

Four Characteristics of the First Church (Acts 2:42-47)

Expository Lessons from the Book of Acts

I. Review from Prior Lessons

- a. Holy Spirit came down on the apostles in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, 50 days after the Passover (the time when Jesus was crucified).
- b. The Spirit being poured out is accompanied by miraculous signs (sound of mighty wind, tongues of fire, speaking in other tongues).
- c. Peter preaches that Jesus is the Christ, raised from the dead.
 - i. Proof of the resurrection: eyewitness accounts and fulfillment of several prophecies, including:
 1. **Psalm 15/16;**
 2. **2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 17, Psalm 88/89, Psalm 131/132;**
and
 3. **Psalm 109/110.**
 - ii. Jesus has ascended to heaven and is now seated on the throne of David, at the right hand of God.
 - iii. Peter's closing statement: "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ". (**Acts 2:36**)
- d. The people are "cut to the heart" by what Peter preached, and ask Peter and the apostles, "What shall we do?" (**Acts 2:37**)
 - i. Peter replies: "Repent and be baptized for the remission of sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (**Acts 2:38**)
 1. He further explains that this promise applies not only to them, but also to their children, "and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call". (**Acts 2:30**)
 2. This is in fulfillment of the promise Jesus had given to the apostles after He rose from the dead but before He ascended to heaven.
 - a. "Then He [*Jesus*] said to them, "Thus it is written, and thus it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and to rise from the dead the third day, and that repentance

and remission of sins should be preached in His name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem.” (Luke 24:46-47, NKJV)

- b. This is where we should look, according to Jesus Himself, to find where the message of remission of sins was preached: pointing directly to what Peter was to say in **Acts 2**, on the day of Pentecost.
- ii. Three thousand accepted the message and were baptized that day. This marks the beginning of the church.

II. The First Description of the Church: Four Characteristics

- a. Read **Acts 2:42-47**.
- b. Here is the first description of the church, at the very beginning.
 - i. They continued steadfast devotion to four things:
 1. The apostles’ doctrine,
 2. Fellowship,
 3. Breaking of bread, and
 4. Prayer.
 - ii. The tone of the church is marked by love, joy, and sacrifice to meet the needs of one another. Also, the church continued to grow beyond the initial 3,000, with more being added daily.
- c. I believe these four characteristics are still great hallmarks of a healthy church, family and individual spiritual life. Let us pause to take an honest inventory of where we are in terms of all four, individually and as a church.
 - i. Devotion to the “*apostles’ doctrine*”.
 1. This wording from the NKJV follows the KJV.
 2. The term used here that is translated “doctrine” in the NKJV (Greek word: διδασκαλία / didache) here simply means ‘teaching’ or ‘instruction’.
 - a. Many of us, when we hear the word ‘*doctrine*’ tend to think of *theology*. However, it simply means ‘*teaching*’, and can include teaching related to sin, righteousness and how one lives.

3. We can see the meaning of this word based on how it is used elsewhere in the Scriptures. For example:
 - a. “Then He said to them in His *teaching*, ‘Beware of the scribes, who desire to go around in long robes, love greetings in the marketplaces, the best seats in the synagogues, and the best places at feasts, who devour widows’ houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. These will receive greater condemnation.’”
(**Mark 12:38–40**, NKJV)
4. We will find the “apostles’ teaching” in the New Testament, in the gospels, as well as the letters. Also, Peter and Paul point us to the importance of studying the Old Testament.
 - a. After quoting from **Psalm 69**, Paul points to the importance of the Old Testament Scriptures for Christians.
 - i. “For whatever things were written before *were written for our learning*, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.” (**Romans 15:4**, NKJV)
 - b. Peter likewise urges us to be devoted to studying the Old Testament Scriptures.
 - i. “And so we have the prophetic word confirmed, which *you do well to heed as a light that shines in a dark place*, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts; knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit.” (**2 Peter 1:19–21**, NKJV)
5. **Challenge:** How are you doing in terms of personal, daily devotion to the apostles’ teaching? Are you devoted to the written word of God (both New Testament and Old Testament)?
 - a. (The point is not to browbeat anyone who has not been ‘seven for seven’ this past week.)
 - b. Are you a person who is “meditating on the word of God day and night” as it says in **Psalm 1**?

- i. “Blessed is the man Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but *his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night*. He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” **(Psalm 1:1-3, NKJV)**
- c. We are in a spiritual war, with Satan and the forces of darkness arrayed against us. We need the sword of the Spirit, the word of God. **(Ephesians 6)**
 - i. In the words of Christian author A.W. Tozer, this world is “*a battleground, not a playground*”.
 - ii. Only a fool would go to war against a powerful adversary without weapons.
- d. I realize that many of us, struggling to make a living and especially those with small children, can be extremely busy. When we are stretched, it can be more challenging to find time every day to be deeply in the word of God. However, how many of us have found ourselves *too busy to eat food* for several days in a row? Consider that in light of how Moses framed the importance of the word of God:
 - i. “So, He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.” **(Deuteronomy 8:3, NKJV)**
 - ii. This is one of the verses that Jesus quoted to back Satan off, when He was being tempted.
- e. As our bodies long for food each day, our souls also long for the spiritual nourishment of the word of God! The word of God is described by several metaphors. For example, it is:
 - i. water to a tree in the desert **(Psalm 1)**
 - ii. a light in a dark place **(2 Peter 1)**,

- iii. the offensive weapon in our spiritual war (**Ephesians 6**), and
 - iv. the daily bread that will keep us alive on our Wilderness journey (**Deuteronomy 8**).
6. **Challenge:** Make a commitment to do whatever it takes to be in the word of God personally, every day: the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. Don't just try to survive spiritually from week to week off of weekly Bible teaching from others!
- a. In watching video coverage of the recent war in the Ukraine, my wife Alison commented on a scene she saw of automatic weapons being handed out to ordinary citizens in the streets. This was being done out of desperation in the face of advancing Russian troops, when the Ukrainian army was not able to protect the cities of that country.
 - b. This reminded me of something I had heard years ago, regarding why Hitler decided not to invade Switzerland in World War II (despite the great wealth in that country).
 - i. Switzerland had a different defense strategy than the other countries in Europe. They had a tiny professional army. However, all Swiss men, when they reached the age of 20, were put through three months of military training (renewed three weeks every year) and issued a rifle.
 - ii. Since the people of the country were all heavily armed, for Hitler to have defeated Switzerland, he would have to do more than just defeat the professional military.
 - iii. There were weapons and trained marksmen in every home. Therefore, doing the cost-benefit analysis, Hitler apparently concluded that the losses to his troops would be unacceptably great if they tried to invade Switzerland.
 - c. Likewise, it will be much more difficult for Satan to attack and defeat a church where *every member* (not just a few leaders) is 'heavily armed' with spiritual 'marksmen' who are skilled in using the word of God!

- i. To be clear, I am NOT advocating taking up guns to shoot people, even in the situation of a declared war. The historic position of the Christian church, taking the teachings of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5:43-45**) at face value, was to be nonresistant. For the historic Christian position on Christians and war (first 300 years of the church, prior to Constantine), see:
 1. *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on 'War'.
 2. Scroll YouTube channel, audio lessons: *What the Early Christians Believed about War*, by David Bercot.
- ii. Second characteristic: *devoted to the fellowship*.
 1. It strikes me that meeting together and devotion to fellowship with one another (not only at our regular meetings but also throughout the week) is a strength of our group.
 - a. "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called "Today," lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (**Hebrews 3:12-13**, NKJV)
 - b. "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching." (**Hebrews 10:23-25**, NKJV)
 2. **Challenge:** To those who have been weak in their devotion to Christian fellowship, take heed!
 - a. Some may need to make changes in their life situations to put this into practice. We all need spiritual encouragement if we are going to make it to the end!
 3. **Some Challenges Specific to Our Own Group:**

- a. **Open Question:** Since we characteristically love to get together with one another, is there any challenge for us related to “being devoted to the fellowship?”
 - b. **Question:** If food is good, is more food always better?
 - i. **Answer:** Well, *that depends*. If one is eating too much, or eating something that is not good for one’s health, then *eating more* is not better!
4. The challenge I see is not just to hang out together, but to have true iron-sharpening-iron fellowship. More talking is not always for the better! It seems to me that the apostles put some healthy limits on fellowship.
- a. Read **1 Timothy 5:11-13**.
 - i. Paul addresses a problem in the church: *gossips* and *busybodies*, saying things that they should not be saying.
 - ii. In my observation, this sin is not limited to women. Men can be guilty as well.
 - b. Read **Romans 1:26-30**. Here Paul speaks of the wickedness of the world.
 - i. In **Romans 1:29-30**, the NKJV (which follows the King James Version) speaks of “whisperers and backbiters”.
 - ii. In the ESV, NASB, RSV and NIV, the same terms are translated “*gossips* and *slanderers*”.
 - c. The **Romans 1** passage quoted above addresses the condition of the lost world. However, in the next one Paul is addressing Christians. He wrote of his concern regarding what he might find when he visits the church in Corinth. Read **2 Corinthians 12:20-21**.
 - i. “For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, *backbitings*, *whisperings*, conceits, tumults....” (**2 Corinthians 12:20**, NKJV)

- ii. From the ESV: “For I fear that perhaps when I come I may find you not as I wish, and that you may find me not as you wish—that perhaps there may be quarreling, jealousy, anger, hostility, *slander, gossip*, conceit, and disorder.” (2 Corinthians 12:20, ESV; similar in NIV, NASB, etc.)
- d. James also speaks of the sins of the tongue in **James 3:2-12**.
 - i. The tongue is described as “an unruly evil, full of deadly poison” and “set on fire by hell”.
- e. **Challenges:** Fellowship is a great thing, but we must keep a tight rein on our tongues.
 - i. There is no room for gossip or slander in our discussions with one another!
 - ii. We cannot speak evil of government leaders, even if we don’t like them or if we see them engaged in wicked behavior. (2 Timothy 2:1-2; Acts 23:5 where Paul quotes Exodus 22:28 from the LXX; Titus 3:1-2; Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-17).
 - iii. Also, we can’t be murmuring or complaining, which led to the death of many of God’s people in the Wilderness. (1 Corinthians 10:10-11)
 - iv. If you have a problem with another Christian, deal with them directly. Do what it says in **Matthew 18**. Bring in others if/when you need to.
 - v. When you are tempted to say something that you know you should not, keep your mouth shut. As it says in **Sirach 19:7-11**, don’t worry - you will not explode!
- iii. Third characteristic: devotion to “*breaking bread*”.
 - 1. I am not sure whether this refers to having meals with one another in regular fellowship, or if it refers to the Lord’s Supper.

- a. Suggesting this may refer to fellowship meals together:
 - i. “So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and *breaking bread* from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart,” (**Acts 2:46**, NKJV)
- b. On the other hand, suggesting that this may refer to the Lord’s Supper:
 - i. “Now on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to *break bread*, Paul, ready to depart the next day, spoke to them and continued his message until midnight.” (**Acts 20:7**, NKJV)
 - ii. “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The *bread which we break*, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?” (**1 Corinthians 10:16**, NKJV)
- c. Christians would gather each week on Sunday to meet. Their meetings would be marked by prayer, thanksgiving, a collection to meet the needs of the poor among them and partaking of the Lord’s Supper. From Justin Martyr’s First Apology (c. 160 AD):
 - i. “And on the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to 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 ceased, the president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.
 - ii. “Then we all rise together and pray, and, as we before said, when our prayer is ended, bread and wine and water are brought, and the president in like manner offers prayers and thanksgivings, according to his ability, and the people assent, saying Amen; and there is a distribution to each, and a participation of that over which thanks have been given, and to those who are absent a portion is sent by the deacons.

iii. “And they who are well to do, and willing, give what each thinks fit; and what is collected is deposited with the president, who succours the orphans and widows, and those who, through sickness or any other cause, are in want, and those who are in bonds, and the strangers sojourning among us, and in a word takes care of all who are in need.

iv. “But Sunday is the day on which we all hold our common assembly, because it is the first day on which God, having wrought a change in the darkness and matter, made the world; and Jesus Christ our Saviour on the same day rose from the dead. For He was crucified on the day before that of Saturn (Saturday); and on the day after that of Saturn, which is the day of the Sun, having appeared to His apostles and disciples, He taught them these things, which we have submitted to you also for your consideration.”

1. (Source: Justin Martyr, First Apology, chapter 67; found in ANF vol. 1, p. 186).

d. **Challenge:** Let us follow the example of the early church and celebrate the Lord’s Supper when we gather, every Sunday.

iv. Fourth characteristic: *devotion to prayer*.

1. **Question:** Do you believe that God listens to prayers, and that prayer is one of the most powerful and important things we can do?

a. What does your prayer life say about your faith?

2. “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. *The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.* Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it would not rain; and it did not rain on the land for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth produced its fruit.” (**James 5:16–18**, NKJV)

3. Read **1 Peter 3:7-12**.

- a. Peter says that if husbands are not understanding of and honoring their wives, then their prayers will be hindered.
 - b. The reason Peter gives here: he points back to **Psalm 34** (designated **Psalm 33** in the LXX) where it says, “the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (**1 Peter 3:12**)
4. **Challenge:** Be devoted to prayer every day. And your prayers need to be the prayers of a righteous man or woman.
- a. Peter is talking about our living in accordance with a righteous way of life.
 - b. He is not referring to the *righteousness of Christ* somehow being imputed to us.
 - c. I am personally convicted in this area, regarding my own life, my family, and our church.

III. Signs, Wonders and Fearing God

- a. “Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles.” (**Acts 2:43**, NKJV)
- b. I realize that many Christians today tend to deprecate fear of God as an inferior type of motivation. However, the Scriptures indicate that fear of God is a good thing for Christians. It can keep us from all kinds of sin.
 - i. Jesus said, “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather *fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*” (**Matthew 10:28**, NKJV)
 - 1. Jesus said we should fear God, his Father.
 - ii. “Honor all people. Love the brotherhood. *Fear God.* Honor the king.” (**1 Peter 2:17**, NKJV)
 - 1. I don’t see fear of God as an inferior motivation. However, we need to combine that with the love of God!
 - iii. Let us strive to love God with our whole heart, soul, mind and strength; however, we should ALSO fear God.
- c. Many wonders and signs were done.

- i. We will see examples of these “wonders and signs” further on in Acts, starting with our next lesson, in **Acts 3**.
- ii. **Question:** What was the purpose of these wonders and signs?
 1. Read **Mark 16:15-20**.
 - a. I realize that some modern Bible translations cast doubt regarding whether **Mark 16:9-20** was in the original text. However, there is a tremendous amount of evidence to support the ‘long ending’ of **Mark** as being authentic. See, for example, *The Original Ending of Mark: A New Case for the Authenticity of Mark 16:9-20*, by Nicholas Lunn.
 2. The Lord “confirmed the word” that the apostles preached to the nations “through the accompanying signs”.
- iii. **Question:** Are these kinds of signs still present, and are they available to us?
 1. **My Own Personal Answer (to Date):** I don’t know. While I was taught the ‘cessationist’ view (that the miracles ended during the time of the apostles), I don’t find the Scriptures used to support that to be convincing.
 2. On the other hand, I have never seen (yet) clear evidence of such signs being authentic.
 3. There is very little emphasis on miraculous signs in the early church writings (first 300 years of the church). From the historical record we have it seems that these gifts did continue in some manner long after the apostles died. However, they receive only limited mention among the early Christian writers; and did not appear to be a focus of church life. For more on this, see:
 - a. *Dictionary of Early Christian Beliefs*, ed. David Bercot, article on ‘Gifts of the Spirit’; and
 - b. *What the Early Christians Believed about Gifts of the Spirit*, audio lesson by David Bercot, available through Scroll Publishing.

IV. Sharing All Things in Common

- a. Read **Acts 2:44-45**.

- i. They “had all things in common”. That raises quite a few questions for me!
- b. **First Question:** Did this continue in the early church, or was it only for a limited time in Jerusalem?
 - i. It seems pretty clear to me that this practice did not continue on broadly in the church.
 1. **1 Timothy 6** speaks of there being rich and poor in the church (with the rich admonished to be generous toward the poor).
 2. There are multiple references to there being slaves and slaveowners in the church.
 3. James speaks of rich and poor Christians in the church, in **James 1, 2** and **5**, with warnings given to the wealthy Christians.
- c. **Second Question:** Should we be living that way today? Yes definitely? No definitely? Or is this type of arrangement optional?
 - i. Throughout history, there have been groups in the Christian world who have voluntarily chosen to live holding all things in common.
 1. Celibate groups, such as the religious orders of men and women, especially in some of the older churches (Catholic, Orthodox, Anglican, etc.)
 - a. Benedictines, Franciscans, Christian Brothers, various orders of Sisters (nuns) etc.
 - b. Some would be devoted to special ministries (prayer, teaching, serving the poor, missionary activity, etc.)
 - c. Shakers, in the U.S.
 2. Married groups with families, such as:
 - a. Hutterites, an Anabaptist group still in existence with colonies founded in 1528.
 - b. Early Puritans, who did this originally after the trip on Mayflower to Plymouth, MA.
 - i. That social experiment did not go well for them; they almost starved, and ended up abandoning the common property approach.

- d. **Third Question:** To many, this description of the early church, sharing all things in common, may sound a lot like socialism (or even communism). Is there room for sincere Christians to be socialists or communists?
- i. To many, this may sound like a ridiculous question. However, in the younger generation in the West, many are attracted to socialism and communism.
 1. The “body count” from Marxist experiments in the 20th century is staggering: multiple tens of millions of people died as a result of one form of Marxism or another, at the hands of men like Mao, Stalin, Pol Pot, Castro, and Enver Hoxha.
 2. Karl Marx, who laid the foundation for communism (Marxism) was an atheist and extremely hostile to God and the Christian faith. He even wrote poetry elevating Satan!
 3. However, following the lead of Italian Marxist philosopher Antonio Gramsci, the tactics of modern Marxists have shifted. He advocates focusing on co-opting existing cultural institutions (education, churches, etc.) as opposed to direct confrontation.
 - ii. Read excerpts from *Compatibility of Christianity and Marxism*, by Andrew Miller (see the appendix at the end of these notes).
 1. Note that the author claims to be someone who holds to ‘orthodox’ Christian beliefs; yet he considers himself to be a *Communist!* In the article, he explained how Communists can ‘reach out’ to Christians based their [alleged by the author] *common ground*.
 2. The author claimed that both Christians and Communists show concern for the poor and want to do something about that.
 3. He also cites the **Acts 2** example of Christians holding all things in common as something similar to what Communists want.
 4. However, “from each according to his ability to each according to his need” is missing some verbs.
 - a. Under communism, the appropriate verbs to add to that phrase are something along the lines of:
 - b. “*forcefully confiscating, under the barrel of a gun (under threat of prison or death)...from each according to his ability, then giving to each according to his perceived needs...*”

- iii. I recall that in my youth, the 'right-leaning' Christians wanted to use the power of the state (force, threats of jail or worse) to keep people out of certain sins they did not like, such as:
 1. Homosexuality
 2. Prostitution
 3. Drugs
 4. Alcohol (including so-called 'blue laws' that prohibited certain activities on Sundays)
- iv. However, things have shifted in the U.S., and today it seems to me that it is predominantly the left-leaning types who want to use the power of the state to advance their own 'noble' agenda, which would include:
 1. Redistribution of wealth
 2. Basic 'needs' paid for by others via the taxing power of the government
- v. Both are antithetical to the Biblical idea of there being two very different kingdoms (the kingdom of God being separate from the kingdoms of this world), which should not mix.
 1. Christians should not use the power of the state to compel others to be generous. The church, the kingdom of God, has nothing in common with socialism and communism.
 - a. In the church, we give to the poor out of love and compassion. We give freely, *not reluctantly nor under compulsion*. God loves a cheerful giver. (**2 Corinthians 9:7**)
 - b. Under state socialism and communism, the 'giving' is forced, under threat of jail, severe punishment or even death.
 2. The two systems are incompatible. Just as the church was corrupted in the days of Emperor Constantine by using the power of the state to pursue 'noble objectives', I believe the church will again be corrupted if we make any alliances with state socialism in any form.

V. **Appendix – Excerpt from ‘Compatibility of Christianity and Marxism’, by Andrew Miller**

- a. (Link to internet article: <http://www.politicalaffairs.net/the-compatibility-of-christianity-and-marxism>)
- b. [*Note that I STRONGLY DISAGREE with the thesis of the author’s article, but I am presenting it here to help us understand some of what we are up against! - CP*]
- c. “...Marxists and Christians have a lot of common ground in that the Bible clearly teaches God’s preference for the interests of the poor. According to the 8th century BCE prophets, a key reason for the Babylonian exile was punishment for Israel’s failure to care for its poor (cf **Jer 5:28-29**; 22:3-5; **Hos 6:6**; **Amos 2:6-7**; **4:1**; **4:11-12**). The Torah is also filled with provisions designed to protect the poor from oppression (cf **Ex 23:3, 7-11**); not the least of which was the Jubilee Year, wherein every 50 years all outstanding debts would be canceled, all possessions returned to their original owners, all prices reduced, and all servants set free; this measure was designed to level the economic playing field among ancient Hebrews (**Lev 25:8-17**).
- d. “Jesus, for his opening sermon in the **Luke’s Gospel** quotes the prophet **Isaiah**: ‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach good news to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the year of the Lord’s Favor,’ (**Luke 4:18-19**). Jesus later tells his disciples: “how hardly shall they that have riches enter into the Kingdom of Heaven,” (**Luke 18:18-25**). Beyond Jesus, James might as well directly explicate the doctrine of surplus value in the 5th chapter of his epistle: ‘behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which you kept back by fraud crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord Sabaoth,’ (**James 5:4**).
- e. “Finally, the **Acts of the Apostles** explicates clearly the kind of society in which Christians are to live, and for which we are to advocate: ‘And the multitude of those who 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... Neither was there any among them that lacked... and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need,’ (**Acts 4:32, 34-35**). Oddly enough, Marx said something suspiciously similar to the tone of: ‘...from each according to his ability to each according to his need.’ Concern for the oppressed and the establishment of a just society is as much a part of Christian tradition as is raw spirituality. The goal of the Communist Party with regards to Christians should be awaken them

to these teachings of their own traditions and how they have more in common with the left than with the right.

- f. “Concerning the Marxian critiques of religion: that it is unnecessary in communism, and more essentially (as per the new-Hegelian school from which Marx hailed) that it projects the human essence onto a non-existent reality rather than enabling humans to reach said essence themselves. It is here that I and Marx will part ways. If one believes this to be essential to Marxist doctrine, then Christianity and Marxism are incompatible, but I would contend that this interpretation is not necessary to either of the two most important doctrines of Marxism: historical materialism, and surplus value. Not only is this interpretation of Marx unnecessary, it is also unrealistic.
- g. “Although many of the existential problems that plague humanity stem from material causes, not all of them do. Even if the human person finds herself completely at home in her workplace, this alone is not satisfactory enough to unite the human essence with its existence. While Marx was correct that the human essence includes its ability to rationally change nature to produce the goods necessary to survive and thrive, it is also the case that human essence includes the possibility of achieving some kind of transcendence of the mundane that cannot be found in merely ending working class alienation.
- h. “In terms of the New-Hegelian Critique: I agree, we do project ideal humanity—in an allegorical sense—onto God. To argue that this necessarily implies that God does not exist, however, is circular. At any rate, the projection of ideal humanity onto God does not imply that religion must prevent humans from reaching this ideal itself. Although some Christians would argue that we should merely rely on the grace of God for salvation and wait for the coming of Christ rather than improve ourselves and reform society, they are sorely unbiblical (cf **Eph 5:1**; **Phil 3:13-14**; **Heb 6:1**). It is because of the biblical imperative to strive for existential authenticity as well as the interdependence of all members of the human community that Communism is entailed by Christian social ethics.
- i. “At any rate, whether or not my comrades agree with my interpretation of Marx, there is an entire community of social-justice-minded Christians—Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical or other—who could potentially be Communists without even realizing it. The party has a great deal of work to do in reaching out to them and assuring them that in the society we intend to build, our right to practice Christianity will be protected. A plurality of the working class of this nation identifies as Christian; imagine what we could accomplish if we managed to convince them that our faith is not only compatible with communism but entails it. At any rate that the party will never succeed in building a mass-people’s movement until it does just that.”