Why The Early Church Was So Liberal

Intro: There are many things which impress us about the early church.

I. SOME IMPRESSIVE FACTS OF THE EARLY CHURCH

A. The rapid growth of the early church.
   1. The day of Pentecost—3000; Acts 2:41 “41 Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.”
   2. Men about 5000; Acts 4:4 “4 Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed; and the number of the men was about five thousand.”
   3. More added; Acts 5:14 “14 And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.”

B. The members
   1. They were zealous
      a. Tit. 2:11-14 “11 For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, 12 Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; 13 Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; 14 Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.”
      b. Acts 2:41-42 “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 steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”
   2. They were courageous
      a. 1 Cor. 16:13 “13 Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.”
      b. Acts 4:29, 31 “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.”
   3. They were loyal to their Master
      a. Acts 21:13 “13 Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.”
      b. Even to the point of death; Rev. 2:10 “10 Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.”
   4. Their steadfast adherence to the apostle’s doctrine.
      a. Jude 3 “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.”
      b. Rev. 2:2-3 “2 I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: 3 And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.”
C. One of their most admirable characteristics was their liberality with material possessions.
   1. Illustrated:
      a. Acts 2:44-45 “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.”
      b. Acts 4:34-35 “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.”
   2. It is often difficult for us to understand for:
      a. They were not taxed.
      b. No compulsion was used.
      c. It was not given grudgingly.
      d. It was not done to be seen of men or for selfish motives.
   3. Their giving was commended in the highest terms possible by the inspired writers.
      a. Acts 4:33-35 “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.”
      b. Phi. 4:16-18 “16 For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity. 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.”
      c. 2 Cor. 8:1-4 “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 of the ministering to the saints.”
   4. What would cause such liberality?
      a. Why would members be willing to sell their goods to give?
      b. Possibly studying the reasons for the first century liberality will help determine why the twenty-first century church is not more liberal.

II. THEY GAVE THEMSELVES.
   A. 2 Cor. 8:5 “And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.”
      1. They did this first; they were truly converted.
      2. They realized that conversion means the giving of self with all that one is and has.
   B. They were not content to be “nominal” Christians.
      1. With them, they were not “joining the church” to be with a husband or wife.
      2. It was a matter of conviction.
      3. They gave themselves:
         a. They gave their time (was not a Sunday only religion).
         b. They gave their energy.
         c. They gave their capability.
d. They gave their possessions.
e. They gave their life.

C. Our shortcomings in true giving can usually be attributed to the fact that we have not been genuinely converted to the Lord and His cause.

D. We do not give materially because we have never given self.

III. Their Background Was Conducive To Liberality.

A. The early church was composed of Jews; their history was one of generosity.

B. The tithes, offerings, gifts, and sacrifices of their income.

1. Their giving comprised a good percentage of their income.
   a. It was not simply a tenth (10% or tithing).
   b. Some estimate that it was as much as 30% or more.

2. When converted to Christianity, it was easy to be liberal in their giving.

C. What is our background?

1. To oppose denominational abuses, we often have gone to other extremes.
   a. The demand for a tenth:
      (1) Heb. 7:1-2, 4-11, 15, 17, 20-22
         "1 For this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him; 2 To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all: first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace; 3 Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life; but made like unto the Son of God; abideth a priest continually. 4 Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils. 5 And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham: 6 But he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham, and blessed him that had the promises. 7 And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better. 8 And here men that die receive tithes; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. 9 And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. 10 For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him. 11 If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron? 12 For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law. 13 For he of whom these things are spok en pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar. 14 For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood. 15 And it is yet far more evident: for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, 16 Who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. 17 For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. 18 For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. 19 For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did by the which we draw nigh unto God. 20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: 21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:) 22 By so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament."
      (2) Denominations have bound this type of tithing on its members.
   b. We are no longer subject to the tithing laws of the Old Testament.
2. A failure to teach liberality to our children.
   a. We give several dollars for movies, candy, etc., then give quarters to put in the collection plate.
   b. The example we set by our giving.

IV. THEY RECOGNIZED THE PRINCIPLES OF STEWARDSHIP.
   A. They realized their possessions were not their own.
      1. All things belong to God.
      2. Exo. 19:5 “5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine.”
      3. Deu. 10:14 “14 Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens is the LORD’s thy God, the earth also, with all that therein is.”
      4. Psa. 24:1 “1 The earth is the LORD’s, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein.”
      5. 1 Cor. 10:26 “26 For the earth is the Lord’s, and the fulness thereof.”
      6. 1 Cor. 6:19 “19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?”
   B. Realizing we are only taking care of that which belongs to God will lead us to exercise extreme caution in using it.
      1. 1 Cor. 4:1-2 “1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. 2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.”
      2. Mal. 3:8 “8 Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings.”
      3. Realize we will give account in the judgment for how we have used it.

V. THEY LIVED IN THE SHADOW OF THE CROSS
   A. Some had been eye witnesses of Christ’s death.
      1. They had seen God’s love; John 3:16 “16 For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”
      2. They saw liberality at its highest; Rom. 5:8 “8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.”
      3. They realized that “God so loved”—they had proof for it in that “He gave.”
      4. Thus, it was not difficult for them to give.
   B. We are several centuries removed from Calvary; however, it should be just as real to us as it was to them.

Conclusion: As the Father and Christ were liberal in their love for us, our love for Them should prompt liberality toward Them; 1 John 4:19 “19 We love him, because he first loved us.” When we love them, we will joyfully consecrate all we have to Their cause.