If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are **widows indeed**.

Philippians 4:14 Notwithstanding ye have well done, that **ye did communicate (G4790)** with my **affliction (G2347)**.

- **G4790** - sugkoinōneō, *soong-koy-no-neh'-o* From G4862 and G2841; to **share in** company with, co-participate: - communicate (**have fellowship**) with, be partaker of.
- **G2347** - thlipsis, *thlip'-sis* From G2346; pressure (literally or figuratively): - afflicted, (-tion), **anguish, burdened**, persecution, **tribulation**, trouble.

Matthew 25:34 Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **35** For I was an **hungred**, and ye gave me meat: I was **thirsty**, and ye gave me drink: I was **a stranger**, and ye took me in: **36 Naked**, and ye clothed me: I was **sick**, and ye visited me: I was in **prison**, and ye came unto me.

Luke 14:13 But when thou makest a feast, call the **poor**, the **maimed**, the **lame**, the **blind**: **14** And thou shalt be blessed; **for they cannot recompense thee**: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

Acts 11:28 And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be **great dearth (G3042)** throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. **29** Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, **determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea**: **30** Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

- **G3042** - limos, *lee-mos* Probably from G3007 (through the idea of **destitution**); a **scarcity of food**: - dearth, **famine**, hunger.

Matthew 6:31 Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? **32** (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) **for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things**. **33** **But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you**.

Acts 2:37 Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said... **what shall we do?** 38 Then Peter said unto them, **Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins...**

1 Timothy 5:3 **Honour (G5091) widows that are widows indeed...** 5 Now she that is... desolate (G3443), trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day... 9 ...having been the wife of one man, 10 **Well reported of for good works;** if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

- **G5091** - timaō, *tim-ah'-o* From G5093; to prize, that is, fix a valuation upon; by implication to revere: - honour, value.

- **G3443** - monoō̄, *mon-o'-o* From G3441; to isolate, that is, bereave: - be desolate.

1 John 3:6 Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him. 7 Little children, let no man deceive you: **he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.** 8 **He that committeth sin is of the devil;** for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil. 9 **Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin;** for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 **In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.**

- In terms of financial benevolence, our duty is to love the children of God not those who become “children of the devil,” which are identified by their behavior.

1 Corinthians 5:3 **For I verily... have judged already... concerning him that hath so done this deed...** 5 **To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh,** that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus... 8 Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness... 9 I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company (G4874) with fornicators: 10 Yet not altogether... 11 **But... not to keep company (G4874), if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.**

- **G4874** - sunanamignumi, *soon-an-am-ig'-noo-mee* From G4862 and a compound of G303 and G3396; to mix up together, or associate with: - (keep) company (with).

2 Corinthians 6:14 **Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship (G3352) hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion (G2842) hath light with darkness?**

- **G3352** - metochē, *met-okh-ay'* From G3348; participation...: - fellowship.

- **G2842** - koinōnia, *koy-nohn-ee'-ah* From G2844; partnership, that is, (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction: - (to) communicate (-ation), communion, (contri-), distribution, fellowship.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, **this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.** 11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now them that are such we command... **that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread...** And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and **have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.**

4. Ineligibility. The inverse of what qualifies a person to receive communal support paints the picture of what disqualifies him. The rich and those with large incomes and large expenses are obviously excluded. Additionally, based on Paul's comments in 1 Timothy 5, people who are able-bodied should work to provide for their own needs—not take from the church. Therefore, unless one is supported because they physically cannot work in the marketplace (due to old age or ailment) a Christian must endeavor to work to be considered eligible for financial aid. This applies to church leaders as well (i.e., pastors, elders, bishops, overseers etc.) considering the example Paul gave them for how to rule a church by working to provide his own needs.⁴

1 Timothy 5:4 But if any widow **have children or nephews, let them** learn first to shew piety at home, and to **requite their parents:** for that is good and acceptable before God... **8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.** **16 If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged;** that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye **withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly,** and not after the tradition which he received of us. **7** For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; **8** Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought **with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:** **9** Not because we have not power, but **to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.** **10** For even when we were with you, **this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.** **11** For we hear that there are some which walk among you **disorderly, working not at all,** but are busybodies. **12** Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, **that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.**

5. Needs dictate intervals. The distribution intervals varied within the church. Some passages indicate it occurred as much as every day (Acts 6:1) and others suggest a weekly distribution (1 Cor. 16:2). A weekly distribution seems common considering the instruction from Paul in 1 Timothy 5 regarding widows, but more specifically because elders officiated Christian gatherings on the first day of every week. Evidence from Justin Martyr's writings in the 2nd century show that collections were dispersed on a weekly basis as part of the communal gathering (see his

⁴ See "Financial Support for Christian Leaders" (christianpapers.net) for more information about this topic, and for a defense of the view that pastors should, like all men, work to provide for themselves as a prerequisite to accepting any type of financial aid from the church.

excerpt below from *The First Apology*). Other collections were sent intermittently over great distances, like Paul's carrying contributions to Jerusalem during a prophesied period of famine. These observations demonstrate something about their flexibility, suggesting the primary answer to "how often should we give" was based on the needs themselves. If there were daily needs, then it made sense to collect and distribute daily. Weekly needs? Then distribute weekly. And in the event of natural or economic disasters, irregular lump sums sent over distance would be appropriate. Some local churches could theoretically experience a zero-interval based on not having identifiable needs within their own local body.⁵

Acts 6:1 And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because **their widows were neglected in the daily (G2522) ministrations (G1248)**. 2 Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

■ **G2522** - kathēmerinos, *kath-ay-mer-ee-nos*'From G2596 and G2250; **quotidian**: - daily. (quotidian from Webster's dictionary "1: occurring every day.")

■ **G1248** - diakonia, *dee-ak-on-ee'-ah* From G1249; attendance (as a servant, etc.); figuratively (eleemosynary) aid, (official) service (especially of the Christian teacher, or technically of the diaconate): - (ad-) minister (-ing, -tration, -try), office, **relief, service** (-ing).

- Acts 6 provides an example of giving and receiving on a daily basis.

Acts 24:10 Then Paul, after that the governor [Felix] had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself... 16 And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men. 17 **Now after many years I came to bring alms (G1654) to my nation, and offerings.** 18 Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

■ **G1654** - eleēmosunē, *el-eh-ay-mos-oo'-nay* From G1656; compassionateness, that is, (as exercised towards the poor) **beneficence**, or (concretely) a **benefaction**: - alms (-deeds).

Romans 15:24 Whosoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you... 25 **But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister (G1247) unto the saints.** 26 For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to **make a certain contribution (G2842) for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.** 27 It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For **if the Gentiles have been made partakers (G2841) of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.**

⁵ This situation may occur more often in affluent parts of the world. In these circumstances, believers should guard against boasting (Rev. 3:15-18) and consider how to use their resources to alleviate the needs of saints afar.

- **G1247** - diakoneō, *dee-ak-on-eh'-o* From G1249; to be an attendant, that is, **wait upon** (mentally or as a host, friend or [figuratively] teacher); technically to act as a Christian deacon: - (ad-) minister (unto), **serve, use the office of a deacon**.
- **G2842** - koinōnia, *koy-nohn-ee'-ah* From G2844; **partnership**, that is, (literally) **participation**, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction: - (to) communicate (-ation), communion, (contri-), **distribution**, fellowship.
- **G2841** - koinōneō, *koy-no-neh'-o* From G2844; to **share with others** (objectively or subjectively): - **communicate**, distribute, be partaker.

● Here Paul informs Roman Christians of his intention to minister carnal things (specifically “contributions,” the same word koinōnia for fellowship originally described in Acts 2-4). Note his use of the term diakoneō (G1247) which is the same root word used to discuss the daily ministration which was appointed to certain disciples to “serve tables” on behalf of widows (Acts 6:2). This contrasts with “ministering the word,” which the apostles refused to abandon for the lower work of distributing material aid to the poor. Therefore, these passages represent an example of irregular distribution among Christians, compared to what would have been more consistent in a local church gathering weekly.

1 Corinthians 16:1 Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. **2 Upon the first day of the week** let every one of you **lay (G5087) by him in store**, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. **3** And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

- **G5087** - tithēmi, *tith'-ay-mee* To place (in the widest application, literally and figuratively; properly in a passive or **horizontal posture**, and thus different from G2476, which properly denotes an upright and active position, while G2749 is properly reflexive and utterly **prostrate**): - + advise, appoint, **bow, commit**, conceive, give, X kneel down, lay (aside, down, up), make, ordain, purpose, put, **set (forth)**, settle, **sink down**.

● Paul instructs the Corinthian believers to store up free will offerings on a weekly basis to be collected and sent to aid saints in Jerusalem. Notice that Paul uses the same term here as is found in Acts 4:35, tithēmi (G5087) where Christians were described as laying the value of their possessions at the feet of the apostles, a primary characteristic of original fellowship.

And **the wealthy come to aid of the poor**, and we are always together. Over all that we receive we bless the Maker of all through His Son Jesus Christ and through the Holy Spirit. **And on the day called Sunday all who live in cities or in the country gather together in one place**, and the memoirs of the Apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits. Then when the reader has finished, the Ruler in a discourse instructs and exhorts to the imitation of these good things. Then we all stand up together and offer prayers; and, as we said before, when we have finished the prayer, bread is brought and wine and water, and the Ruler likewise offers up prayers and thanksgivings to the best of his ability, and the people assent, saying the Amen; and the distribution and the partaking of the eucharistized elements is to each, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons. **And those who prosper, and so wish, contribute what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the Ruler, who takes care of the orphans and widows, and those who, on account of sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers who are sojourners among us, and in a word [He] is the guardian of all those in need.** But we all hold this common gathering on Sunday, since it is the first day, on which God transforming darkness and matter made the Universe, and

Jesus Christ our Savior on the same day rose from the dead. For they crucified Him on the day before Saturday, and on the day after Saturday, He appeared to His Apostles and disciples and taught them these things which we have passed on to you also for your consideration. – Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, (155–157 AD), Chap. 67.

- This chapter from Justin's first apology serves as historical testimony to the Christians still carrying on the practices of fellowship which originated in Acts 2–6, in this case a weekly interval. This piece of writing is generally dated to 155–157 A.D.

6. Minimalism affirmed. We already saw in our historical inquiry of fellowship that Jesus warned about the spiritual dangers of amassing wealth. Considering this tenet, along with the supporting commentary of the apostles, we can infer that early believers endorsed simple, unadorned lifestyles (not the flaunting of wealth with fine clothing, vacationing, jewelry, or cuisine). We should distinguish between excessive antagonism toward the rich and the stern counsel they need. Jesus' interaction with the rich ruler is a great example showing more regard for the rich man's soul than blame for letting wealth be a snare. Jesus taught that the word of God acting like a seed can be choked by worldly cares and riches, making a plant unfruitful. Knowing the destiny of unfruitful vines should motivate loving counsel to the rich. The New Testament also conveys a shrewd preference for modest lifestyles and an aversion to excess luxury.

Mark 10:20 And he answered and said unto him, Master, all these have I observed from my youth. **21** Then **Jesus beholding him loved him, and said** unto him, **One thing thou lackest: go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast, and give** to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me. **22** And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved: for he had great possessions. **23** And Jesus looked round about, and saith unto his disciples, **How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God!**

Matthew 13:22 **He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.** **23** But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty.

Luke 3:9 And now also the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: **every tree therefore which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.**

John 15:4 Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine... **5** I am the vine, ye are the branches: **He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit:** for without me ye can do nothing. **6** **If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch... and they are burned.**

Hebrews 13:5 Let your **conversation (G5158)** be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have:

- **G5158** - tropos, *trop'-os* From the same as G5157; a turn, that is, (by implication) **mode or style; figuratively deportment or character:** - (even) as, conversation, [+ like] **manner** (+ by any) **means, way.**

James 2:5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, **Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith...** **6 But ye have despised the poor...** **4:13** Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: **14 Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour...** **15** For that ye ought to say, **If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.** **16** But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil. **17** Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin...

Revelation 3:14 And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write... **15 I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot...** **17 Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;** and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: **18 I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich...** **19** As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

1 Timothy 6:3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; **4** He is proud, knowing nothing... **5 ...supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.** **6 But godliness with contentment is great gain.** **7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.** **8 And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.** **9 But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.** **10 For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows...** **17 Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; 18 That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate (G2843); 19 Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.**

- **G2843** - koinōnikos, *koy-no-nee-kos* From **G2844**; communicative, that is, (pecuniarily) liberal: - willing to communicate.

- **G2844** - koinōnos, *koy-no-nos* From G2839; a sharer, that is, associate: - companion, **fellowship**, partaker, **partner.**

● Notice the inescapable conclusion that Paul means for the rich to learn how to embrace Christian fellowship by giving. Also note the grammar of v. 19 “laying up in store” and its striking similarity to Paul’s instructions to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 16 about collections for the saints in Jerusalem: “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay (G5087 - tithēmi) by him (G1438 - heautou) in store (G2343 - thesaurizō) as God hath prospered him...” Both are derivative of Jesus’ instruction not to store up (G2343 - thesaurizō) treasure on earth, but rather to be rich with God in generosity (See Luke 12:21, Mat 6:19-20). In a curious way, Jesus’ gospel to rich and poor alike is an offer of surer everlasting wealth via the immortalization of the body and inheritance of the earth (Mat 5:5).

1 **Peter 3:1** Likewise, ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands... 2 While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear. 3 **Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;** 4 ...even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

1 **Timothy 2:1** I exhort therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men; 2 For kings, and for all that are in authority; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty... 9 In like manner also, **that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array...**

1 **Thessalonians 4:10** And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more; 11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; 12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

1 **John 2:15** Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 16 **For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride (G212) of life (G979), is not of the Father, but is of the world.** 17 And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: **but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.**

- **G212** - alazoneia, *al-ad-zon-i'-a* From G213; braggadocio, that is, (by implication) **self confidence: - boasting, pride.**

- **G979** - bios, *bee'-os* A primary word; life, that is, (literally) the present state of existence; by **implication the means of livelihood: - good, life, living.**

7. **Debts.** Personal debts arising from immodest spending and or slothful lifestyles should not be paid off through fellowship. While naturally intuited, the conclusion is also stipulated in the New Testament and addressed by early Christian writers. This corresponds with the second point about balancing needs. In today's world, excessive debt is rarely found among lower income workers, suggesting those with higher incomes are leveraging their capital to finance unnecessary expenses which should not be paid for by the church's charity. Paul stipulates that servants under debt should work, and work admirably, to fulfill their contracts. The *Didache* encouraged givers to agonize over the legitimate receipt of alms, and Ignatius warned Polycarp about debt-slaves seeking freedom through the church's treasury.

1 **Corinthians 7:17** But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches... 20 Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. 21 **Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free (G1658), use it rather.** 22 For he that is called in the Lord,

being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

1 Corinthians 12:13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, **whether we be bond (G1401) or free (G1658)**; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

- **G1401** - doulos, *doo'-los* From G1210; a **slave** (literally or figuratively, involuntarily or voluntarily; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of subjection or subserviency): - **bond (-man), servant**.
- **G1658** - eleutheros, *el-yoo'-ther-os* Probably from the alternate of G2064; unrestrained (to go at pleasure), that is, (as a citizen) not a slave (whether freeborn or manumitted), or (generally) **exempt (from obligation or liability)**

Ephesians 6:5 Servants (G1401), be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; **6 Not with eyeservice (G3787), as menpleasers; but as the servants (G1401) of Christ**, doing the will of God from the heart; **7 With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: 8 Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.**

Colossians 3:22 Servants (G1401), obey in all things your masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice (G3787), as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God:

- **G3787** - ophthalmodouleia, *of-thal-mod-oo-li'-ah* From G3788 and G1397; sight labor, that is, that needs watching (remissness): - eye-service. Webster's definition of remiss 1: **negligent in the performance of work** or duty : CARELESS 2: **showing neglect** or inattention : **lax**

1 Timothy 6:1 Let as many servants (G1401) as are under the yoke (G2218) count their own masters worthy of all honour (G5092), that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed. **2 And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit.** These things teach and exhort. **3 If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; 4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, **whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5 Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, **supposing that gain is godliness:**** from such withdraw thyself. **6 But **godliness with contentment is great gain.** 7 For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. 8 **And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.******

- **G1401** - Doulos, *doo'-los* From G1210; a **slave** (literally or figuratively, involuntarily or voluntarily; frequently therefore in a qualified sense of subjection or subserviency): - **bond (-man), servant**.
- **G2218** - zugos, *dzoo-gos'* From the root of ζεύγνυμι zeugnumi (**to join**, especially by a "yoke"); a **coupling**, that is, (figuratively) servitude (**a law or obligation**); also (literally) the beam of the balance (as connecting the scales): - pair of balances, yoke.
- **G5092** - timē, *tee-may'* From G5099; a **value, that is, money paid**, or (concretely and collectively) valuables; by analogy esteem (especially of the highest degree), or the dignity itself: - **honour, precious, price, some**.

Titus 2:9 Exhort servants (G1401) to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things; **not answering again (G483)**; 10 **Not purloining (G3557)**, but shewing all good fidelity; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.

- **G483** - antilegō, *an-til'-eg-o* From G473 and G3004; to **dispute, refuse**: - answer again, **contradict**, deny, **gainsay** (-er), **speak against**.
- **G3557** - nosphizomai *nos-fid'-som-ah-ee* Middle voice from νοσφί nosphi (apart or **clandestinely**); to sequester for oneself, that is, **embezzle**: - **keep back**, purloin.

Woe to him who receives; for if one receives who has need, he is guiltless; but he who receives not having need shall pay the penalty, why he received and for what. And coming into confinement, he shall be examined concerning the things which he has done, and he shall not escape from there until he pays back the last penny. And also concerning this, it has been said, **Let your alms sweat in your hands, until you know to whom you should give.** - *The Didache*, (50-120 AD), Chap. I.

Let not the widows be overlooked; on account of our Lord be thou their guardian, and let nothing be done without thy will; also do thou nothing without the will of God, as indeed thou doest not. Stand rightly. Let there be frequent assemblies: ask every man to them by his name. **Despise not slaves, either male or female; but neither let them be contemptuous, but let them labour the more as for the glory of God, that they may be counted worthy of a more precious freedom, which is of God. Let them not desire to be set free out of the common fund, lest they be found the slaves of lust.** - Ignatius, *Letter of Ignatius to Polycarp*, (105-115 AD), Chap. IV.

8. Communal living. The degree to which fellowship might be understood as lodging together in multi-family compounds or large homes with other Christians could be distracting to its central aims (see point 2 - “Resources should balance”). Of course, individuals are free to use their possessions however they like to include cohabitating with like-minded people; however, the New Testament does not link the adaptation of property for this purpose with fellowship as a common ordinance. In fact, the only mention of real estate in the context of fellowship involved liquidation. However, even though scripture does not urge living together as a mainstay, it does theoretically solve for circumstantial or abbreviated needs of distressed Christians or missionary workers. The silence on this question should not be taken as a prohibition. Consequently, on one hand distinguishing between fellowship and living together is appropriate from an institutional perspective; but on the other, it would be foolish to denigrate communal living wholesale considering erstwhile critics might find refuge in it one day.

Still, those who insist on conflating the two might point to hospitality or generosity as precepts validating an explicit or implicit standard of living together. Let's examine some scriptures to better understand how these precepts may or may not apply.

Romans 12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; 11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; 12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; 13 **Distributing (G2841) to the necessity** of saints; given to **hospitality (G5381)**.

- **G2841** - koinōneō, *koy-no-neh'-o* From G2844; to **share with others** (objectively or subjectively): - **communicate**, distribute, be partaker.
- **G5381** - philonexia, *fil-on-ex-ee'-ah* From G5382; hospitableness: - **entertain strangers**, hospitality.

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Be not forgetful to **entertain strangers (G5381)**: for thereby some have **entertained (G3579) angels** unawares.

- **G5381** - philonexia, *fil-on-ex-ee'-ah* From **G5382**; hospitableness: - **entertain strangers**, hospitality.
- **G5382** - philoxenos, *fil-ox'-en-os* From G5384 and **G3581**; fond of guests, that is, hospitable: - given to (lover of, use) hospitality.
- **G3581** - xenos, *xen'-os* Apparently a primary word; foreign (**literally alien**, or figuratively novel); by implication a guest or (vice-versa) entertainer: -**host, strange (-r)**.
- **G3579** - xenizō, *xen-id'-xo* From **G3581**; to **be a host** (passively a guest); by implication be (make, appear) strange: - entertain, **lodge**, (think it) strange.

Like Romans 12:10-13 others also cite “hospitality” alongside good works we should exhibit, including terms related to koinōnia fellowship (1 Tim. 3:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; Tit. 1:8). As such, it's understandable how hospitality might inadvertently be interpreted as an extension of fellowship or an equivalent term. However, while “distributing” (koinōneō) is listed with good works like hospitality, rejoicing, praying, and teaching—that doesn't make them all the same.

Grammatically, the term “hospitality” signifies an affable reception of strangers as opposed to familiar loved ones. Consider the root xenos (G3581), the same seen in the English word xenophobia, defined as the fear of people from outgroups, particularly foreigners. Likewise, consider the author of Hebrew's expansion, that in practicing hospitality one might lodge angels. Nothing stresses the impermanence of a living arrangement more (prior to the restoration of all

things) than the mention of angels—the strangest, and perhaps most transient guests a household could conceive of hosting this side of heaven. Furthermore, that hospitality is extolled by the apostles specifically (Rom 16:23; Phlm. 1:22; 1 Jn 1:5) who benefited from it when traveling abroad is no surprise. These facts demonstrate that long-term living arrangements among Christians struggle to be regarded as anything more than normal, mutually advantageous living preferences—not fellowship, and not even hospitality, strictly speaking. But wouldn't a perpetually open offer to cohabitate at low rates (or no cost at all) be preferable in every setting, and therefore yoked to our concept of fellowship because it's generous?

If a Christian property owner chooses to extend below-market or free lodging to a believer dwelling permanently with him or her, that might well be gracious and generous. But calling it fellowship is an overreach considering our analysis of the term concerned with widespread practices. It's more akin to the private debt forgiveness of Onesimus than the fellowship typified in Acts. On Onesimus' behalf, Paul called in a favor with Philemon to pardon his debt, and to whatever extent Philemon was not inclined to, Paul committed to pay it himself (Phlm. 1:10-19). Was this an act of grace by Paul to the material benefit of Onesimus? Certainly. But does it instruct on fellowship at large? No, even in spite of Paul's appeal to the *koinōnia* shared with Philemon in the faith (Philem. 1:6-17). Because in his broader letters, Paul instructed that debtors should honor the contracts of their masters (i.e., bond holders, employers, etc.) even if their masters were believers, without any indication such arrangements needed correction under the auspices of fellowship (1 Tim 6:1-2). Paul's singular act of grace, like Christians gifting charitably low rent, should be remembered in no louder tones than originally bargained.

The motivations involved with living together are too inseparable from the isolated social and financial benefits to be feigned as a judicious devotion to Christian fellowship. This paper determines that fellowship is primarily concerned with the alleviation of material needs of vulnerable people facing difficult situations—not needs associated with self-esteem, social intimacy, or a good deal. A Christian community can be perfectly renowned for its generosity and sociability

without ever entertaining the notion of shared housing. In extreme cases, insatiable cravings for Christian company could lead to bizarre experiments in living arrangements, social isolation, and the creeping repudiation of personal property or responsibility.

Conclusion

Christians today view the first account of fellowship as though it were an embarrassing old photograph pulled down for the spectacle; we throw in with all the teasing curiosity before reshelving it fast. But those were our bright and innocent days, regardless of how old and insignificant they make us feel now. The apostle John said the love of God was bestowing good things to those in need (1 Jn. 3:17). Is this not the same love Jesus prophesied would wax cold? Lest shame turn to self-hatred, we must try to debrief and understand what's gone wrong.

Matthew 24:10 And then shall many be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another. 11 And many **false prophets shall rise, and shall deceive many.** 12 And **because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.** 13 But he that shall endure unto the end, the same shall be saved.

2 Peter 1:5 And beside this, giving all diligence, **add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6 And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7 And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.** 8 For **if these things be in you... ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful** in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 **But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.** 10 Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall... 2:1 **But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies...** 2 And **many shall follow their pernicious ways...** 3 And **through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you;** whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not... 12 But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption; 13 And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. **Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you;** 14 Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: **an heart they have exercised with covetous practices;** cursed children: 15 Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, **following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;** 16 But was rebuked for his iniquity: the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet. 17 These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever. 18 For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, **they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness,** those that were clean escaped

from them who live in error. 19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

Jude 1:3 Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should **earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered** unto the saints. 4 **For there are certain men crept in unawares**, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, **ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness**... 8 Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise dominion, and speak evil of dignities... 10 But these speak evil of those things which they know not: but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves. 11 **Woe unto them! for they have... ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.** 12 These are **spots in your feasts of charity**, when they feast with you, **feeding themselves without fear**... 16 These are murmurers, complainers, **walking after their own lusts**; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, **having men's persons in admiration because of advantage**.. 19 These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit. 20 But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, 21 **Keep yourselves in the love of God**, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life. 22 **And of some have compassion, making a difference**: 23 **And others save with fear**, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

The dominant opponents of Christian fellowship are not rich people per se, but those who rule the church for their own financial gain. The difference is subtle. Of course, some hoard wealth as if immortality can be bargained for with money. James makes quick work of these (Jas. 4:13-5:6). They tread a similar avenue of destruction, but it smacks much less guaranteed than the one belonging to spiritual leaders making merchandise of the gift of God's word, or who exploit offerings otherwise intended for the weak. Whether some do it perfectly unaware of their own mischief is difficult to say; however, considering the effect it may not matter. But those who are rich (but not actively exploiting the church) still have a powerful and attractively paradoxical appeal to salvation. They must desire greater riches, finer gold, and longer life than they already seek.

Revelation 3:17 Because thou sayest, **I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked**: 18 **I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich**; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. 19 **As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.**

Psalms 19:7 **The law of the LORD** is perfect, converting the soul: **the testimony of the LORD** is sure, making wise the simple. 8 **The statutes of the LORD** are right, rejoicing the heart: **the commandment of the LORD** is pure, enlightening the eyes. 9 **The fear of the LORD** is clean, enduring for ever: **the judgments of the LORD** are true and righteous altogether. 10 **More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold**: sweeter

also than honey and the honeycomb. 11 **Moreover by them is thy servant warned: and in keeping of them there is great reward.**

The restoration of our corporate fellowship sounds as naïve and superhuman as it did when the apostles balked at the notion of large-scale sacrificial conversions like their own (Luke 18:24-30). But this is the stuff of small seeds and great power. And if their epistles are of any help, the point is not to convert false teachers, but to test them, watch out for them, and seek only the company of those affirming the love of God known by the apostles. If this paper produces just one more receptive mind toward the remedy to our falling temperature, it was well worth it. The last word seems fitly reserved for Clement (an early Christian writer and bishop of Rome) who appealed to the Corinthians with such things in mind.

Let us therefore, with all haste, put an end to this state of things; and let us fall down before the Lord, and beseech Him with tears, that He would mercifully be reconciled to us, **and restore us to our former seemly and holy practice of brotherly love.** For such conduct is the gate of righteousness, which is set open for the attainment of life, as it is written... **Let a man be faithful:** let him be **powerful** in the utterance of knowledge; let him be **wise** in judging of words... let him be **pure** in all his deeds; **yet the more he seems to be superior to others in these respects, the more humble-minded ought he to be, and to seek the common good of all, and not merely his own advantage.** - Clement of Rome, *The First Epistle of Clement*, (96 AD), Chap. XLVIII.