

ECONOMIC LAWS OF THE KINGDOM

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SCRIPTURE: Acts 4:31-35.

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. 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. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. 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, and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

If ye are not equal in earthly things, ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things.

It may seem to some people to be a contradiction of terms to speak of the economic laws of the kingdom of God, as we do in today's sermon title. The kingdom of God is a spiritual kingdom, some would say; and would quote the words of Jesus, "My kingdom is not of this world." It is true that the kingdom of God is not of this world, but it can be, and indeed was intended to be in this world; for Jesus also taught us to pray, "Thy kingdom come; thy will be done on earth as it is done in heaven." When God's will is done on earth as in heaven, when all the laws of the kingdom of heaven are obeyed on earth, then we shall have the kingdom here and now, and God will have complete and perfect rule over both heaven and earth.

To admit that the kingdom and its laws are spiritual does not imply that the kingdom has no practical laws, no tangible, concrete physical implications. All Christian people believe that man is spirit; but they also are pretty well agreed that he needs a body to implement and give expression to the will of that spirit. So far as we know, the spirit is helpless to do much on the physical plane of existence unless it is implemented with a physical body. Just so, the spiritual kingdom is not of much practical value to men on this earth, living this mortal life, unless its spiritual laws find practical, tangible expression in social, economic, and even political affairs.

The laws of the kingdom were not given simply that men might die and go to heaven, but that they might begin to live a heavenly quality of life on earth -- now, that they might have the more abundant life, beginning now, and continuing through eternity. We know men's spiritual natures only by what they do with and through material things. Therefore a kind, loving, equitable and just heavenly Father cannot be pleased with men who profess a spiritual love for him, but who oppress their fellow men socially, economically, or politically. No earthly father whose sons were all serving him obediently could say to one, "Be thou clothed in robes, and sit thou here," and to another, "Be thou clothed in rags, and sit thou there," and still claim to be a just and impartial father. Neither is it God's will that men should ignore the law of love, the spiritual law of the kingdom, to provide an abundance for themselves by exploiting others and depriving them of the necessities of life. If men are not equal in earthly things, God cannot bless them with equality in heavenly things.

When the life of the kingdom is transplanted into us so that we are born again, with the Spirit of Christ living in us, our attitude towards the world, towards our fellow men, and towards our possessions undergoes a complete change. Nowhere is there a better or more striking example of this than the transformation which came to the New Testament church, as described in the second and fourth chapters of Acts. When the Spirit came upon them on the day of Pentecost, none of them from thenceforth said that any of the things which he possessed was his own. They were convinced that all belonged to God, and that they were only stewards over that which God had temporarily

placed in their possession.

With this new sense of stewardship, there came a new concern for the welfare of others. "Neither was there any among them that lacked." They were of one heart and one soul. Equality in spiritual things was balanced by equality in temporal things. They had all things common. This does not necessarily mean that there was no private property, for "neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own...." They had private property, for without ownership and control of property there could have been no true stewardship; but they regarded their property as God's, not their own. Because it was God's, they gladly devoted their surplus to the relief of the poor.

A careful reading of these verses will convince the student that when those who were possessors of lands or houses sold them and brought the prices of the things that were sold and laid them down at the apostles' feet, this was not a complete impoverishment. Making everybody poor, so that all can be poor equally and together, is not the way of the more abundant life. Notice that in this passage, "lands," "houses," "prices" and "things" are all in the plural. Those who had more than one house, and could live in only one, sold the surplus houses. Those who had more lands, or more things than they could properly use did likewise. Every man kept his home, his tools, his land, the capital necessary to run his business, as a stewardship from God, to be used in God's business. To sell them, and then apply for relief, would have been patently foolish and improvident, and out of keeping with the best principles of stewardship.

Let us notice another supremely important thing -- that there was no force or coercion used to bring men into compliance with these economic laws of the kingdom. The men of the New Testament church complied with these economic principles and laws of the kingdom because they had been born again, because they had been endowed with the life of the kingdom, because they were filled with the Holy Ghost, because they were of one heart and one soul, because they loved and trusted each other. Kingdom laws are made to be lived by citizens of the kingdom. For one kingdom-minded man to divide up his property with a greedy, lazy, rapacious man would only impoverish the one and further encourage the unregenerate man in his laziness and greed. But when a group of people of one heart and one mind and one soul band themselves together in economic relationship according to the laws of the kingdom, without compulsion or force or coercion, respecting the rights and property of each other, but exercising also a Godly concern for each other, there the kingdom law can be lived, and God's will be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

In such a group there would be recognition of God's ownership through the principle of an annual financial accounting to the bishop, who has been set in the church as God's minister to whom such accounting is due. In such a group there would be universal obedience to the principle of tithing -- one tenth of the net increase, not gross income, annually. In such a group there would be observance of the principle of socialization, of consecration of surplus, which surplus could be the means of providing less fortunate men with the means of earning a living, and paying a tithe of their increase, and eventually perhaps a consecration of their surplus.

Perhaps one reason why we do not enjoy more of the heavenly blessings in the church today is that we have not learned to be equal in earthly things. We have refused to pay heed to the economic laws of the kingdom, and therefore for us the kingdom of God has not been realized on earth. If we are not equal in earthly things, we cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things. The spiritual laws of the kingdom must find practical implementation in economic affairs, if we are to have the kingdom of God on earth.