

Acts 4:35

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

Analysis

And laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. This verse describes the radical economic sharing practiced by the earliest Jerusalem church. Believers who sold property or possessions "laid them down at the apostles' feet"—a phrase indicating complete surrender of control and submission to apostolic authority. The physical gesture of placing resources at someone's feet symbolized both honor and the transfer of decision-making power.

The apostles served as stewards who administered "distribution" (diemerízeto, διεμερίζετο) to each person "according as he had need" (kathóti an tis chreían eichen, καθότι ἀν τις χρείαν εἴχεν). This wasn't communism or mandatory redistribution but voluntary, Spirit-led generosity addressing genuine needs within the community. The imperfect tense suggests ongoing, repeated distribution—a sustained practice, not a one-time event.

This economic fellowship demonstrated the transformative power of Pentecost. The same Spirit who enabled multilingual proclamation (Acts 2:4-11) also produced supernatural unity and generosity. Private property wasn't abolished (note Ananias and Sapphira retained the right to keep their property, Acts 5:4), but believers willingly shared so that "neither was there any among them that lacked" (Acts 4:34). This fulfilled Old Testament ideals where faithful covenant obedience would eliminate poverty (Deuteronomy 15:4). The early church's economic

practice wasn't a universal blueprint for all times but a powerful witness to transformed hearts overflowing with love.

Historical Context

The Jerusalem church faced unique economic challenges. Many believers were pilgrims who had remained in Jerusalem after Pentecost, creating housing and food needs. Additionally, new converts often faced economic ostracism—Jews who confessed Jesus as Messiah risked expulsion from family businesses, trade guilds, and synagogue-based social networks. This created urgent material needs within the community.

In first-century Greco-Roman culture, patron-client relationships dominated social welfare. Wealthy benefactors provided for dependents in exchange for honor and loyalty. The church's practice subverted this system—the apostles weren't seeking honor but serving needs, and distribution was based on need rather than social status or reciprocal obligation. This radical equality shocked contemporary society.

Archaeological evidence reveals that early Christian communities developed sophisticated systems of economic support. The "widows' list" (1 Timothy 5:9), the collection for Jerusalem (Romans 15:26), and traveling support for missionaries (3 John 1:5-8) show that the Jerusalem pattern influenced broader Christian practice. While the intense communal sharing may have been unique to Jerusalem's circumstances, the principle of generous mutual care became a distinguishing mark of Christian communities throughout the Roman Empire, prompting pagan observers to marvel, "See how these Christians love one another!"

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does the early church's economic sharing challenge modern Christian attitudes toward private property and wealth?
2. What prevents contemporary Christians from experiencing the same radical generosity seen in Acts 4?
3. In what ways should church leaders today function as stewards distributing resources according to need?
4. How can we distinguish between Spirit-led voluntary sharing and coercive redistribution schemes?
5. What specific needs in your faith community require sacrificial generosity to address adequately?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἔτιθουν παρὰ τοὺς πόδας τῶν ἀποστόλων
And laid them down at feet the apostles
G2532 G5087 G3844 G3588 G4228 G652

διεδίδοτο δὲ ἐκάστῳ καθότι ἐν τις χρείαν
distribution was made and unto every man according as need G5532
G1239 G1161 G1538 G2530 G302 G5100

εἶχεν
he had
G2192

Additional Cross-References

Acts 5:2 (Parallel theme): And kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Acts 2:45 (Parallel theme): And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

Acts 4:37 (Parallel theme): Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

