LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

Paul and Economics: A Theology of the Gospel and Economics

Submitted to Dr. Robert Talley

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

BIBL 989-A22

Dissertation Research and Writing

by

Brent Myers

September 18, 2023

Contents

Charts and Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

Few have contributed more to the formation of Christian thinking and Church philosophy than the apostle Paul. Paul's writing on systematic issues of theology, Christology, soteriology, hamartiology, pneumatology, ecclesiology, and even eschatology has been examined and taught thoroughly. From a biblical theology perspective, his themes have filled sermons and textbooks. Even today, two thousand years after his writing, there is still exploration into new insights from Paul (for example, the "new perspective on Paul")[1]. Yet there is a topic that Paul addresses often that is ignored by commentators and teachers of Scripture. That topic is economics. More specifically, Paul addresses some of the economic issues facing people of that day. For example, he addresses the responsibility of believers to take care of the poor, believers taking care of those in ministry, and find contentment in one's financial condition. However, it is abundantly clear that Paul makes no distinction between walking with Christ and taking care of those in need as he emphasizes this repeatedly in his writing.

Thesis

While there are often many societal, cultural, and historical considerations that go into the interpretation of biblical texts, rarely is economics considered. Yet, economics is something that affects all people across all cultures. Even so, this is often not taken into consideration in the exposition of biblical texts. Additionally, Paul's teaching on issues other than economics is viewed as more significant to the Christian life. However, in all of this, it is important to note

[1] For further reading on the "new perspective on Paul" refer to N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015).

that Paul spends significant time writing about taking care of the needy.[2] All of this should influence the exposition of the text unlike it has. At times, blanket statements about the economic conditions of the early church are included with the teaching of such texts, however, the teaching stops short of demonstrating how those conditions influence the text in both its understanding and application. Interpretation of the text is contingent upon a proper understanding and application of these issues. In doing so, they help the teacher and the reader to better understand that helping those in financial need is a keystone truth to living out the gospel message.

There is a growing number of scholars that write about the economic world of the apostle Paul. This scholarship is found both in the church world, written from a spiritual perspective and mindset, but also from the secular world without consideration for the things of God. While there is an increasing amount of content being generated with consideration for these issues, it is interesting to note that there is less content giving consideration to how the economic world in which Paul lived influences the interpretation of his letters. It is undeniable that the Greco-Roman society in which Paul found himself is exponentially different than today. As such, one must consider how Paul's writing influence today's reader in their approach to economic issues.

This is what makes this work different from much of the scholarship that is in place – and is growing – in today's biblical academia. Paul is appreciated in his influence on systematic theological issues and the formation of the church's beliefs, but he is undervalued in his influence on sociological issues, specifically economics. This work looks at Paul's writing and his theology on economics and how it should influence the reader in today's setting.

For example, upon further examination, one will find that demonstrating economic help to the poor is not just supplemental or a sidebar to being a follower of Christ. Helping the needy

[2] Bruce Longenecker goes to great lengths to show that Paul addresses poverty throughout his letters. This will be explored at length in chapter five of this paper.

is not just a practice that one does, but it is central to the theme of the gospel. Many times, 1 Corinthians 15 is used as a definition for the gospel: Jesus's death, burial, and resurrection. While the admonition to take care of the poor is not in that gospel definition, it is part of the gospel message that Paul lays out in depth through his epistles. "Remembering the poor" is a critical expression of the gospel at work in the life of the believer. As such, it is a part of the gospel of Jesus for believers. Paul believed that taking care of the needy is a benchmark of the individual and corporate life of the follower of Jesus. Paul believed that it was critical to the advance of the Way. Ultimately, Paul's writing shows that taking care of the poor is central to living out the gospel.[3] This is an idea and theme of Paul's that has largely been overlooked in the study of Paul. It is also interesting to note that Paul is not alone in this ideology. One will see how the "pillars" of the early church also supported this idea.

Chapter Summaries

The opening chapter of the dissertation will serve as an introduction to the topic. It will paint a picture of the overall economic situation of the first century. The chapter will introduce the thesis and explore the need for the topic.

After the introduction, the next chapter will focus on the economy of the first century. Because Paul found himself living in multiple cultures, the paper will examine each of those settings and their impact on Paul's writing. It will look at the economy of Israel, from which Paul and the early church came. Then it will look comparatively at the Greco-Roman economy in which Paul lived and ministered. With Paul's writing being focused on those living in the Roman empire, it will serve as a foundation for understanding the texts in their original contexts. A part

[3] Bruce Longenecker implies these ideas in *Remember the Poor*, but the other biblical theology ideas that come out of Paul's writing are mostly unexplored.

of this setting will be examining the stratification of society. Within that stratification, it will examine the classes of society and ultimately will examine the stratification of the church. This lends itself to understanding Paul's writing and his original hearers.

The next chapter will look at practices of benefaction within the Jewish culture. It will examine how God's people practiced giving according to the Law of Moses compared to their treatment of the poor in the first century. Following the model of the previous chapter, the chapter will then examine the practice of benefaction throughout the Roman empire. It will explore the practices within Rome and the provincial areas which dominated Paul's time.

Having laid the foundation for the economies and giving in the first century, the next chapter will focus on the teachings and patterns of the early church in taking care of the poor and needy. There will be foundational research in examining the Law, its mandates, and the practices of the nation of Israel. Out of that exploration of the Law, one can see the historical expectation of God's people to take care of the needy. As a brief example, the Law says much about taking care of widows. This translates to the actions of the early church in Acts and the writing of Paul to continue to do the same. Additionally, there will be some looking at Jesus's teaching on the topic. The early church, and by extension Paul, took their example for behavior from following the example of Jesus. As such, an exploration of Jesus's teaching on taking care of the poor, the needy, and those without is key to understanding Paul's writing.

However, the bulk of this chapter will demonstrate the outflowing of His teaching into the teaching and practice of the Church. The book of Acts provides some prime examples of the gospel message being lived out through taking care of the needy. Acts, and the early church, show a microcosm of the issues in which Paul was living. Paul came from a Jewish background but predominantly ministered in a Gentile world. Thus, Paul's writing reflects his own experience and provides his insights into how to apply the gospel regardless of his context. The Jewish world and the Greco-Roman worlds come together to form the foundation of the Church and lend themselves as a model for her to follow. In this, there will be an exploration of the categories of need: poor, widows, and sick. It will examine how the apostles approached the issue and the practices they implemented to help solve it. This chapter will show the inseparable relationship between the gospel message and taking care of the poor.

The next chapter(s) will serve as the primary focus of the paper. This is the exposition of the writing of Paul as it relates to the issues of taking care of the poor. It will be argued that Paul's admonition to the church to take care of the poor was central to his theology and that his living out the gospel could not be separate from taking care of the poor. With the historical economic analysis combined with the first-century practices of benefaction in place, the exposition will also look at other writings of Paul.

After looking at these passages in more detail, other passages of Paul dealing with economic issues will be studied. It is worth noting that almost every one of Paul's letters deals with taking care of the needy in some way. One can see his words in Acts. Paul sees taking care of the needy as a natural and expected outflow of the gospel message. As such, he frequently (nearly every letter) writes on the issue to the churches.

The next chapter will serve as a comparative analysis of Paul's writing. This analysis will start by looking at Paul's writing through the lens of the Old Testament. Much of his admonitions are rooted in the Old Testament and his writing on economics is no different. It will also compare the writings of Paul to the teaching of Jesus. Then it will look at Paul's writing considering the early church (Acts). Finally, it will compare the theology of Paul to other apostles. Specifically, it will compare Paul's teaching with that of James (James 1-2) and John (1

John 3). It will look at the similarities and explore differences. Ultimately it will show that Paul is in line with these apostles and demonstrate that their messaging is consistent in showing the relationship between the gospel and taking care of the needy.

This chapter will summarize the theological position of Paul as it relates to taking care of the needy. It will bring all the elements together and show how Paul admonished believers of their responsibility – as a part of the gospel message – to take care of the needy. It will examine the personal responsibility of believers. However, it will examine the corporate church's responsibility as well.

The final chapter will serve as the conclusion to the dissertation. The conclusion will lay out the argument that Paul deals with economics in his writing. Not only does Paul write about economics, but he is continuing the tradition of the Mosaic Law, the teachings of Jesus, and the practices of the early church. However, the primary thrust of the conclusion will show that taking care of the needy is central to Paul's admonition of the gospel of Jesus.

Primary Sources and Methodology

Much of the groundwork for the sociological influences on scripture and its interpretation come from the foundational work of Wayne Meeks (*The First Urban Christians*), Bruce Longenecker (*Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World*), Steven Friesen ("*Poverty in Pauline Studies*"), Richard DeMaris (*Understanding the Social World of the New Testament)*, George Gotsis (*"Economic Ideas in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament"*), Thomas Blanton (*Paul and Economics: A Handbook*), Philip Esler (*The Early Christian World)*, David Fiensy (*Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy)*, M.I. Finley (*The Ancient Economy*), and Joel Green (*The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*).

The synthesis of these sources serves as the building blocks upon which the formation of the thesis will be built.

Meeks provides the foundation for understanding the individual classes of the first century as well as the early church. His work is based on archaeological evidence as well as biblical and non-biblical writings. He employs the practices of modern anthropology and sociology in his analysis of the material. Meeks ultimately concludes that the first century had different economic classes. His work resets the framework of a simple countryside fisherman and peasant society in which the church functioned. It seeks to demonstrate the church as a normal part of society showing how it is influenced by its surroundings. It is worth noting that the findings of Meeks are somewhat disputed. There is some criticism of both his methodologies and his conclusions. This will be developed and examined throughout this paper.

Longenecker, in a nod to Meeks, takes that urban work and expounds upon it. Longenecker argues that dealing with the poverty of urban centers in the first century is the mainstay in the writing of Paul. He sets out a robust "economy scale" (ES system) for urban Greco-Roman society. Yet the Longenecker scale of the economy and society is a furtherance of work done by Friesen. By using his in-depth analysis of poverty in the first century as the backdrop for a compelling presentation integrating economics, history, exegesis, and theology. Longenecker puts forth the idea that taking care of the needy is central to the gospel message he presents. In his own words: “Paul imagined care for the poor among gentile communities of Jesus-followers to be an expression and embodiment of the invading triumph of the deity of Israel who had made himself known in the scriptures of Israel, in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and now through the Spirit/spirit that enlivened small groups of Jesus-followers.”[4]

---

[4] Bruce Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishers, 2010), 299.

Longenecker offers a different perspective on Paul in which his convictions regarding care for the poor are shown to be central to the gospel. Additionally, Longenecker co-authored with Kelly Liebengood, *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*. In this work, the focus is the theology of the early church as well as the reception of that theology by the church fathers.

Fiensy, in his *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, also argues how economic issues affect every area of life (family, religion, community, etc.). His writing comes from a more economic perspective (instead of biblical), he addresses goods and services, labor, and the division of wealth.

Esler's *The Early Christian World* explores how the Jesus movement from Galilee permeated the known world of the Roman empire. It explores the political and religious worlds of the Greco-Roman age. This work provides insight into society. Specifically, it looks at how the church fits within and interacted with the society in which it lived. *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds* takes the research of the setting of the church and adds the component of interpretation. While many of the chapters do not have anything to do with the topic at hand, the first two chapters demonstrate how social sciences (of which economics is one) impact the interpretation of the writings both for the original hearers and today.

Beyond those three authors, there are a handful of resources that will be used as primary sources in understanding the nuances of the topic at hand. Richard DeMaris and his *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament* gives additional insight into the culture of the first century. Combining biblical scholarship along with sociologists, DeMaris looks at the values of values such as collectivism, kinship, memory, ethnicity, and honor while showing how to apply these to New Testament texts. It provides not just insight into the social structure of the day, but the application of such to the understanding of the Scripture.

Thomas Blanton and Raymond Pickett wrote *Paul and Economics: A Handbook.* This volume places Paul's writings in the context of the larger Roman economy. It looks at relevant topics like slavery, urban poverty, economic stratification, eating together, gift exchange, and the collection for Jerusalem. The authors also attempt to look at Paul's writing through the modern lens of Marxism and capitalism.

George Gotsis provides another economist's view on these issues. Writing in two different economic journals, Gotsis details the role of economics in Paul's writing. In another article, he compares Paul's views with the apostle James.

Green and Finley provide an additional perspective on the societal makeup of the world in which the scripture was written. Finley provides insight into the inner workings of the economy, primarily from the view of an economist. His understanding of the flow of resources – both incoming and production – helps the reader to understand Paul's world of readers better. Green approaches the issue from a more societal impact and how the flow of resources (or lack thereof) impacts those living in those conditions.

Peter Oakes (with a forward from Longenecker) in *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament* deals specifically with the imperial rule of Rome over house churches. He examines non-biblical literature combined with studying archaeology to provide a social scientific approach to criticism and interpretation of Paul's writing.

Steve Walton, the author of *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*, addresses poverty in the first century. Specifically, he deals with the causes of poverty, benefaction, patronage, donation, dehumanization, the undeserving poor, and the responsibility of individuals within the culture. As a collection of essays, it seeks to understand the first century through the lens of today, with solutions taken from the first century and applied.

Updating the work by Meeks is Todd Still and his *After the First Urban Christians: The Socio-Historical Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-Five Years Later.* It looks critically at the research methods and outcomes from Meeks' work. It offers new perspectives and insights into the issues of the urban setting in the first century.

While the early chapters are foundational for the ideas found later in this work, it will be the exposition of the text that will serve as the primary focus of the paper. For the exposition of passages, general commentaries will be used, with emphasis on authors who have also written about this and other sociological issues that influence the writing and interpretation of the Bible. The rationale for the use of these authors (and their commentary) is that their writing often comes from the perspective to looking at the issues of economics, class, and society in their interpretation. Specifically, authors like Peter Oakes, Craig Keener, George Gostis, Scot McKnight, and the NIV Application Commentary for each book of Paul will be used in looking at what the text of Paul is communicating. Added insight into the New Testament passages will come from more critical sources like *Hermenia*, the *Word Bible Commentary* series, and the *New International Greek Testament* commentaries.

Additionally, the following resources will be referenced for an exploration of the Old Testament issues, Satlow's *Judaism and the Economy*, *Wright's Old Testament Ethics for the People of God*, Knoppers' *The Economy of Ancient Judah in its Historical Context*, *Barrera's Biblical Economic Ethics*, and Walton's *Old Testament* Bible background commentary among others.

Paul's Economic Formation

There are a few issues that are universal to all cultures and all societies. Economics is one of those issues. In general, economics explores how people meet their needs and wants through scarce resources. Regardless of the time and place, people have always had needs and wants but limited resources to get them. Paul's personal experiences allowed him to experience a variety of economies, all under the umbrella of the Roman empire. Jerome notes that Saul was born in Gischala which would have exposed Paul and his family to rural agrarian Jewish economics. The Bible deals with this type of economy. "The Bible, more concerned with agrarian and pastoral economies than the urban, discusses bailment—the act of placing something in the trust of someone else— rather than mercantile partnership as such,"[5] Satlow concludes that most of the economic writings of the Bible deal with farming and economics outside the urban environment in which Paul ministered. Additionally, for the Galilean economy, "Fishermen were central to the Galilean economy and could make a good living by the standards of their culture, far better than the large numbers of peasants who worked the land through much of the Roman Empire."[6] Living in the rural Jewish world exposed Paul to the typical economy written about in the Bible.

Moving to Tarsus, Paul would have experienced the urban economics of an outpost of the empire. From there he learned at the feet of Gamaliel in Jerusalem living out once again urban economics but with a Jewish influence. In Jerusalem, Paul saw a different side of the Jewish economy. Jerusalem had the unique presence of the Temple which had a huge influence on the economy. "The temple was famous for its beauty and grandeur; it was also central to Jerusalem's

[5] Michael L. Satlow. *Judaism and the Economy: A Sourcebook.* (Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2019), 64.

[6] Craig Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 37.

economy (e.g., Josephus claims that its completion in AD 62– 64 put eighteen thousand people out of work)."[7] Then, post-conversion, Paul lived predominantly in urban environments moving closer and closer to the center of the empire, Rome. In each of his stops, whether from his early life or later in life, Paul would have experienced the realities of the economy and the need to take care of the poor along the way.

In addition to his economic exposure, Paul's religious heritage laid the foundation for his message of taking care of the poor. Paul, in writing about himself, notes that he was "circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee" (Philippians 3:8). As such Paul would have been familiar with the Mosaic Law from Exodus 22 which would have led him to the understanding about helping those having trouble. "That is because the most common way of extending help to the needy in the agrarian economy of ancient Israel was through non-interest loans. The understanding was that indigence was temporary, due to some sort of crop failure and that, when conditions improved, the aggrieved could make up for the loss. Help in this context was understandably kin-based and as will become clear in other portions of the Torah, distinctions were made between those within the larger kin unit and foreigners"[8] based on Exodus 22:24-26. It should be no surprise to the reader that all these experiences influence Paul's writing. Economics influences all aspects of life.

---

[7] Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 38.

[8] Satlow, *Judaism and the Economy*, 64.

Economics of Paul's Day

Within the Roman empire, the economy was primarily agrarian commerce, even with tenant farmers. As crops were harvested, trade was encouraged through offers of citizenship and tax breaks. Even though much of the economy was farming, it was still built on the backs of slaves. It is estimated that nearly thirty percent of the city of Rome was slaves. Both the tenant farmers (*coloni*) and the slaves lived in the city. They assimilated into the culture and were a part of everyday life. In the capital city alone, it was estimated that there were one million people, thus three hundred thousand slaves. Extending that statistically throughout the empire, it is thought that there were nearly sixty million people across the empire, and thus twenty million slaves. Admittedly it is difficult to extend those numbers throughout the empire, but it does paint a picture that the empire was divided into those with wealth and those without. The empire's economy positively generated wealth, but it was inequitably distributed to the advantage of those who held power.[9]

Roman society across the empire can be divided into elites and non-elites or the haves and have-nots. The gap that exists between the classes was considerable. Very little, if any, saw upward mobility from the lower echelon to the upper. This was because of one's birth station, and there was little opportunity for financial development. The upper classes were only the top three to five percent of the entire population in wealth, power, education, authority, and honor. Though living in a collective society, their value system was guided by personal gain and security as opposed to the enhancement of the common good. "Preservation of the political and economic status quo with its inherent social inequalities factored prominently in public policy.

[9] Keener, *IVP Background Commentary*, 38.

Although the elites showed disdain for manual labor, they depended on it."[10] Because economics impacted so many areas of life, it was not an issue that could be separated from all else. As such, Karl Polanyi argues, all ancient economies were "embedded economies."[11] This means that economics was not so much a separate field of study but instead permeated every facet of daily life. Additionally, it is worth noting that many of society's groups were and are based on economics. "In the ancient economy, people of the same trade usually lived together in the same part of town and formed trade guilds."[12]

Considering this economic reality contributes to the understanding of the formation of house churches. Each church is comprised of similar people of like means. The churches had like-minded people who were in precarious financial situations. For the most part, these house churches served a cross section of society, but many were in the lower status levels. They were non-elite, but they probably had slaves since they had homes to host the house church. This adds to the dynamic of Paul's writing being implemented into daily life (economically and beyond).

This paper will explore the makeup of those classes. Wayne Meeks has done extensive analysis in looking at the stratification of the Roman empire. Meeks has also taken this analysis and laid it upon the early church, suggesting that this classification exists within the church, and ultimately shows that the church was not comprised of only the poorest of the poor. Some have argued that all first-century Christians fell into this category. On the other hand, it is wrong to think that there were some elites among the Christians and that some of the tension within churches was due to sharp differences in social level. Instead, the economic divisions within the

---

[10] Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald. *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013) 137.

[11] Peter Oakes. *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2020) 64.

[12] Keener, *IVP Background Commentary*, 39.

church would be better stated as "relatively poor, relatively prosperous," "minimum existence," and "absolutely poor." Oakes uses a house church model from Pompeii to show the differentiation within the early church.[13] One of the matters that influences the economic makeup of the church is to discover whether the churches were made up of itinerant followers of Jesus from Israel or established Hellenistic house church communities. Pliny the Younger, in his examination of early Christians, does note that there were indeed different classes in society that translated to the Church. As for the differences in the writing of the New Testament, it has been argued that the diversity of New Testament writing on economic issues can be attributed to the situations of members of first-century house churches.

Economics and the Bible

With all this in mind, it begs the question as to why economics has not been more frequently discussed in connection with biblical interpretation. Not very often does the average laymen hear a sermon or Bible lesson on the economics of the times of scripture's writing much less hear how it influences interpretation. As Oakman puts it, "When Luke's Jesus says, "Blessed are you who are poor" (Luke 6:20), should we think of this in the peasant economic context of Galilee, or the Greco-Roman urban context of Luke, or the shadowy world of the scribal transmitters of Luke's sources?"[14] Or is it simply "spiritual destitution" to which Luke is writing? Oakman puts forth a fair question: why isn't the issue of economics considered more in the interpretation of the text? Additionally, the Messianic implications of the statement

[13] Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*, 73-77.

[14] Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 54.

(regardless of Luke or Matthew) once again point to the centrality of the message to the gospel. This broadens the interpretation of such texts, and the writings of Paul are no different.

With economics playing such a huge role in daily living and the obvious influence on the life of Paul, it is interesting to note that it is not taught more. A precursory look at writings on the theology of Paul shows almost no mention of his dealing with the economy. Morgan and Peterson's book on the theology of Paul, *The Glory of God*, examines in depth these Pauline topics: God's glory, salvation, resurrection, new covenant, church, eschatology, systematic, and the catch-all Christian living (covering love, provision, hope, mystery, boasting, worship). In their volume, the idea of provision brushes on the idea of mutualism and uses Philippians 4 but does not cover the issue of taking care of the poor and economics. In his New Testament work on theology, Keown (*Discovering the New Testament*) addresses Paul's writings on the topics of God, Christ, Spirit, fulfillment, sin and wrath, law, righteousness and justification, faith, Jewish and Gentile relationships, ethics, mission, and hope. Apart from a single, simple phrase in a sentence in a discussion about ethics, which states that believers are to be generous, there is nothing on the ethic of taking care of the poor. It is worth noting that Douglas Moo in his recent comprehensive release on the theology of Paul (*A Theology of Paul and His Letters: The Gift of the New Realm in Christ*), an over seven-hundred-page volume, spends less than one page on the idea of "doing good" to others.

Peter Oakes suggests that understanding the economic situation of a writer helps today's interpreters understand what they were writing. As one looks at relating a text to everyday life, the consideration of economics must be made. In applying economics to a text, Oakes argues that it influences understanding in three ways. "First, economics can provide an overall analytical framework for interpretation. Second, the aim of the interpretation of a text may be to gather economic evidence. Third, economic evidence may be a resource that is used in interpretation."[15] Ultimately, Oakes suggests that the use of economics in the interpretation of scripture has two purposes. "The use of economics in the study of early Christian texts ranges between these two limits, from the elucidation of texts that directly refer to some aspect of the first-century economic system through to the use of theories in which the economic situation of writers, readers, or characters in the texts is related to class interests that are seen as shaping every aspect of the text."[16] It will be argued in this paper that understanding the economic environment shapes our understanding of the text.

Furthermore, this view is shaped to the point of understanding the role that a Jesus follower has in taking care of the poor. This view can be summed up in the concept that "God reveals the fact that he has so closely aligned himself with the vulnerable that their words are also his words"[17] Thus, Paul's emphasis on taking care of the poor is akin to the gospel message he focuses on so clearly and frequently. As one looks at the writing of Paul on economic issues, one of the issues that will be examined is whether Paul is writing to be subservient to the culture of the Roman empire or whether he is writing to undermine cultural norms through "hidden texts." This is often a similar discussion surrounding the "household codes" of Paul (Colossians, Ephesians, 1 Timothy). The idea of "hidden texts" will be referred to as transversive (instead of subversive).

Regardless of his writing being subversive or transversive, there is a large amount of writing about the economy within Paul's epistles. The bulk of his economic writing deals

---

[15] Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*. 78.

[16] Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*, 64.

[17] Satlow, *Judaism and the Economy*, 20.

directly with taking care of the poor. Paul writes in depth about economic issues facing the followers of Jesus on at least six occasions (Galatians 2, 2 Corinthians 8-9, Romans 15, 1 Corinthians 11, 1 Timothy 5, and Philippians 4). In all, Paul touches on the issue nearly thirty times in twelve of his epistles (Titus being the lone exception) as well as in his speeches in the book of Acts. Frequency does not necessarily translate to importance. However, the relationship of the message to the gospel does. The reader will find that the message of the gospel is closely related to that of taking care of the poor. One will discover that the Law, the teaching of Jesus, and the practice of the early Church will all support this idea. Yet, most importantly, one will find when Paul writes of the economy, he is writing with the gospel and taking care of the poor in his mind.

Chapter 2: The Ancient Economy

Economics is part of every culture throughout history. The first century is no different. The apostle Paul writes in a time with clear economic boundaries and expectations. The existence of that world must have influenced his writing. However, much of the study of his letters have not yet included looking through the lens of economics. Scholarship, for one reason or another, has not yet considered Paul's biblical theology of economics as a major component of his writing. As Hollander states, "the economic history of early Christianity has not yet been written. Nor is there even a commentary on the New Testament that focuses on the economic aspects of various passages. That is certainly not because economic issues were foreign to the first Christians."[18] Hollander goes on to note that economic issues faced believers in nearly every book of the New Testament. "Further, there are numerous direct references and allusions to economic issues in the New Testament. Scholars are now realizing that we cannot understand the New Testament without some attention to the subject."[19]

However, giving attention to the issue is not enough. Simply being aware that economics has an impact on religion falls short of the influence it has on the writing of Scripture. Many commentators and writers of scriptural interpretation understand that economics have an impact on the writing and interpretation. As such, much of the scholarship in this area is simply historical and not interpretive. "Most scholars of religion readily acknowledge the role that religion plays in the economy and the economic aspects of religion itself, they have until recently paid substantially less attention to the issue of "religion and the economy" than historians and

[18] David B. Hollander, and Thomas R. Blanton IV, and John T. Fitzgerald, *The Extramercantile Economies of Greek and Roman Cities: New Perspectives on the Economic History of Classical Antiquity*, (Oxfordshire, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2019), 2.

[19] Richard DeMaris, and Dietmar Neufeld, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 194.

economists have to the issue of “history and the economy.”[20] Sociologically, it is important to see how economics influenced the church and the formation of Christianity and vise-versa. More specifically, Esler puts it this way: “Christianity and the empire affected one another – it was a dynamic process in which both sides were changing.”[21]

However, when economic consideration is given to interpretation, Friesen argues admittedly that most all economic interpretation in the 20th century is through Marxist or capitalist eyes and ideologies. The absence of those two schools of thought in the first century means that lens of interpretation is invalid. If the world in which Paul wrote did not exist with Marxism or capitalism, then he wrote in a different world and interpreters need to be aware of what that world looked like. “Any attempt to understand early Christianity apart from the unique cultural context (including economics) of the ancient Mediterranean in which it was born will lead to a misleading and emaciated form of intellectual history, dangerously divorced from the realities of human experience.”[22]

Thus, it is important to start with an understanding of the economy of the region before one looks at its interpretive influence. Also, considering Paul’s tight connection of the gospel to economic issues, helps the interpreter to understand the world in which Paul was writing.

Collectivism

One of the sociological phenomena that impact the Mediterranean economic world is the concept of collectivism. This is a defining characteristic of the culture of the New Testament that

[20] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economics of Greek and Roman Cities*, 2.

[21] Philip Esler, *The Early Christian World*, (New York: Routledge, 2017) 21.

[22] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 22.

the Western world does not fully understand, though it is still prevalent in the world today. It is estimated that nearly eighty percent of the world's population still values and lives with this behavior.

Collectivism holds that people are most concerned with the group to which they belong. It looks at advancement and decisions through the lens of the group and what benefits the group the most. Individualism – the idea that influences Western thought the most – is not valued. "We" outweighs "me" in almost every decision. As Demaris notes:

> Collectivists believe groups are unique and distinct relative to other groups. The unique and distinct groups to which persons belong through no choice of their own are groups into which a person is born and socialized: parents and family by birth, place by location of the kin group, and gender by patriarchal gender roles. Genealogy, geography, and gender serve to define single groups as unique and distinct. It is group features that then define single group members.[23]

The impact this has on economic thought is forceful. In a capitalist view of the economy, the ego is considered the motivating factor of the economy. Decisions are arrived at by looking at what is going to most benefit the individual. Resources are allocated to what is going to bring the individual the best return. The focus is on the self and not on the group. This is a stark contrast to the collective mindset. As a result, the collective philosophy makes economic decisions based on what impacts the group the greatest, not the individual.

Though families are one aspect of their group, collectivism is more than one's family group. The collectivist society was not just families, but social groups as well. "Birth-dependent groups are kin groups, immediate or expanded kin groups consisting of members whose situation has been determined by birth. Collectivists find it difficult, if not impossible, to leave such

[23] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament,* 20.

groups or to deny these ascribed features."[24] These groups would have been defined by trade, social activities, worship, and as a result, the emerging church. As such, through the collective group, one finds their place within the hierarchy of society. Thus, the newly burgeoning Christian groups throughout the Roman empire would have identified themselves as a collective group.

Oftentimes, these followers of the Way would have been ostracized from their familial groups and in turn, would find a new group within society to identify with – namely with other believers. As followers of Jesus, the new believers would have seen or been taught the teaching of Jesus found in Luke 14 which emphasizes one's forsaking family for the sake of following Christ. At the same time, one sees familial salvation throughout the gospels and the book of Acts. As one further reads Paul's writing, one can conclude that the path of following Jesus is often lonely, but the collective nature of society would afford Christ followers (and their Christ-following families) to connect to a new collective group; namely other believers. With Jesus serving as the leader of their new lifestyle, they would be shaped to make those connections. Demaris asserts:

> One's behavior in the group is dictated by the group's customs and sanctions or the authority of the leader. Unless for the benefit of the group, achievement and competition are seen as disruptive of social harmony. The worth of a person is measured by familial status, social position, class, and caste; birth, family prestige, heritage, or traditional prominence are more important than personal accomplishments.[25]

Yet, even within that social structure, there are exceptions. There is some individual-promoting behavior. Specifically, the extremely wealthy often look out for themselves. The elites are not as concerned with the collective group as the average citizen. "Elite members of

[24] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament,* 20.

[25] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, 20.

otherwise collectivistic societies often evidence quasi-individualistic behavior, frequently motivated by pleasure, personal needs, or achievement aspirations. Elites indulge in all kinds of conspicuous consumption, carnivals, trade, luxury goods, and so on."[26] This again has an impact on economic decisions and behavior. Additionally, the least of those on the social ladder are also individualistic. Often, the lowest levels of society are cut off from their respective collective. Demaris observes that the lowest levels are excluded:

> "At the other extreme, the lowest levels of hierarchically stratified societies, one finds people who cannot maintain their usual social status: beggars, prostitutes, disinherited sons, family-less widows, orphans, or children that families cannot support who are abandoned to the streets to fend for themselves, are all obvious examples. These lowest levels of society, often called "the most marginalized," are persons who are cut off from the ingroups that guarantee survival in collectivistic cultures.[27]

As such those in this category are isolated from groups and left to fend for themselves.

Understanding the culture of collectivism is important to see how the Mediterranean world operates. Seeing the importance and value of the group over the individual greatly influences how Christians would operate socially and as a result economically. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of collectivism on economic decisions.

Economic Interpretive Terms

The next discussion that adds to the value of understanding economics is a brief examination of the interpretative methods of economics. There are two views when looking at economies and their value. There is the substantivist view and the formalist view. The

[26] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, 23.

[27] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, 23.

divergence of these two views determines one's perspective on what an economy is and how an economy operates.

The substantivist views the economy as more than markets, commodities, the exchange of money, and the pursuit of meeting individual needs using scarce resources. It looks at status and ideology more than supply and demand. "Economic behavior is "embedded in a network of social relationships that determine values, attitudes, and actual behavior."[28] They look at the aspects of the social system – primarily in the cities - in which the economics of the society operates. These aspects of the social system are kinship, politics, and religion.

On the other hand, are the formalists. They look at the technical basics of the operations of the economy. They look at the pre-industrial, predominantly non-market, exchange of goods and services. "The formalists, on the other hand, maintain that the economic sphere was separate from social relations."[29] Formalists view the ancient city as the primary place of business. They see the city as a parasite living off the surrounding countryside.

For this study, a substantivist view will be taken when looking at the economics of the ancient world. As already spelled out, collectivism was the ruling philosophy of the day. Everything was done with the group in mind and the group's interest at hand. Thus, one cannot look at economic outcomes separate from social connectedness. As one will see later, in the ancient world, economics cannot be separated from other issues like politics, religion, and social happenings. When examining the ancient Mediterranean, it is most beneficial and best to look at economics through the lens of substantivism.

---

[28] David A. Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, (Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2014), 119.

[29] David A. Fiensy, *Christian Origins*, 119.

The Ancient Mediterranean Economy

This section will highlight some of the commonalities of the ancient economy – specifically in the Mediterranean region. Later, there will be a specific look at the Palestinian economy during the Second Temple Judaism period, the Roman economy, and the urban economy. As this paper takes a substantive view of the economy, it will also examine the issues surrounding stratification and social interaction. As Esler states, "The ancient world did not possess an 'economy', in the modern sense of an autonomous area of human interaction largely separate from other social features and governed by the use of money and markets, with associated arrangements for trade and exchange."[30] Instead, one will find that the ancient economy involves many of the social interactions that are important to a collective society.

It is hard to find agreement among economists and historians on a definition of economics. However, it is even more difficult to find disagreement. A single definition does not make everyone as satisfied as the best definition but most quibbles over a minute and insignificant terms. Therefore, for this paper, economics is meeting needs through scarce resources.

Originally, economics was rooted in the Greek concept of household management – *oikonomia*. It involved the issues of handling resources but went much further than that. It took on the task of organizing the people of the household, how the family would interact with others and the role of the household within the community. It would manage the household's role in society. "The ancient concept of *oikonomia* is thus far more expansive than the modern understanding of an "economy," for ancient writers did not view the economic activity as distinct

[30] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 12.

from other aspects of political and social life, including estate and household management."[31] In this role, *oikonomia* involved other areas of living. A home's spiritual, political, social, and economic worlds were all intertwined. "'Economics' did not exist as a separate area of inquiry in the ancient Mediterranean. The very word derives, in fact, from *oikonomia*, meaning the management of the oikos, or private household – a subject in which there was a keen interest (as in Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*)."[32]

Even religion is included in this discussion. Whether influenced by the pagan pursuits of the Roman culture or the Jewish pursuit of Yahweh or the Christian pursuit of Jesus, religion is a part of the social world that involves economics. "Religion, though often neglected in studies of the economy, plays a role in all countries and inevitably in their economies. Sometimes religion's role is substantial, as in the temple-states of the ancient world or the modern state of Israel."[33] As a result, it is easy to see how Paul's writing about cultural and social issues must have touched on economic issues as they were not separate from everyday life. "The ancient economy, in contrast to the modern one, was not a separate sphere of society."[34] Finley states, "(they) farmed, traded, manufactured, mined, taxed, confined, deposited, loaned money, mode profits or failed. What they did not do, however, was to combine these particular activities conceptually into a unit or a differentiated sub-system of society."[35]

---

[31] Joel B. Green, and Lee McDonald, *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 156.

[32] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 12.

[33] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economics of Greek and Roman Cities*, 1.

[34] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economics of Greek and Roman Cities*, 29.

[35] Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 12.

The ancient economy was predominantly an agrarian one. This is an important note of discussion. For many readers, that is a foreign concept, but at one time it was very much a part of everyday life. "The first thing we should say about the ancient economy of the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern regions is that it was agrarian. This observation is so common as to be beyond dispute."[36] Two common attributes mark typically mark an agrarian economy. First, agrarian societies were controlled by monarchs who gained and held power through their military. Secondly, due to technological advances, diversity of labor, and improved trade, there was a collective surplus of food beyond what was needed merely to subsist. Most of the surplus, however, was siphoned off by the rulers; since there was a surplus, urban communities could exist and the population, in general, could increase."[37] Furthermore, "In most agrarian societies about one-tenth of the population lived in urban centers, the rest in small villages that worked the land."[38]

Part of this dependence on agrarian economics is due to natural resources. "The Mediterranean area constitutes a single "climatic region," marked by winter rains and long summer droughts, by light soils and dry farming for the most part, in contrast to the irrigation farming on which so much of the ancient Near Eastern economy was based. Moses Finley observes that:

> It is a region of relatively easy habitation and much outdoor living, producing on its best soils, the coastal plains and large inland plateaus, a good supply of the staple cereal grasses, vegetables, and fruits, in particular grapes and olives, with suitable pasture for small animals, sheep, pigs, and goats, but not on the whole, cattle. The ubiquitous olive -

[36] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament,* 195.

[37] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 69.

[38] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*.

> the chief source of edible fat, of the base soap, and fuel for illumination - is an essential clue to the Mediterranean lifestyle.[39]

As the countryside would provide for the cities, the primary motivation for growing crops was taking care of the family. Most production that originated with peasants was for personal use in the context of households. Those products that did move to others passed through social networks, communities, and villages. In rare cases, the products would be sold to pay rent or taxes. Elite landowners brought the fruits of their land to urban markets. Even within urban environments, goods and services were produced and distributed within familial and collegia networks.[40] Peasants labored on their land as family units if they were freeholders or tenant farmers. Those bound to a piece of land also were bound to their families.

Yet even with the predominance of agrarian production, there were issues. These issues included the fact that a large number of farmers could still not support all those who needed food. "It is important to emphasize that ancient agrarian societies, with poor agricultural technology, could support only a small group of elites. The surplus was simply too meager."[41] Since the production could not meet the needs, this created other problems. Initially, the issues created were stratification and classes. Understanding this framework, it is easy to see that ancient agrarian societies tended to be structured around two groups: the takers (i.e., the elites) and the givers (i.e., the large class of rural peasants). The number of these aristocrats was always small in agrarian societies. Most historians estimate that only about 1 percent of the population was in this class. The estimates for the overall elite population of the Roman empire in the first century ranged between one and five percent of the population and thus most people were poor

---

[39] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 31.

[40] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economics of Greek and Roman Cities*, 51.

[41] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 12.

and dependent upon some sort of patron for their survival. The aristocrats did not engage in physical work and usually did not even live on the farms. Rather, as absentee landlords, they lived in the cities and demanded rent from the peasants. Fiensy furthers the point: "The natural result of different cultural experiences was a sense of superiority on the part of the urbanite over the country peasant. Lenski shows that in agrarian societies in general, the urban elite viewed peasants as subhuman."[42]

The government, made up predominantly of the aristocrats and elites, would then tax the peasantry. They would demand more from them than could be produced thus continuing the model in place. The payment of rent and taxes by the peasants kept the wealthy comfortable in their lifestyle. The burdens of taxes created a difficult balance for the poor. As a result, "life was a continual challenge to juggle the demands of the powerful on their farm produce with the subsistence needs of their families."[43] As Esler notes, it is essential to realize that because rents and taxes had to be paid to landlords and urban elites, the storage houses of the poor would shrink and subsistence would have been difficult.[44] As a result, the situation did not improve everyone's state but instead kept the cycle going downward.

While there were other pursuits of labor and market exchanges, the primary means of the economy was through agriculture. It is worth noting that there was no singular economy. There was not a world economy (with which modern readers are familiar). There was not even an imperial economy and instead most economic interactions were regional, even down to each village.

---

[42] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 8.

[43] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, 197.

[44] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 105

Since there was not a singular economy, each area was dependent upon themselves to meet needs with limited resources. To work within this system, there developed an inter-dependence of communities upon each other. Finley notes that the "Town-Country-Sea" relationship is what drove those economies.[45] The cities were dependent upon the production of the countryside. The movement of goods (from region to region and throughout the empire) was dependent upon access to water. While the roads of the Roman empire are famous for historical accomplishment and significance, they were less than ideal for the transport of goods. Therefore, access to rivers or proximity to the sea was critical. This is how trade and commerce happened in the first century.

Additionally, the state established all economic policies, and all consequences lie with those decisions. Whether beneficial or detrimental, the policies of economics were absolute.[46] Yet even with that, a hands-off non-interference approach dominated the approach to the economy. The policy was supposedly dictated for the common good of the people but seemed to benefit the elite more than anyone else. Again, one can see the collective nature of society in this philosophy. "'Satisfaction of material wants' is the key concept, which is not synonymous with the needs of the economy, of trade as such, or of a mercantile class. Sometimes the latter was a beneficiary (though not always), and when that happened it was a by-product."[47] Since the satisfaction of wants drives economic decisions, one can understand that at times, those decisions were not in the best interest of the overall economy (meeting needs). Only in extremes did the state get involved in the economic affairs of the people. The exception to that rule was the

[45] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 129.

[46] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 155.

[47] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 160.

production of currency, over which the state had sole discretion of doing. It is interesting to note that the production of currency hurt the peasantry. Though it enabled citizens to have money, one cannot eat a piece of money like one was able to eat goods previously in exchange for goods. Eventually, a balanced reciprocity had to exist within villages.

As a result of the peasants no longer being able to eat, they were forced to get money by selling or borrowing. This exchange of goods and services for money created even more problems. As a result, debt existed in the ancient economy. "In Greco-Roman antiquity, chronic indebtedness was seemingly the norm for the poor, and such a state of affairs subjected them to 'brutal compulsion and oppression.'"[48] Conceptual ideas and practices like debtor's prison came into existence. The situation in Second Temple Judaism was not much different. "In Palestine, for example, with rising debt came greater landlessness, and thus tenancy and control centered on fewer and fewer wealthy landowners."[49] There were few ways that the cycle could be broken.

While the lack of government intervention worked for the economy, the government did intervene on occasion when overwhelmingly it failed to feed the masses. Remedial food distribution programs failed and continued the stress and struggle for the poor. As one will see, this has a major impact on the economics of the day, society in general, and in turn Paul's writing.

Other aspects of the ancient economy were shared resources. Within a group of similar workers – *collegia* – tools, meeting space, and input resources were shared. Through this, some financial solidarity and work solidarity was formed.[50] For the modern reader: think of union-type

---

[48] Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 13.

[49] Douglas Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*. (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008), 25.

[50] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economics of Greek and Roman Cities*, 134.

work relationships. This once again goes to illustrate the influence of collectivism on the economy.

While an agrarian society, the purpose of producing crops was for the collective. There was not an ambition of getting rich, but instead, it was to provide. The people worked the land so they could eat. "The peasant saw his land and work as the means of feeding his family and not as a business for profit."[51] However, eventually, this translated into a bigger picture – making money for the elites. "What is missing in this picture is commercial or capitalist exploitation. The ancient economy had its form of cheap labor and therefore did not exploit provinces in that way."[52] Furthermore, "The concept of markets is secondary to the idea that getting resources (conquest, oppression) 'resource extraction'." [53]

All in all, the economy of the Roman empire is far from what modern readers would have in mind. Though developing and growing (like the modernists picture), it was still primitive and undeveloped. Garnsey and Saller describe the Roman economy as "undeveloped." By this, they mean that a high majority of the people lived at subsistence level from agricultural production and that the level of investment in manufacturing was minimal. Due to poor transportation, some areas of manufacturing and trade did not develop. "The prevalence of an aristocratic ideology that was inimical to any profitable enterprise except agricultural production restricted the development of a prosperous and confident merchant class." [54]

---

[51] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*, 196.

[52] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 158.

[53] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economics of Greek and Roman Cities*, 20.

[54] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 16.

It is worth noting, that trade did exist in premodern economies. "Trade was largely an elite activity of long-distance transactions in prestige goods."[55] Beyond trade, artisans were present, and fishing was an industry of the countryside. Of note: "The fishing syndicates were not exceptionally wealthy and paid their fixed 'rent' in fish to agents who contracted rent and tax collection from the Galilean elites."[56] Even as both trade, and even fishing, were present, one can see that they, too, contributed to stratification within society. Even with that in mind, marketization must have had some good as it grew and took over the agrarian lifestyle. The urban setting allowed the peasants to market their goods and improve their economic status. The villages not only engaged in farming but also had industry. As Demaris notes, "the socioeconomic effects of the increase in marketization are often assumed to have been positive."[57] Yet even with the marketization, the classes grew farther apart.

Often, these social classes outweighed one's ethnicity. One's race and familial background did not form the social classes as strongly as one's wealth. Though one could argue the inseparable nature of the two and how they are inextricably linked. "A well-to-do merchant is about on the same level regardless of his or her ethnic origins. Likewise, a poor day laborer suffered the same plight whether he or she was a Jew, a Phoenician, an Arabian, or a Greek."[58] Additionally, society was divided into urban and rural. The urban setting saw a Hellenistic influence, a common language, and similar customs. On the other hand, the rural culture demonstrated a traditional language and traditional customs. Out of those two divisions,

---

[55] Gary Knoppers, *The Economy of Ancient Judah in its Historical Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 4.

[56] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 109.

[57] DeMaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament,* 196.

[58] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 6.

economics followed. As a result, the economy developed classes. Though the concept of class is a relatively modern term, there were divisions of society within the culture. This list is a summary and not comprehensive, but the classes were the elite, the retainers, the peasants, the low, and the expendables. As Fiensy notes, "The size difference between the rich and poor populations was enormous. Perhaps only about 1 percent of the population belonged to the elite class and about one-third of the population lived in "habitual want."[59] This group living in "habitual want" would have made up, not only a large portion of the empire (33%) but also a large percentage of Paul's audience. As a result, their life was hard and driven to meet needs. "According to MacMullen, the person living in "habitual want" "devoted the vast bulk of each day's earnings to his immediate needs and accumulated no property or possessions to speak of."[60]

From a substantivist perspective, two other issues will be addressed briefly here but will be explored in depth in the next chapter. The first of those issues is the role of giving in the economy. Giving, patronage, and the client-patron relationship were key aspects of the economy. Typically giving was in exchange for something else – recognition, status, influence, or some other non-material gain. However, giving was also reserved for the elite class. Those who could afford to part with some of their surpluses. Thus, when Paul writes about giving to the poor, not only does it strike a chord with so many who are poor, but it also would have been a familiar concept to the readers. The other issue is the concept of honor. The honor was a commodity in all economic systems. Treating one another with honor, conducting business with honor, and receiving honor (for giving gifts) were all valued in the ancient economy.

---

[59] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 23.

[60] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 23.

The Palestinian Economy

The Palestinian economy follows the general principles of the ancient economy described above. Some specific traits make it distinct, but much of it has been covered already. For the most part, the Palestinian economy is agrarian. As such, much of the production of goods was for personal (and familial) survival. The economy was "essentially similar to the economics in the rest of the Mediterranean world."[61] In his context, Josephus notes: "There is no doubt that economic activity in Roman Palestine centered on agricultural production, with the harvest of grain for food, olives for oil, and grapes for wine the primary crops (Josephus, Ag. Ap. 1.60)."[62] "The traditional crops were grain (wheat, barley), olives, figs, and grapes. Of these, grain was the primary staple in the diet of the populace. It was grown wherever possible, but apparently, the optimal crops were grown in the northern part of Samaria."[63] "Many of the crops grown around small villages served the needs of the local populations, the regional military, and the elite who wanted to be viewed as devoting themselves to "higher" interests of philosophy."[64]

Like the ancient economy, most of the land in Judea and Galilee seems to have been owned and farmed by freeholding peasants, but some large landowners fell into the elite class. Green observes:

> With regard to the Palestinian economy, the claim is made that wealth and power, including land ownership, were concentrated in the hands of urban elites (particularly in Jerusalem), whereas the vast majority of the peasant population in Judea and Galilee worked the land and paid taxes that supported the comfortable lifestyles of the wealthy.[65]

---

[61] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 6.

[62] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 161.

[63] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 486.

[64] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 485.

[65] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 161.

Demaris further describes it this way: “Another way of describing agrarian societies, instead of in terms of empire and the elite class, is from the perspective of the largest number (90 percent) of their inhabitants: the peasants.”[66]

The agrarian economy of Palestine was common in other ways. The socio-economic makeup of the region was once again the haves and have-nots. As such, there were plenty of peasants who lived below sustenance levels. “Palestine was a typical agrarian society in this regard in that it too had a population of beggars Jerusalem was, according to J. Jeremias, a center for begging. Numerous beggars stationed themselves at holy places in the city, especially at the temple’s gates.”[67] Yet, one distinction of the region was the Second Temple Jewish understanding of the understood obligation to take care of the poor. This supports the idea of communal responsibility that came from collectivism. “Traditional texts certainly oblige the wealthy to take care of the poor and they respect human dignity.”[68]

Remembering there is no universal economy, there were different emphases within the region. As such, there were different economies between Galilee and Judea. This might be attributed to the fact that Galilee was more recently settled than Judea and therefore had a newer economy.[69] Additionally, one can see a gap in the level of wealth between the aristocrats of Galilee and the elites of Judea. Also, since there existed regional trade in clay pottery, basalt,

---

[66] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament,* 196

[67] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 485.

[68] Michael L. Satlow. *Judaism and the Economy: A Sourcebook* (Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2019), 6.

[69] The Holman Illustrated Guide to Biblical Geography details the migration of Israel throughout the promised land from the south to the north. Additionally, it explains the historical difficulty of setting the north (Galilee) due to the topography of the region combined with the frequent foreign incursions from the north.

millstones, and olive oil, non-elite trade was an important aspect of economic production and was not merely controlled by elites. As Green comments:

> In addition to farming and fishing, peasants in villages had a variety of specializations that were handed down in families, such as making clothing; processing grain; manufacturing pottery, leather goods, metal, and wooden goods; weaving; and pressing olive oil and grapes. This allowed for self-sustaining village life.[70]

Additionally, fishing was a part of the Galilean economy. Commercial fishing was not a free enterprise but was controlled by the wealthy, who sold fishing rights to brokers who in turn sold leases to fishermen.[71] At the bottom of this industry were hired laborers, who engaged in tasks like cleaning and mending nets and managing oars and sails[72] The Palestinian economy was marked by more than farming and fishing. “There were also cloth industries in Galilee. Linen, grain, and olive oil were exported. Pottery was also an important item of trade. The distribution for such trade would have required an active mercantile class.”[73]

While archaeology points to economic activity outside of farming, ancient texts also indicate market practices. As Satlow notes, “Nearly all traditional Jewish texts assume that there are markets. Although these texts rarely judge these markets in and of themselves as “bad” or a necessary evil, they also recognize that markets have the potential to generate problems.”[74]

One of the defining characteristics of the Jewish economy that distinguishes it from the typical ancient economy is the role of God in the economy. As there was no distinction between religion and the economy (among other social sciences), the view of religion in the economy was

---

[70] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 486.

[71] Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 106.

[72] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 486.

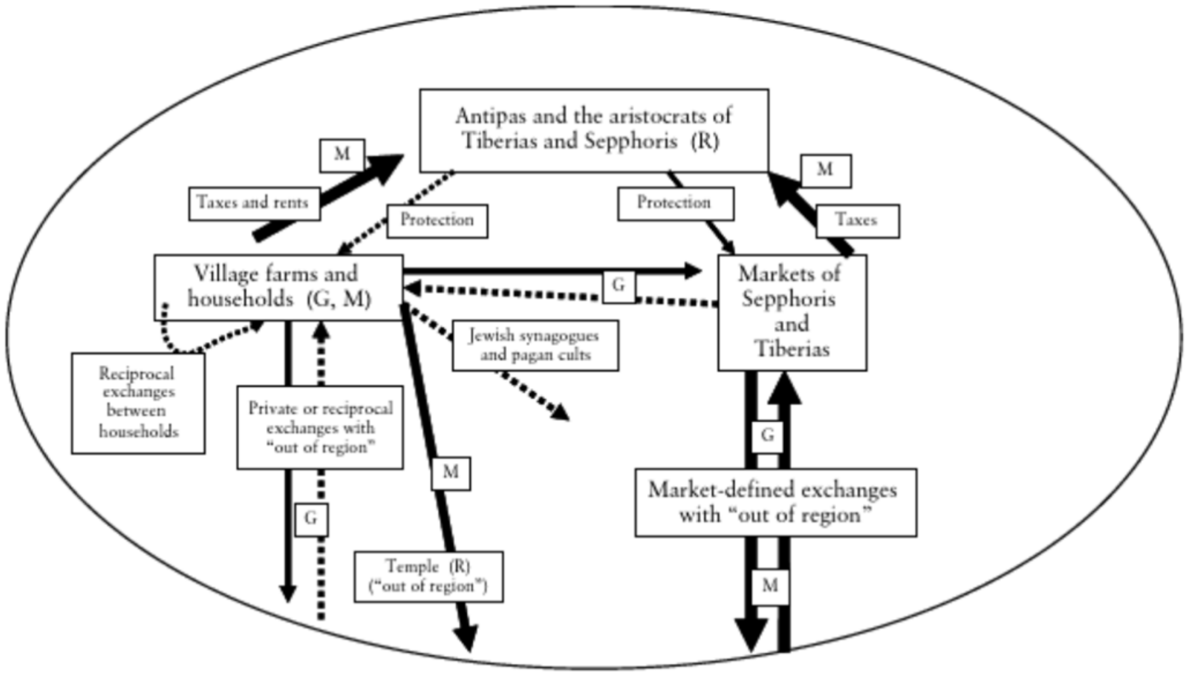
[73] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 17.

[74] Satlow, *Judaism and the Economy,* 8.

unique. The dominant thought of the day was that God owned everything and people are stewards of Him. The land, its production, their production – it all belonged to Him. This thought changes the average person's perspective on the economy. Additionally, Mosaic Law instructed people to take care of those who must need greatly influenced behavior. It directly impacted the beneficiary (as they would have to follow the instruction) and the benefactor (those who gave). Also, in the Law of Moses would be those laws describing the tithes and offerings that governed economic religious life.

In addition to the tithes required by the Law of Moses, there would have been more obligations required for Jews. Additionally, a religious tax or Temple Tax would have been required. The government also conscripted a tax, due to Herod. Also, due the government would have been the tribute due to Rome. Finally, for those engaged in market economics, there would have been tariffs on the transportation of goods.

The following is a suggested model of the flow of resources in Galilee put forth by Davies in the village exchange or markets within the classes:



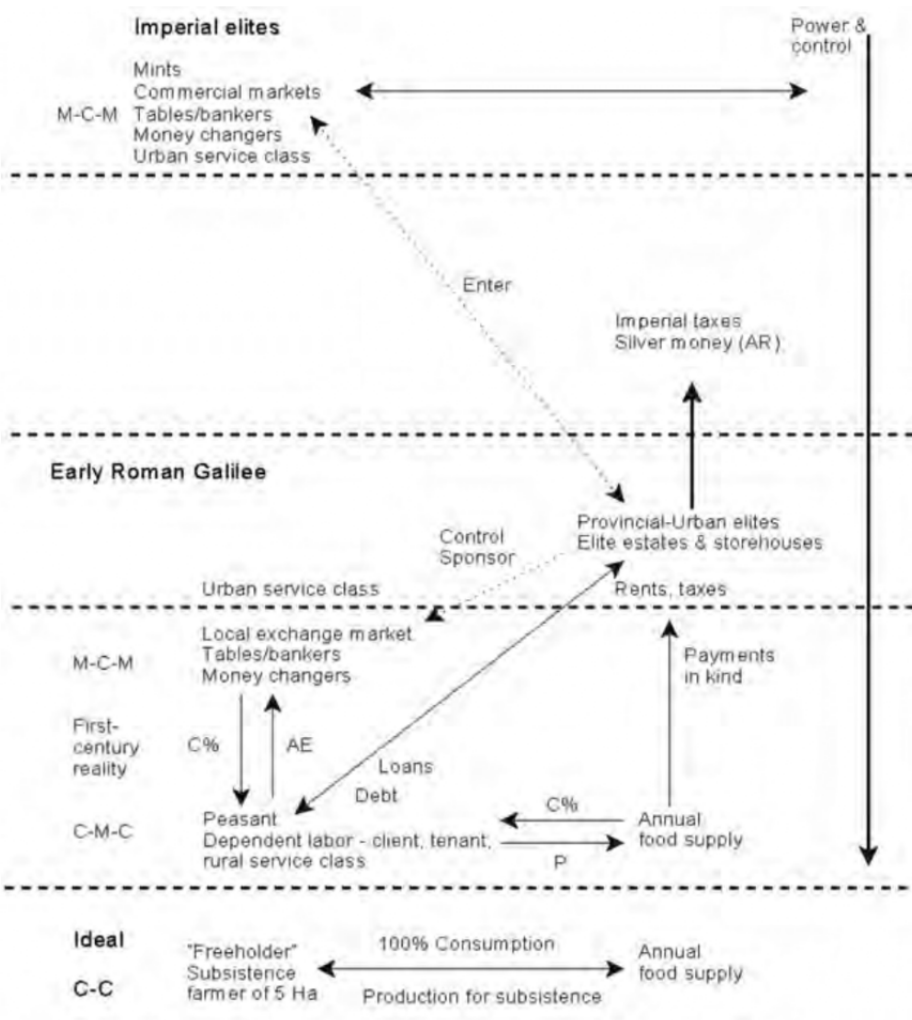
75

The flow of Resources in Ancient Galilee

In the above chart, the width of the arrows indicates the bandwidth of each group's ability for the transactions. The "M" designation represents the motors that drive the economy, while the "G" markings represent the gates or impediments to the economy. Finally, the "R" label represents the reservoirs.

Additionally, Oakman puts forth his model of the Jewish economy as it relates to Roman Galilee:

[75] John K. Davies, "Linear and Nonlinear Flow Models for Ancient Economies", *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005), 150.



[76]

Second Temple Judaism Economy in Roman Galilee

In the above chart, "C" is the abbreviation for Commodity, or goods and services. "M" represents Money or currency. Whereas "C%" is representative of Percent Consumable, and "P" represents the Production Level.

Both above visuals give an idea of how the economy flowed in ancient Palestine.

---

[76] Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 150.

The Greco-Roman Economy

In the Greco-Roman economy, land ownership was a defining characteristic of wealth. Though still an agrarian economy, the method of land management and the role of the farm were different in the Roman economy. The prevailing thought is that the countryside farms feed the urban cities.[77] Sticking with the collective society, the goal was family provision and benefit to society. That is to say that the goal of production was not personal advancement or accumulation of wealth. Wealth in the Roman empire was found through land ownership. "The commonplace that the land was the chief source of wealth in antiquity must be understood in the Roman Empire, from its beginning, to include the wealth of the state."[78] The Roman economy was characterized by the disparity in wealth distribution. On the flip side, people worked to survive. They worked for livelihood which made them "dependent labor". This means that the workers were dependent upon others for income.[79]

Another defining characteristic of the Roman economy was the number of slaves throughout the empire. It is estimated that nearly ten percent of the empire's population was enslaved. With a population of roughly fifty million, that means that there would be nearly five million slaves. "In all the sources of the late Empire, when productive slaves appear they are working in the rural sector, as farmers or craftsmen, whereas the still numerous urban slaves appear with equal regularity as domestics and administrators."[80] However, it is important to note that slaves were not used in large numbers for mass production. Instead, they were used in small

[77] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 126.

[78] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 89.

[79] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 69.

[80] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*., 94.

numbers and were localized.[81] The Roman slavery system is different from most throughout history. Slaves in the Roman economy were acquired through indebtedness, war, criminalization, or through family heritage. Additionally, in the Roman empire manumission was a possibility. However, it is interesting to note that urban slaves were manumitted more than rural slaves.[82] This is of significance as Paul wrote primarily in an urban context. Thus, Paul found himself addressing a poor but working segment of society. Freedmen were then able to work in civilian occupations and contribute to the economy instead of taking from it. Often, urban slaves were considered even less than rural slaves. "Urban slaves were parasitical on the state and others."[83] However, there was hope. "The starting point is that both slaves and free men are found in every kind of civilian employment."[84]

However, the slaves were not the only "poor" of the empire. Instead, the poor were from almost all walks of life. "MacMullen estimates that the poor consisted of about one-third of the Roman Empire. The figure includes not only many of the expendables but most of the day laborers among the urban and rural workers—and probably many of the tenant farmers." [85] It is worth noting that many of the poor lived in poverty but still had their physical needs met. The average peasant was very poor compared to the elite but did not live in constant want. Most historians generally put Rome into the elites (which represented about one percent of the population) and the non-elites. The challenge, then, is to further break down the ninety-nice percent. Statistically speaking, a

---

[81] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 183.

[82] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 77.

[83] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 94.

[84] Finley, *The Ancient Economy,* 94.

[85] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 23.

> 'middling' sector of somewhere around 6– 12 percent of the population, defined by a real income of between 2.4 and 10 times 'bare bones' subsistence or 1 to 4 times 'respectable' consumption levels, would have occupied a fairly narrow middle ground between an élite segment of perhaps 1.5 percent of the population and a vast majority close to a subsistence level of around 90 percent[86]

Beyond the farmers and slaves, the Roman economy offered a greater diversity of employment than that of Palestine. The concepts of white-collar and blue-collar are relatively new and did not have a place in the ancient economy, but there were still divisions, nonetheless. Jobs that required specialized skills were respected as usually required more intelligence to perform. The classical authors[87] often referred to craftsmen as inferior beings whose bodies were deformed by hard work and whose minds were like those of slaves. However, craftsmen were reputable. They were poor but they were honorable, and honor was of great value in the ancient economy. Resellers of goods were considered less than honorable because they were viewed as liars. Additionally, non-reputable jobs were those that did not require special skills. "Least worthy of all are those trades which cater to sensual pleasures: 'fishmongers, butchers, cooks, poulterers, and fishermen,' as Terence says; to whom you may add, if you please, perfumers, dancers, and all performers in low-grade music-halls."[88]

Another distinguishing characteristic of the Roman economy was the lack of care for the marginalized. Specifically, the lacks institutional care for the poor by the state. The Roman economy did nothing to support those in need and many instances created an environment in which poverty would grow. Specifically, as it related to debt, it was difficult to break out of the cycle of indebtedness. Bondage due to debt was prevalent and perhaps even dominant in the

---

86 Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 160.

87 For example, Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, refers to the detriment that hard work has on a person's physical body and instead extols the pursuit of work that requires intelligence.

88 Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 42.

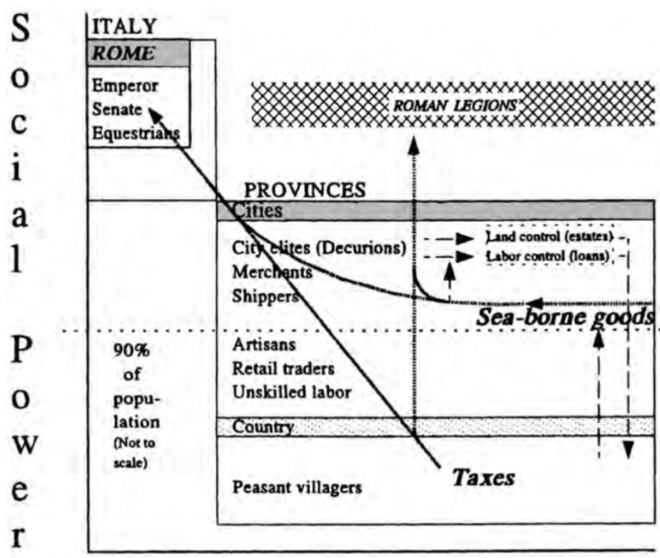
culture.[89] To look at the attitude of society toward the poor, it is of value to understand the lack of philanthropy that permeated thinking and instead examine the law of debt. Laws regarding debt were harsh and kept a person in a downward cycle. "Even where the archaic system of debt-bondage disappeared, the defaulting debtor continued to make amends, in one way or another, through compulsory labor, his own and sometimes his children's."[90] Even for those who started on equal ground, one found themselves at the mercy of the other and as a result would be indebted to them. "The establishment of a client relationship with a patron provided some measure of security yet it could simultaneously develop into overt exploitation such that peasants were "reduced to amoral familism by destitution." The fact that most ancients viewed all goods— whether they be land, money, honor, protection, or food— to be in fixed quantities and short supply, that is, to be "limited goods," meaning that one person's or family's gain would be perceived to be at the expense of others.[91]

The following is Oakman's flow chart of the Roman economy and its connection to political power (or status):

[89] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 69.

[90] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 40.

[91] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World*, 169.



[92]

The Relationship between Status and Economic Power in Ancient Rome

The Urban Setting

The cities of the empire get much of the attention of archaeologists, historians, missiologists, and perhaps even the apostle Paul himself. In the first century, it is estimated that the distribution of the almost sixty million people of the Roman empire was greatly uneven. It was uneven between regions, uneven between town and country, uneven between the five or six administrative capitals, and uneven between the hundreds of little towns that filled the empire. It is often the case that the rural areas, comprising perhaps as much as 85% of the empire's population, are overlooked.[93] "In most agrarian societies about one-tenth of the population lived in urban centers, the rest in small villages which worked the land." [94] From a historical perspective, the rural element is hugely important for an adequate reconstruction of the growth of

---

[92] Oakman, *Jesus and the Peasants*, 204.

[93] Thomas A. Robinson, *Who were the First Christians?: Dismantling the Urban Thesis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 13.

[94] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World,* 196.

Christianity in the Roman Empire.[95] "We may say that Jesus lived in an agrarian society that tended to be divided culturally into urban and rural, with the overwhelming majority of the population being rural."[96] Even overlooked and critical to a historian's view, the difference between rural and urban was not as pronounced as one might think. "The line between rural and urban was ambiguous at best. City and country were interwoven in ways that prevent neat definition, and the urban and rural worlds were never mutually isolated enclaves where members of one rarely entered the other."[97] Robinson notes:

> The ancient world is better viewed more as a continuum, running the gamut from a few huge metropolises to a number of smaller cities and towns of considerably varied sizes, to villages and settlements, some perhaps no more than a few hovels—all of them accommodating to some degree rural residents, who worked the fields beyond during the day but made their homes at night in an assortment of settlements, from bustling cities to small villages.[98]

Even with the lines between city and countryside being blurred, urban centers were often defined by their statistics (population), their size (geographically), and their structure.

With an unequal amount of time dedicated to the study of the city, it is important to remember that Christianity's spread happened predominantly through urban settings. Most of what is recorded for the reader in Scripture – from a missiological approach – is the apostles going to cities. Paul, Peter, and John among others are found to have gone to urban settings for the sake of the gospel. In summary, early Christianity was primarily an urban movement - not a rural one. Thus, it makes sense to evaluate the make-up of cities as a part of our economic study.

---

[95] Robinson, *Who were the First Christians?,* 14.

[96] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 32.

[97] Robinson, *Who were the First Christians?*, 20.

[98] Robinson, *Who were the First Christians?*, 198.

The urban-rural relationship is critical to the ancient economy. The countryside provided the needs of the city. "Whether large or small, many of the inhabitants of such clusters worked the lands surrounding these towns. Reflecting on this reality, Scheidel suggests that it would be more accurate to speak of agrarian and non-agrarian sectors than of countryside and city. Even large cities could have had a good portion of their population who daily left for the fields, for it would have been a relatively short walk from towns or cities to plots in the countryside."[99] The rural supplied the city with food, clothing, manufactured goods, people, and even religion. The most obvious contacts were created by the regular visits from farmers and craftsmen when they brought their goods to market, and, in a reverse movement, by wealthy city residents who spent considerable time at their country estates.

Urban occupations were both skilled and unskilled. While there are some references about labor outside manual labor, most of the writing focuses on the working class. From a skilled perspective, one can find artisans (like tentmakers, metalworkers, wool workers, leatherworkers, sculptors, painters, and stonecutters), educated artisans (like lawyers, physicians, record keepers/shorthand takers, scribes), merchants (purple sellers, bankers), and civic leaders (like a city manager, tax office administrator, imperial slaves/freedmen, managers of large estates, treasurer of gladiatorial games). But there were many unskilled laborers as well.

Even the physical layout of cities reflected the stratification of society. The center of town was dedicated to the elites and haves. They were wealthy and considered to be important for the people of the area. "A patronage model of urban structure first sees the town as a central display area for the elite (the patrons) surrounded by the rest of the town (the clients). The civic elite were patrons in three ways. Individually, they each had a network of clients. Collectively,

---

[99] Robinson, *Who were the first Christians?*, 200.

they operated a rotating system of individual patronage of the town as a whole."[100] Most of those in the inner part of the city gained their wealth from activities taking place outside the city. "In the ancient town, the elite, who controlled the town center, gained most of their income from agricultural rents and production, so their priorities for use of the town center were not the modern ones."[101] From that center, the town would be organized according to status with the least of the people (poorest, least reputable workers) in the outskirts. This structure was intentional and ultimately had a purpose. "The elite domination of the town is ideologically supported by the presentation of the relation between the elite and the town as being a mutually beneficial interchange in which the elite provide benefactions and the town responds with honor."[102] But landowners were not the only ones in the city or the city's premier locations. "Others lived in the cities and towns besides the absentee landlords: merchants, artisans, and urban day laborers. Wealthy merchants eventually entered the aristocratic class. The smaller merchants include what J. Jeremias called the "retail traders" and those who engaged in either foreign or local trade on a small scale."[103] This physical organization is one more facet of seeing the collective nature of society coming through. Those of like means and standing stick together and live together.

[100] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World*, 142.

[101] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World, 142.*

[102] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World*, 142.

[103] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 16.

Stratification

A major characteristic of the ancient economy is the division of classes. The idea of stratification within society creates issues that need to be considered. While the ancient Mediterranean economy was characterized by a few elites, a larger group of retainers, and most peasants, slaves, and those unable to support themselves. This gulf between the social classes – the elites and the peasants – was the source of the major stratification within society. "Due to this stratification of society, there were large distances between the social status of elites and those of most of the population."[104]

Finley, in his seminal work, *The Ancient Economy*, notes that society was divided in three interlocking ways. The social division was based on order, class, and status. Order was the hierarchical structure of society. One's position was relationally driven, and it was hereditary. The two main groups were the patricians (higher) and the plebians (lower). The second consideration was class. This brought into consideration the ability to produce and work. It is worth noting that in the ancient world, the slave and the freedman were in the same class. The third division of society was status. In summary, status was one's rank within their class.[105]

While these descriptions help in understanding the social elements in play, it is much more complex than that. The factors that determine one's position in society are much more complex. "While all mainstream interpreters in the twentieth century agreed that Paul's assemblies were comprised of a cross-section of society, early twentieth century and late twentieth century interpreters differed in their assumptions about what Roman imperial society

---

[104] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World*, 156.

[105] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 43-52.

was like."[106] The intersectionality of the classes also must consider gender, ethnicity, whether one was freed or slave, and geographic location. The discussion included more than "rich" and "poor". These descriptors oversimplify the issues at hand. As Oakes notes, "(There are) issues in defining the terms "economic elite" ("rich" is a vague term) and "poor." For "economic elite" a viable definition would seem to be "a wealthy group that controls a larger share of scarce resources than would be expected in a random distribution." From a substantivist economic perspective, many suggest there exist multiple behaviors that lead to poverty. As such, "poverty" can be defined as "economically enforced lack the most of socially perceived necessities."[107] Friesen takes is one step further. Frustrated not only with binary terms of rich and poor, but he also argues that there are different scales of poor. "The problem with the binary terminology of rich and poor is that the term 'the poor' has to cover at least 90% of the population with little or no differentiation among them."[108]

There have been several suggested models to recreate the different classes of society. Geza Alföldy's classic diagram of first-century social stratification divides its upper part into seven horizontal bands, representing levels within the 1 percent of the population who form the elite. [109] Below that, in the other 99 percent of the population, there is no differentiation in social level as such. However, there is differentiation, at the same social level, between urban and rural and between free-born, freed, and slave.[110] The challenge with this model is, though it does well

---

[106] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies," 335.

[107] Peter Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 87.

[108] S. J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 26(3), (2004), 339.

[109] Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*, 76.

[110] Oakes, *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*, 76

in showing the one and the ninety-nine, it does not further differentiate the ninety-nine percent of society.

Lenski creates a model that serves advanced agrarian economies in general. One way in which the diagram of Lenski's model differs from that of Alföldy is that it rises to a tall narrow point, representing the small numbers of the elite and the wide range of their levels of wealth. Lenski also includes a class of retainers: people just below the socioeconomic level of the elite and dependent on them. However, it similarly fails to differentiate below the retainer level. Beneficial to the discussion is Lenski's contribution to labels for the classes. "Lenski offers eight levels of social stratification characteristic of advanced agrarian economies: (1) ruler, (2) governing class, (3) retainer class, (4) merchants, (5) priests, (6) peasants, (7) artisans, and (8) unclean, degraded, and expendables."[111]

Ekkehard and Stegemann somewhat combine Alföldy and Lenski. Their triangular diagram is the top with aristocracy and then retainers. They introduce differentiation among the non-elite by dividing them into "relatively poor, relatively prosperous," "minimum existence," and "absolutely poor." They calculate minimum existence using calorific intake, converted into a minimum necessary wage.[112] But again, there is little differentiation on the lower levels.

If the non-elite comprises ninety-nine percent of the population, it would be helpful to understand the makeup of that large portion of society. As a result, it is important to understand that the apostle Paul wrote to all audiences, with most of his readers in the ninety-nine percent. That means that as he admonished congregations to take care of the poor, in many instances, they were poor themselves, or at least not part of the elite. This goes to show that Paul's idea of taking

---

[111] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 160.

[112] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies," 340.

care of the poor was not distributed only to those with means, but to all who called themselves followers of Christ. In considering the audience of Paul, it becomes necessary to better understand the large majority of society.

Friesen offers a model in which he breaks down that segment of the population into different categories or classes. In his model, the top three categories comprise a very small percentage of the population (one percent). Also, most of the population under Roman imperialism lived near the subsistence level, that is, categories PS5-7 (see below). "Subsistence level" is here defined as the resources needed to eat regularly. There was a huge difference in economic abilities between the top three levels and most people who lived in levels PS5-7. It is interesting to note that in Friesen's model, relatively few people had incomes between the lower three groups and the super-wealthy three groups, and these people did not comprise a 'middle class' as one finds in modern industrial or post-industrial economies.[113] Here is a visual of that model:

[113] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies", 341.

PS1	Imperial elites	imperial dynasty, Roman senatorial families, a few retainers, local royalty, a few freedpersons
PS2	Regional or provincial elites	equestrian families, provincial officials, some retainers, some decurial families, some freedpersons, some retired military officers
PS3	Municipal elites	most decurial families, wealthy men and women who do not hold office, some freedpersons, some retainers, some veterans, some merchants
PS4	Moderate surplus resources	some merchants, some traders, some freedpersons, some artisans (especially those who employ others), and military veterans
PS5	Stable near subsistence level (with reasonable hope of remaining above the minimum level to sustain life)	many merchants and traders, regular wage earners, artisans, large shop owners, freedpersons, some farm families
PS6	At subsistence level (and often below minimum level to sustain life)	small farm families, laborers (skilled and unskilled), artisans (esp. those employed by others), wage earners, most merchants and traders, small shop/tavern owners
PS7	Below subsistence level	some farm families, unattached widows, orphans, beggars, disabled, unskilled day laborers, prisoners.[58] [114]

Friesen's Stratification of First-Century Roman Society

Regardless of the model, it is safe to say that the number of "haves" greatly outnumbered the "have-nots". "The number of these aristocrats was always small in agrarian societies. Most historians estimate that only about 1 percent of the population was in this class."[115] Esler adds

[114] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies" 341.

[115] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World*, 196.

more context to the discussion: “These systemic considerations underscore the important point that the ancient provincial elites held all the power and productive levers in early Roman Palestine. They controlled land through estates and labor through debt, client loyalty, and obligation.”[116] On the other end of the spectrum, the have-nots lived in constant struggle. “One-third of the population lived in “habitual want.” According to MacMullen, the person living in “habitual want” “devoted the “vast bulk of each day’s earnings to his immediate needs and accumulated no property or possessions to speak of.”[117]

These classes of society can be summed up as the elites, the retainers, the poor, and the expendables, leaving the possibility that there may have been some crossover within those broad categories. There was a large social distance between those at the top of the spectrum and those nearer to the bottom. As such, there was often ridicule toward the lower class and disdain projected toward the higher class. Still, in the agrarian society of the Mediterranean, “most of the population in ancient agrarian societies belonged, as Rostovtzeff affirmed, to the rural peasantry. MacMullen suggests, for example, that seventy-five percent of the people of ancient Italy were peasants.”[118] This figure agrees with those offered by sociologists of agrarian societies.

Between the elites and the peasants was the social group called the “Retainers.” Lenski estimates “the average number of retainers for agrarian societies at 5 percent of the population. The retainers administered the financial and political affairs of the upper class and enforced their

[116] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 77.

[117] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 93.

[118] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 14.

goals."[119] A consideration of this category is the concept of upward mobility. There was some opportunity for moving up classes; though limited and difficult. "The number of 'retainers' catering directly to the needs of the elite, such as household servants, stewards, and scribes, together with other groups serving them indirectly such as artisans and merchants, grew considerably."[120] Additionally, craftsmen could attain a level of affluence if their skills were especially in demand, or if they could afford slaves to mass-produce their goods. Yet still, historians agree that most artisans worked hard but were able to earn just enough to live simply. They were not usually wealthy, but neither were they starving. This created a very limited middle class (as is thought of in modern economics). Some of these people generated their moderate wealth through commerce or trade, and some people even accumulated exorbitant wealth in this way, but this course of action seems to have been open only to some people in some urban settings. Below the merchants in economic status were the artisans and craftsmen who were able, because of their skills, to demand a higher wage than the unskilled day laborer. "The crafts in the ancient world included making leather products, cloth products, and pottery. Carpentry, masonry, and metalworking were also prominent."[121]

Most agricultural workers stayed poor. "The agricultural workers included small freeholders, tenant farmers, day laborers, and slaves. Day laborers and hirelings were very poor workers who found work, especially at harvest time. Agricultural slaves, though probably less numerous than in other parts of the empire, did exist."[122] The life of the farmer was difficult.

---

[119] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 13.

[120] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 42.

[121] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 18.

[122] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 16.

Regardless of whether one was freed or a slave, it was hard to make a living. However, it is important to note the difference between the two. Still, the challenges remained. "By the time peasants had paid taxes to the local political ruler and often to the local temple as well, there might be little left to support themselves and their families." [123] As a result, hunger was a common issue. Also, the poor could be drafted into military service or forced to work on construction projects. If harvests were poor, the farmers would have to borrow money at high-interest rates using the next harvest as collateral. One can see how this would feed into a downward spiral of debt, making it difficult to break out of that situation. However, it is important to note that the production level between freed and the slaves was not noticeably different. The negative impact of a bad harvest was an equal opportunity offender.

Farmers were not the only ones who were poor. As Friesen suggests, other workers in urban environments were also below sustenance levels. There were also in the cities unskilled day laborers. These unskilled laborers were across all facets of the economy. In this category, one would find burden bearers, messengers, assistants to artisans, watchmen over children, over the sick, or even over the dead, as well as manure gatherers and thorn gatherers.[124] As unskilled laborers, it was more likely they were unable to earn a living wage. Friesen further states:

> They were found in the city and consisted of people 'inferior to that of the masses of common people due to occupation, heredity, or disease. The occupations that were scorned were, among others, prostitutes, dung collectors, ass drivers, gamblers, sailors, tanners, peddlers, herdsmen, and usurers.[125]

However, even below the low class was still below the low class was the expendable class. As harsh as that title sounds, it accurately describes the attitude society demonstrated

---

[123] Green, *The World of the New Testament*, 142.

[124] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 19.

[125] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 20.

toward them. These were the lowest of the low and received no pity or charity from society. "At the very bottom of the social structure, according to Lenski, were the "expendables." This group consisted of "criminals, beggars, and underemployed itinerant workers." Lenski remarks concerning this class: "Agrarian societies usually produced more people than the dominant classes found it profitable to employ." [126] Lenski estimates about 5 to 10 percent of the population was in this class.[127]

Friesen goes on further to estimate numbers (demonstrated in percentages) for the differing classes in his model. However, Longenecker adjusts as he feels Friesen is too binary based on statistics (like Meggitt). Below are Longenecker's assertions:[128]

PS1	Imperial elites	0.04%
PS2	Regional elites	1.00%
PS3	Municipal elites	1.76%
PS4	Moderate surplus	17%
PS5	Stable near subsistence	25%
PS6	At subsistence	30%
PS7	Below subsistence	25%

Longenecker's Adjusted Stratification of First-Century Roman Society

It is important to point out that there is no perfect model. There is no total and complete historical data to validate any of the models. Additionally, there are too many determinants and

[126] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 21.

[127] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 21.

[128] Bruce Longenecker, *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub, 2009), 43.

variables that go into order, class, and status. However, these models do serve to paint a picture of the world in which Paul was living and to whom he was writing.

Stratification within the Church

The early church was a microcosm of society. Throughout the New Testament, from Acts through the writings of Paul, one can find the stratification of the members of the church. By examining the names of those mentioned by Luke and the apostle Paul, one can see the range of affluence (or lack thereof) within the congregations of the first century. Yet, much of today's teaching put forth a church that was founded by the poor and favored by the poor. This teaching is accented by the teaching of today which indicates the church was comprised of the poorest of the poor. "Descriptions of the alleged new consensus tell us that for most of the twentieth-century scholars thought that Paul's assemblies were composed of the poor and marginalized inhabitants of the Roman empire." [129] However, it is best if one looks at the situation on a scale. On this scale, economic behavior from the top to the bottom is better understood. Additionally, as the church reflects society and its makeup, the church reflects the economic scale as well. In fact, "The "emerging consensus" that Malherbe reports seems to be valid: a Pauline congregation generally reflected a fair cross-section of urban society."[130] Friesen further asserts that "the members of these assemblies represented a cross-section of society, coming mostly from the middle and lower sectors of society, with some members from the higher sectors."[131]

---

[129] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies," 324.

[130] Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 28.

[131] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies," 325.

One of the first to examine stratification within the church was Adolf Deissmann. Deissmann noted that Roman society had three strata: the upper, middle, and lower. He focused on the writings of Paul when examining the makeup of the early church. When Deissmann described Paul's assemblies as coming from the lower strata, he meant that these assemblies contained a cross-section of society. Only members of the ruling elite were not present.

Justin Meggitt also contributed to an understanding of the stratification of the early church. His focus was on the Pauline corpus as well. Meggitt's model is based on a highly technical mathematical formula, taking the general knowledge of class in the Roman empire, and applying it empirically to the church. One of the difficulties of Meggitt's model is the total exclusion of any elite from Pauline writing. Yet, upon examination of Pauline writing, one can find lists of names within the text that were of the upper class, if not elite.

Wayne Meeks is considered by many as the leader of the study on the stratification of the early church in the twentieth century. Meeks defined social status as a phenomenon composed of several variables such as ethnic origins, ordo, citizenship, personal liberty, wealth, occupation, age, sex, and public offices or honors.[132] He notes that it is difficult to measure status because the influences on status are hard to quantify due to the infinite combinations of influences on status. Meeks also notes that the reader does not know with certainty the status of the individuals about whom Paul writes.

Jerusalem Church

Looking at Scripture, one can see the cross-section of society in the early church. In Acts, many of the classes of society were represented. The disciples were a microcosm of society.

[132] Meeks, *The First Urban Christians*, 53-55.

There were fishermen, artisans (James like his brother), and at least one retainer (tax collector). Also in the congregation were the dependent (widows and orphans). It can be inferred that there were even expendables (diseased, beggars). But there were also the wealthy (relatively speaking). Ananias and Sapphira were examples of those who had excess wealth. However, there are unnamed examples as they sold their possessions – their excess – to share with those in need – the poor (Acts 2). Just on the surface look, one can see that the early church had different classes. "Second, we should note that all the classes were represented. Neither the wealthy nor the impoverished were excluded. Earliest Christianity was not a movement within one socioeconomic class, but from the beginning, was as pluralistic as the city of Jerusalem itself."[133] But this should not be a surprise. As a city of sixty thousand or more inhabitants, Jerusalem in the early Roman period contained the fabulously rich as well as the unbearably poor.[134]

Furthermore, it is worth noting that the book of Acts, which is the greatest source of the early church, has so little about class distinctions or economic status. The Jerusalem church was representative of the city's population. While some of the initial followers of the Way would have been travelers in town for Pentecost, one can read in the book of Acts to see that the makeup of the church reflected Jerusalem society. In Acts 6:9 one can find the multi-cultural nature of the church in Jerusalem. Though the members of the church were Jewish, not all were from the Palestinian area.

For the most part, the wealthy are hardly noticed at all except in a few cases of their extraordinary generosity. But one does see in that congregation, there were well-to-do members like Simon of Cyrene (who owned a farm in the vicinity of Jerusalem). There was also Barnabas

---

[133] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 175.

[134] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 160.

who sold his lands and gave the proceeds to the poor. One cannot document that any of the high-priestly[135] families or any of the governing élites were members of the earliest church. But the lower class was certainly represented as well in the Jerusalem church. Based on Friesen's and Longenecker's scales, it is safe to assume that the members of the first church were generally poor (P5-P7). It is more difficult to determine whether they were citizens of Jerusalem (Acts 6:9), travelers in town for Pentecost, or a hybrid audience of urbanites, local farmers, and out-of-towners (which is most likely). It is also likely that most of the members of the Jerusalem church were farmers, craftsmen, or small merchants, but the sources do not indicate this. The lowest classes were also a part of the Jerusalem church. One would assume that the beggars and diseased people healed by Jesus or by the apostles became members of the church. The lower class had the fewest references in the ancient sources, although one could speculate that they had the largest representation.

The situation in Acts 4:32-27 can be interpreted as such: "The best way to understand the problem that the Jerusalem church solved by its generosity is to view the situation in terms of its broad social and economic context. We see no reason to appeal to special circumstances or an emergency as is usually done. The situation is quite understandable in light of the ongoing problem of poverty in Jerusalem."[136] Fiensy furthers the idea by stating, "it would be surprising if the Jerusalem church—which allegedly boasted five thousand members at this time (Acts 4:4)—should not have contained a large group of both poor day laborers and beggars. Thus, the

[135] Acts 6:7 mentions "…a great many of the priests became obedient to the faith." This is the first mention of priests coming to faith in Jesus. It is included in the description of the birth of the Church to demonstrate the power of the gospel. It is likely these priests first heard the gospel in Acts 4 with the arrest of Peter and John and now it is fulfilled with the conversion of some. It is unlikely that those steeped in the priestly leadership are in this category and thus non-elite. (Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 160-175)

[136] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 148.

church's ministry to the poor does not require us to speculate about an emergency caused by dallying pilgrims or the like. The church would naturally want to take care of the daily needs of its members, many of whom must have been extremely poor."[137]

House Church Model

In looking at the composition of the early church, one needs to have a frame of reference that goes beyond the Jerusalem church. Paul's writing took place throughout the Roman empire and the churches he started and ministered in were all over the region. As such, it is important to consider the workings of the house church in Paul's day.

Oakes puts forth a model based on the Pompeii house model. This model is derived from the well-preserved conditions of the city of Pompeii. It arbitrarily looks at the home of a mid-level citizen that might have hosted a house church. Specifically, this home was a craftworker or cabinet maker. "The model craftworker house church is a device to help us understand socioeconomic locations, diversity, and potential hierarchies within first-century Christian groups, and to use that understanding for analysis of various issues and texts."[138] When one combines the nature of collectivism, the *collegia* effort of labor forces, the organization of the urban setting, and the cross-section of society that makes up the church, one would find a diversity of people in this congregation.

The model by Oakes further suggests the members of the congregation. He suggests that six groups made up the congregation. There was the craftworker or cabinet maker, and his wife. This craftworker would have been poor, but wealthier than others in the house church. There

[137] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 150.

[138] Oakes, *Empire, Economics and the New Testament*, 14.

were several other dependents in the house such as his children, the house caretakers, a few craftworking slaves, their spouses, and children. Additionally, there were a few members of families with non-Christian family heads. The house church also could have had a couple of slaves with non-Christian owners, a couple of free or freed dependents of non-Christians, and a couple of homeless people. From a professional perspective, Oakes[139] proposes the following professions:

- Artisans: tentmakers, metalworkers, wool workers, leatherworkers, sculptors, painters, and stonecutters.
- Educated artisans: lawyers, physicians, record keepers/shorthand takers, scribes
- Merchants: purple sellers, bankers
- Bureaucrats: city manager, tax office administrator, imperial slaves/freedmen, managers of large estates, treasurer of gladiatorial games
- Soldiers
- Slaves

One can see that there was someone virtually from every walk of urban life.

The Writings of Paul

While models can be created and based upon the sociological data available, it is important to look at the writing of Paul to get a better idea of the known members of the congregation to whom he was writing. Much like Paul's writing that gives value to women and slaves, Paul gives dignity to those who performed manual labor. Historians point out that Christian thought brought dignity to manual labor. While the classical authors often referred to craftsmen as inferior beings, that contrasts with Paul's writing about those professionals. One can note that as Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 9:1–27, Ephesians 4:28, 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12, and 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 he marks their work as appointed by God for the benefit of man.

---

[139] Oakes, *Empire, Economics and the New Testament*, 16.

In looking at Paul's writings, Friesen makes three conclusions. First is that Paul's letters provide no evidence of any assembly participation from members of the super-wealthy elite (Friesen's PS1-3). Secondly, of the individuals about whom we have economic information, at least one or two and a maximum of seven can be classified as having moderate surplus resources. Finally, most of the people in Paul's congregations lived near the level of subsistence, either above it or below.[140] When one considers the economic history of Rome, these conclusions should not be surprising.

Furthering his assertions, Friesen has created this model of looking at the individuals listed in Paul's writing. In doing so, he projects the individuals and where they might land on his economic scale.

[140] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies," 348.

PS	*Name*	*Reference*	*Location*
(4)	(Chloe?)	1 Cor. 1.11	Corinth
4	Gaius	Rom. 16.23	Corinth
4-5	Erastus	Rom. 16.23	Corinth
4-5	Philemon	Phlm. 4-22	Colossae?
4-5	Phoebe	Rom. 16.1-2	Cenchraea, Rome
4-5	Aquila	Rom. 16.3-5	Rome (or Ephesus?)
4-5	Prisca	Rom. 16.3-5	Rome (or Ephesus?)
5	Chloe's people	1 Cor. 1.11	Ephesus
5-6	Stephanas	1 Cor. 16.17-18	Ephesus
5-6	The household of Stephanas	1 Cor. 16.15-16	Corinth
5-6	(Many) saints in Corinth	1 Cor. 16.1-2	Corinth
5-6	Churches in Galatia	1 Cor. 16.1-2	Galatia
5-7	(Many) brothers (and sisters)	1 Thess. 4.11	Thessalonica
6	(Many) saints in Corinth	2 Cor. 8.12-15	Corinth
6	The assemblies of Macedonia	2 Cor. 8.1-6	Macedonia
6	Paul	2 Cor. 11.1-21	Corinth
6	Paul	1 Thess. 2.1-12	Thessalonica
6	Paul	Phil. 4.12-13	Rome? Ephesus? Caesarea?
6-7	Onesimus	Phlm. 10-19	Ephesus? Rome?
6-7	Those who do not have food for the Lord's supper	1 Cor. 11.22	Corinth
7	Paul	Phil. 2.25-30	Rome? Ephesus? Caesarea? [141]

Individuals in Paul's Writing on Friesen's Scale

Friesen is not exclusive in his stratification of Pauline figures. Demaris suggests that three of the Corinthians named in Romans 16 (Phoebe, Cenchreae, one unnamed) can be shown as benefactors to many including Paul. Additionally, Gaius must have a home large enough to host the church (Romans 16:23) and Paul. With a home of that size comes the assumption of wealth.[142] While they were not considered elite, all of them would have broken the model of the church only being the poorest of the poor. Instead, it shows that the church was a cross-section of

---

[141] Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies," 357.

[142] Demaris, *Understanding the Social World*, 160.

society and as such, it was stratified. There are other examples of interpreters examining the individuals found in Paul's writing which will be examined later. Regardless of the model used one can see that there were different classes within the church – a reflection of society.

Conclusion

Economics affects every area of life and in the ancient economy even more so. In the ancient world, economics was not a separate part of one's life. From means to status, economics played a role. Economics was a part of one's social life and even religion. With society being a collective consortium as it was, the group's life was greatly impacted by economics. As a result, it is important to look at the economics in which the writer of the Bible lived. In Paul's world alone, one must consider agrarian Palestine, urban Jerusalem, the Second Temple era, the Greco-Roman way of life, the urban settings of Paul's ministry, and the class system in which they lived and worshiped. Each of those components shaped the author and the readers of his writing. Thus, the interpretation of Scripture is dependent on understanding the economic world in which the authors wrote. The understanding of the stratification of society and the church contributes to a better understanding of the words of the apostle Paul.

Chapter 3: Patronage

Giving is neither a practice that was founded in the gospel message of the New Testament nor does it have its sole existence in religion at all. Giving has been a part of society since there has been a need. However, almsgiving, or gift-giving, is a concept encouraged and demonstrated throughout Paul's epistolary writing. Throughout history, almsgiving and charity have been a religious activity not a state-oriented program. Giving, in all its forms, is an element of society and as such, the economy. In many instances, giving predates the concept of market economies. It has even been argued that gift exchange was a primitive form of a functioning economic system. Giving existed before markets. As Hollander states, "usually pre-state societies and were thought chronologically to have preceded economic systems based on other forms of exchange, such as barter, redistribution, or the market."[143]

Yet to better understand Paul's admonition to give in the context of his economic world, one needs to explore the concept of giving in his world. Giving involves more than the modern Western world considers. In first century times, the giving of a gift often involved more than money and was many times met with certain expectations. Gift giving (and receiving) came with all the strings attached and it impacted all areas of one's life. "The gift was a total social phenomenon, encompassing all spheres of social life: economic, legal, political, and religious. Social spheres were embedded within one another and had not separated, as they arguably had in modern Western society."[144]

In general, the term giving was demonstrated through two means. The first was almsgiving and the second was mutualism. Almsgiving was gift-giving from the haves flowing

---

[143] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economies*, 53.

[144] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economies*, 53.

“downward” to the have-nots. As Schellenberger defines it, the “funneling of funds along a vertical axis from those with an abundance of assets to those with minimal resources.”[145] The other method of gift giving is mutualism. In today’s Western culture, some might not even consider this as “gift giving” but when one considers the first century world, it must be looked at as gifting. By definition, it is “the “horizontal exchange of resources among those of lesser or equal means.”[146]

However, the practice of giving takes on a different look and feel depending on the culture which practices it. This section will examine the different practices of giving throughout Mediterranean culture in the ancient world.

Patronage

The general idea of gift-giving is called patronage. Though difficult to summarily explain, patronage is the exchange of benefits. Many times, the exchange is not equal and those involved are unequal as well. “A full social-scientific definition of patronage is complex, but its core characteristics are that it is a non-market relationship between socially unequal people in which dissimilar benefits are exchanged.”[147] Many times, this inequality is manifested in financial means. The academic word for this is euergetism. This idea is after the ancient Greek words *euergesia* (“benefaction”), *euergetē* (“benefactor”), and *euergeteō* (“to be a benefactor”).[148] Patronage was critical to an understanding of the ancient Roman world because

---

[145] Ryan S. Schellenberg, "Subsistence, Swapping, and Paul's Rhetoric of Generosity”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 1 (2018): 215.

[146] Schellenberger, "Subsistence, Swapping, and Paul's Rhetoric of Generosity", 215.

[147] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order of the New Testament*, 178.

[148] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Economies*, 63.

its influence was in so many facets of life. Euergetism was foundational for Roman society in personal relationships and even city infrastructures. “Patronage was indeed central to the way the Roman elite presented itself to the world.”[149] Even the organization of cities was along the lines of the patron-client structure. As stated earlier, the wealthy lived closer to the center of the city. As elite members of society, their contributions allowed the city to thrive. The clients or recipients of the gifts would then live farther out as the city expanded. “In other words, the Roman Empire was not a market economy in which more people “fell through the cracks” than in modern industrial market economies. The Roman economy itself was structured largely through patronage.”[150]

It is important to bring clarity to key terms involved in the idea of giving. The two primary terms to be looked at are benefactor or patron and client. The one giving the gift is the patron and the one receiving the gift is the client. In the ancient world, the patron and the client were critical to understanding exchange and giving. As Esler states, “A typical feature of Mediterranean culture is the existence of patron-client relations.”[151] The relationship between patron and client is often considered unequal and uneven. “These social relationships between individuals are based on a strong element of inequality and difference in power that permit the exchange of different and very unequal resources.”[152]

[149] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order of the New Testament*, 178.

[150] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order of the New Testament*, 177.

[151] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 20.

[152] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 20.

The patron, or benefactor, is the one giving the gift. The client, or receiver of the gift, is the one in need. "Good patrons promote their client's interests. Clients, correspondingly, offer praise for their patrons, advertising their "grace" to all who would hear."[153]

In the ancient world, the gift giver would typically be in a position of power or prestige and since the understanding of patronage was unequal, the gift giver would be in a higher position. "Patronage, above all, is a system of exchange for goods and services between people who are not social equals."[154] Yet the apostle Paul makes no distinction between those with and those without in his writing. Based on the state of the economy of the first century, one might assume that Paul's admonition to give is given only to the rich. "The first obvious conclusion one can draw here is that only those with a financial surplus can be generous, and the greater the surplus the greater the potential generosity."[155] However, that conclusion would be erroneous. As one reflects on Friesen's and Longenecker's stratification of the first-century church, it is easy to note that there were not many people in the category of having a surplus. With that being the case, one must ask why Paul would write about giving if none of his readers could give. Additionally, there is no evidence of Paul's explicit distinction between the rich and poor and different admonitions for each. Therefore, the conclusion can be reached that the message to give was for all people regardless of ability.

There are a couple of characteristics that are in common with all patronage. The first is that giving was motivated by honor. Whether it was position or recognition, the receiving of honor was critical in gift giving. Honor was something received in physical terms or in

[153] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 157.

[154] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 157.

[155] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 197.

recognition. In terms of physical honors, "we also see peer benefaction such as erecting honorary steles, pillars, and votive plaques, lamp oil, silver vessels and other ornaments, building supplies, and unspecified cash."[156] A person honored as a benefactor was identified as someone who could act again as such. Other forms of gifts could be: "land, money, protection, support in legal cases, food, access to other patrons, and any other provision that might be necessary for their overall well-being."[157] "Typically, a member of an urban elite will share some of his social, economic, and political resources (including legal advice) to people lower on the social scale, who, in return, will give him expressions of loyalty and honor that are useful in one way or another."[158]

The second trait of giving, in the imperial Roman context, that is common is the concept of reciprocity. All gifts were given with the expectation that there would be some sort of exchange from those receiving the benefits of the gift. It is possible that the gifts may be asymmetrical, but there would be an exchange, nonetheless. "Patronage falls under the broader category of reciprocity. Reciprocity is as much a social relationship as it is a material one."[159]

While there were some common characteristics, there were also differences. Often these differences in patronage were typified by region. There was no uniform practice across all economic systems. However, giving was considered a predominantly economic act. "Though it has obvious social and political aspects, patronage is at root an economic act."[160]

However, not all giving was financial. On occasion, the gift would something intrinsic and non-materialistic. "It is important to note that not all exchanges involve "economic"

---

[156] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 20.

[157] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 157.

[158] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 20.

[159] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 157.

[160] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 190.

elements. Oftentimes patronage involved material support, but it also frequently involved power, protection, and influence."[161] Additionally, it is worth noting that the patron had control over resources that the client might want or need. "What characterizes patrons is their control over access to the resources needed by clients."[162]

Esler notes that giving was a way to connect otherwise disconnected people. Due to the unequal nature of patronage, it connected people across social classes. "Patron–client relations are explicable as a way of overcoming the extremely stratified nature of Mediterranean society and the limited nature of its resources, but also of investing relationships with people who are not kin with some of the characteristics of the reciprocity and even emotional attachment which characterizes the household."[163]

For the Church, this would mean that the seeking of patrons was critical. It was critical in meeting financial needs, but also in developing social connections. As Blanton notes:

> Clearly, the ability of an association to attract acts of generosity had implications for its survival. Nonetheless, while associations had to be concerned with finances, honor, and influence mattered far more. The result was a scenario in which men and women actively sought to become patrons or benefactors of associations, and associations sometimes aggressively sought patrons, in some cases naming someone as a patron before even asking that person.[164]

In some instances, the *collegia* would serve as the means to develop those social connections. Blanton continues, "The closest analogy of patronage to Christ groups would be patronage to other voluntary associations."[165] Ideally, generosity to a group might make member

---

[161] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 157.

[162] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 157.

[163] Esler, *The Early Christians*, 20.

[164] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 193.

[165] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 190.

contributions (fees, support, fines) unnecessary, but until then, or in the absence of benefactions, costs carried by members were the only thing between viability and dissolution.

Second Temple Jewish Patronage

The apostle Paul was most familiar with the Jewish world of the Second Temple period. As such, he would have been well-versed in the practices of the culture concerning giving. Giving in Second Temple Judaism was a part of everyday life. There was not a separate sphere of life that was designated for charity. Instead, it was a part of who they were and what they did. "Jewish economic thought has always been strongly rooted in the special understanding of the mutual responsibilities the members of the faith and Nation have to one another."[166]

The overarching values of Second Temple Judaism greatly guided the people of that time. Much more than their Roman counterparts, there was a concern for the poor. This concern was driven by a desire to follow Mosaic Law. The Torah required God's people to give ten percent of their earnings to the poor every third year (Deut. 26:12). It also called for an additional percentage of their income annually. The sabbatical year, established by Mosaic Law (Ex. 23:11), allowed for the poor to gather food as well as the cancellation of debt (Deut. 15).[167]

Additionally, there was provision for the poor through the practices of the farmers. Mosaic Law also aided the poor through gleaning. This practice limited the harvest of the farmers who were required to leave some grain behind for the poor to gather (Lev. 19:9-10). With consideration of the agrarian nature of the economy, this had a huge impact on benevolence

---

[166] George Gotsis and Sarah Drakopoulou Dodd, "Economic Ideas in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament", *History of Economics Review* 35, no. 1 (2002), 15.

[167] Raphael Posner, "Charity." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed., vol. 4, Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, 575.

for those who needed it. However, it is worth noting that there was a sense of personal responsibility in gathering - it was not just given without effort. The Law also insisted that the poor (orphans, widows, foreign travelers, etc.) be remembered when the festivals are celebrated. Jews considered foreigners ("strangers") to be in a lower economic position than themselves.[168]

Extra-biblically, the Talmud-instructed Jews were obliged to give to charity. Even those who were on charity were expected to give to those less fortunate than themselves (Gittam 7a). In fact, "the court can compel one who refuses to give to charity - or donates less than his means allow - to give according to the court's assessment."[169] According to the Talmud, an individual could be flogged, or his property assessed for charity. In all giving, the charity was extended to non-Jewish poor first, to preserve good relations. However, one's relatives are prioritized over strangers and women take precedence over men in receiving alms. Second Temple Judaism also took into consideration the psychological needs of the poor, even if those needs are exaggerated.

The Talmud gives additional guidance for giving. "To give a tenth of one's wealth to charity is considered to be a "middling" virtue, to give a twentieth or less is to be "mean"; but in Usha, the rabbis determined that one should not give more than a fifth lest he becomes impoverished himself and dependent on charity."[170]

To preserve the trait of honor, giving was to be done in such a way as to not humiliate the receiver, or preserve their honor. To preserve this honor, it was preferred that gifts be given and received without knowledge or familiarity of one another. Also, giving was expected to be done with a good attitude. In accepting charity, no shame was to be considered if the person had done

---

[168] Posner, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 577.

[169] Posner, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 578.

[170] Posner, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 578.

all they could to avoid taking the gift. Even a delay in taking charity and suffering without becoming a burden to the community is highly revered.

In summary, the Second Temple Jewish community had a sense of duty to both individualistic initiative and shared responsibility in taking care of the poor.

Another distinguishing characteristic of the Jewish perspective on taking care of the poor was their reliance upon and belief in God of His provision. In many ways, Second Temple Judaism overlaid their practice of faith upon their economic reality. To the Jews, God was their patron. Since God was the owner of all things, one needed to turn nowhere else but God for their needs to be met. "For the early followers of Jesus (and perhaps for Jesus himself), to claim the God of Israel as patron meant that there were no other patrons to whom one could turn and expect access to all of the same goods and services."[171] This concept would be in direct contradiction with the Roman view. The Romans would look to Caesar or other benefactors who controlled the resources and determined their distribution.

Yet, another of the distinctive issues of the Roman culture of giving was reciprocity (discussed below). However, for the Jews, this was a major stumbling block for their assimilation into Roman culture; not just concerning giving but in general.[172] As a collective society, the Jews would have understood the value and nature of reciprocity as it is one of the central themes of their Deuteronomic theology. "God benefits Israel when Israel treats him properly."[173] However, at the same time, the Bible seems to be void of many teachings on the reciprocal nature of a person-to-person relationship. "And yet it is remarkably difficult to find

---

171 Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 162.

172 Seth Schwartz. *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?: Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009, 5.

173 Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?*, 7.

any positive valuation of human-human reciprocity in biblical texts, except sporadically in wisdom literature."[174] What the Old Testament does offer is in general terms of fairness and justice. Giving could be categorized into personal giving and institutional giving as well as obligatory and voluntary.

Roman Patronage

Roman culture is significantly different from the world of Second Temple Judaism. Richard Saller's important work on personal patronage in ancient Rome suggests three criteria that distinguish patron-client bonds from other types of relationships: (1) "the reciprocal exchange of goods and services" and (2) "a personal [relationship] one of some duration" that is (3) "asymmetrical, in the sense that the two parties are of unequal status and offer different kinds of goods and services in the exchange."[175] Additionally, one might add that "these relationships are entered voluntarily. Both patrons and clients are free to enter and exit from the patronage relationship, though there are costs associated with doing so."[176]

The primary characteristic of the gift-giving culture of the Roman empire was reciprocity. Reciprocity goes into the Greek idea of *oikonomia*. As a part of managing, one's household, taking care of those in the household and returning their feeling of obligation was a powerful motivating force. Again, one can see the collective nature of society comes into account for the ancient economy.

---

[174] Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?*, 7.

[175] Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, 1.

[176] Demaris, *Understanding the Social Order*, 170.

Reciprocity invokes the imagery of exchange. Person one gives to person two. Person two corresponds with a gift to person one. This return gift is most often given out of obligation. "Although gifts are technically given voluntarily, in practice they are often accompanied by elements of social constraint and compulsion."[177] This practice contrasts with the Western idea of gift-giving. In Western thought, gifts are free will and given without "strings attached." Instead, in the ancient world, a donation is more of an exchange. Greek culture is full of references to the obligation to reciprocate gifts. This includes the feeling of indebtedness. As a result, the counter gift is not a "gift" but a cancellation of a debt. As Hollander observes:

> The ancient authors reflect on the feeling of indebtedness of those who receive a gift, their sense that a counter-gift will not be perceived as a gift but only as the cancelation of a debt, how this affects their attitude toward givers, the superiority/inferiority relationship between giver and receiver while the receiver is in debt after the exchange, and possible strategies to transform this inferiority into superiority.[178]

Hollander continues, "Accepting a gift often implied entering into a power relationship in which the receiver was the weaker party. Through his act of giving, the giver obliged the receiver to reciprocate, and his gift determined the dimension of the counter gift (since only an equivalent counter-gift would cancel the debt)."[179]

Unlike modern Western understanding, reciprocity also includes the idea of the redistribution of wealth. From an elementary understanding, money flows from the people to the elite and then the elite gives back to the people. Blanton goes so far as to make no distinction

---

[177] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 291.

[178] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Exchanges*, 63.

[179] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Exchanges*, 69.

between the two practices.[180] The idea of gifting remains, regardless of whether one considers the redistribution or reciprocal gift.

However, the collection of the saints in Jerusalem is found in 2 Corinthians 8 in Pauline writing, Blanton notes that the Jerusalem collection and the Lord's Supper may both be mentioned by Paul as an instance of redistribution of wealth.[181] Specifically, Paul invokes the idea of giving monetarily and not with goods. Even so, Paul seems to emphasize the idea of *charis* (1 Corinthians 16) and highlights the voluntary nature of the gift. This contrasts with the obligation that Paul presents in 2 Corinthians 8.

Additionally, it is worth noting that Paul considered the reciprocity of gift-giving in his writings. However, Paul also looked at natural things and spiritual things as possibly being reciprocal. He saw the "material things" of the world and the "spiritual things" existing in a "relationship of exchangeability within a system of reciprocity" as in Romans 15:27. Elsewhere, Paul refers to the hospitality he received as a response to Paul's "gift" of the gospel. In defense of his "right" to be provided with food and drink within the context of hospitality as he asks, "If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?" (1 Corinthians 9:11, ESV). As one can interpret the reciprocal nature of Paul's message, one would be right in understanding this as a normal practice within the Church. "Reciprocity appears to have been the preferred vehicle for the transfer of goods and services within early Christian assemblies."[182]

---

[180] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 286.

[181] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 292.

[182] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 293.

Yet it is important to note that the exchanged gift may be both asymmetrical and not financial. Many times, a gift was exercised for political reasons and not out of generosity. "The exchange between elite and people is viewed as a dynamic political process, a form of politics indeed, which turns *euergesia* into a rather fluid and flexible concept: those deeds, and only those, that were in the course of this political process recognized as benefactions deserving the appropriate honors would be considered acts of euergetism."[183] Honor connected to one's giving was a primary source of value. Additionally, giving was to be recognized and honored. "To give abundantly, Paul suggests, would bring them honor, in part through Paul's boasting about them, whereas to fail to give lavishly would result in their humiliation, as well as Paul's, in the eyes of the Macedonians."[184] It was important for the gift giver to have his gifts recorded and noted. "It is also extremely important to register that acts of generous giving in return for honor and recognition were not solely the domain of the aristocratic elite."[185] Paul honored his patrons often through their mention in his papyri. Additionally, there were other benefits to considering for giving. For some, administrative offices would be given, or an honorary inscription would be left. These practices are still employed by modern Western culture and more specifically churches. Things like having buildings on a college campus named after a benefactor; or smaller things like pews or bricks or hymnals with a giver's name on them are examples of inscriptions given in exchange for a gift.

It is important to understand not all gifts were monetary. Other gifts given in consideration were hospitality, travel funding, labor performed, food, and honor. Paul, himself,

---

[183] Hollander, *The Extramercantile Exchanges*, 52.

[184] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 292.

[185] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 196.

was found to be the recipient of non-financial gifts and multiple occasions. Some might have considered the act of providing meeting space for church congregations as gifts. Specifically, Blanton notes, “Four areas in which Pauline associations could conceivably have benefited from acts of generosity, whether from members or not: meeting space, travel, service as treasurer, and meals.”[186]

Application

This is the world in which Paul lived. His formative experiences (in Second Temple Judaism) and his living conditions (in imperial Rome) were shaped by these practices. The following provides a non-comprehensive and brief examination of how everyday life and understanding shape and form his writing. In examining two passages that seemingly have nothing to do with economics on the surface, one can see the influence that the economic realities of Paul can shape how the reader would understand the text.

Romans 12:1

Paul writes, “I appeal to you, therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship” (Rom. 12:1). While the ESV uses the word ‘spiritual’, the word in Greek is *logikos*, or reasonable and logical. Paul is letting the reader in Rome know that when they consider all that God has given to them (Romans 1-11), it is only “logical” that one would give (back) himself. Also, consideration must be given to the word ‘worship’. In the Greek, the word is *latreia*, and is better translated as service, and more specifically as service for hire. Considering that work was often performed in

[186] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 199.

exchange asymmetrically for a gift, one can see the influence of cultural gift giving in Paul's writing. Again, the concept of reciprocity influences the mind of the reader to know that "paying back" the giver of the gift can only be done with one living his life for God.

Ephesians 2:8-9

In this oft-quoted passage, Paul clearly explains that salvation comes because of the grace of God. "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is **the gift of God**, not a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Eph. 2:8-9, emphasis added). One can see how Paul's world of benefaction shaped his understanding and his readers' interpretation of this theological tenet. God as the patron gives the "gift" (*doron*) to the readers or the clients. A reader in imperial Rome would have pictured the need for reciprocity - an obligation to repay, even if one could never repay the debt. As a result, Paul would have to work diligently to let his reader know that there is nothing they could do; he states twice, "...not your own doing… [and] …not a result of [your] works…" Thus, Paul helps the reader understand that God's economy is different from the economy in which they operate.

Conclusion

While specific passages about giving from Paul will be explored later in this paper, one can gain a general understanding of giving in his context. In the Greco-Roman world, giving was motivated by honor and recognition. It (giving) was voluntary and yet socially compulsory. Paul's background in the Second Temple era would have made giving mandated by God (Mosaic Law and Talmud) along with a cultural pressure that made people feel obligated to give. All of Paul's writing (and the ensuing interpretation) about giving and economic issues must be framed by these realities. Therefore, the challenge lay in the inability of people to give out of their surplus, as there was none. Still, giving could come in a variety of means: honor, work, food, etc. However, Paul makes no distinction between financial gifts and non-financial. His admonition is to give. Yet the admonition from Paul to give remains without bias or distinction. In Paul's world, there were an overwhelming number of poor people yet also in his world, giving was a social construct encouraged. Paul saw the practice of giving as being closely related to the good news of the gospel. His ideas of spiritual needs married to material needs are not to be missed in his writing.

Chapter 4: Early Practices

At least 55% (per Longenecker) of the population fell in the category of "poor" during the times of the New Testament; that number goes up to 75% if one considers living at subsistence as being poor. Leading up to the gospel ministry of the Apostle Paul, it is important to review the practices of these cultures in their attitudes and actions toward the poor. Additionally, it is of value to examine the behavior of Jesus and the early Church as well.

Second Temple Judaism and the Poor

A significant amount of the Law of Moses provided for the poor. There were laws governing gleaning and reaping (Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22). There were laws for the second tithe which was designated for the poor (Deuteronomy 14:28-29). Furthermore, Mosaic Law established the forgiveness of debt (Deuteronomy 15:1-2). Debt frequently was the cause of insurmountable poverty. Additionally, there was legal precedent for the restoration of land in the year of Jubilee (Leviticus 25:13). With the overwhelming number of laws about meeting the needs of the poor, it is safe to say that there was an obligation to give gifts. As Marcel Mauss, the famed sociologist and anthropologist who authored *The Gift* notes, there existed an obligation to give gifts; it was not voluntary, but compulsory.[187] Giving was held in highest esteem by the practitioners of religion. In the Jewish book of *Tobit*, the protagonist states right from the start that his care for the poor is the most obvious mark of his Jewishness, and that almsgiving is an excellent offering to the Most High.[188]

---

[187] Stansell, *The Gift in Ancient Israel*, 66.

[188] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 77.

The *Babylonian Talmud Baba Batra 9A-B1* emphasizes the importance of giving a coin, even from the smallest denomination. This provides an example of Talmud encouragement to give based on the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 59:17; 64:5). "Although the word *tzedakah* denotes "righteousness" in both verses, in rabbinic literature this term typically refers to "giving (alms) to the poor." In Jewish culture, giving alms was on par with righteousness, often used interchangeably. This later definition enabled the rabbis to interpret many biblical verses as discussions of offerings for the poor, although they did not originally refer to giving alms."[189]

Specifically dealing with Paul's writing in 2 Corinthians 8-9, it is worth noting that the text alludes to communities creating and keeping relationships with their brothers and sisters in the faith. In doing so, Paul was suggesting that the church at Corinth could connect with the Christ-follower community in Jerusalem. This "was a contemporary Jewish practice, particularly as shown in the collection for the Temple of Jerusalem and its rabbinic memory (*Mishnah Sheqalim* 1:1) and other mentions of Jewish charity collectors (e.g., *Tosefta Peah* 4:15)."[190]

A distinguishing mark of Jewish giving is the view that God is involved in the equation of taking care of the poor. Alms giving by the Jew was a means of seeing the promises of God to take care of the defenseless as being fulfilled. "One of the most striking features of charitable deeds in Second Temple Judaism is the participation of God within the exchange itself."[191] This concept can be seen in the text from *Ben Sira* 29. "God is not simply an advocate for the poor, as depicted in Exodus 22:24–26 but becomes the guarantor whenever a "loan" is given to the poor.[192] This passage in Exodus is foundational because the most common way of extending help

---

[189] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 71.

[190] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 40.

[191] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 38.

[192] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 38.

to the needy in the agrarian economy of ancient Israel was through non-interest loans.[193] The supernatural character of the exchange was also expressed by the poor when they sought help from others. Note the use of the poor of the Hebrew text *Leviticus Rabbah* 34:7, "acquire a merit (in heaven) through (generous gift you're about to give to) me."[194] By invoking this thought, the gift does not just elevate the poor, but also elevates the giver in the eyes of God. As such, there is benefit to both the giver and the receiver. "Charity has both a horizontal and a vertical plane of action."[195]

While one considers the broad reach of the "poor" in ancient Israel, it is interesting to note that Jewish literature even provides "guidelines" for who was to be considered poor. The Mishnah determines criteria for collecting harvest gifts, but also defines the idea of poverty. In doing so, it speaks to poverty in both individual and relative terms. In essence, the individual can "qualify" as being poor simply because of their overall financial status. Yet some may qualify in relative terms if they have fallen in wealth which was considered embarrassing and shameful.[196] Shame in the Old Testament was a public social reality.[197] It invoked the idea of rejection and

---

[193] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity,* 19.

[194] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 38.

[195] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 38.

[196] Proverbs 13:18 which states, "Poverty and *disgrace* come to him who ignores instruction, but whoever heeds reproof is honored." gives a prime example of the connection between a lack of financial means and shame. Psalm 41 and Psalm 113 also show the relationship between God's protection of the helpless and honor demonstrated to them in return.

[197] Shame has many different Hebrew words in the Old Testament. *Bosh is* the most common word for "shame," and it signifies the feeling of being ashamed and/or the social reality of being put to shame (see Genesis 2:28; Psalm 119:31; Proverbs 13:18; Isaiah 54:4; Jeremiah 17:18). *Qll r*efers to a diminution or lessening and means *small*, *light*, or *insignificant* (see Genesis 16:4; Job 40:4). *Qlh is* a form of *qll* and refers to someone contemptible or despicable (see Deuteronomy 27:16, Prov 12:9). *Hrp*—One of several terms for verbal degradation, like taunt, reproach, mock, scorn, or insult (see Psalm 42:11; Psalm 119:42; Proverbs 17:4; 2 Samuel 21:21).

isolation, yet God is the Defender of the poor and helpless. The poor could receive disbursements to avoid such a reality.

Jewish writing also defined what poor was. The *Mishnah Peah* 8:8-9 goes on to establish this individual poverty line. "Those with less than 200 denars (a Roman coin, equivalent to a *zuz*) in wealth (or 50 denars in disposable wealth), are eligible to collect *peah* (produce left unharvested in the "corner" of a field), gleanings, forgotten produce and the poor tithe."[198]

Distribution to the poor in Second Temple Judaism was both organic and organized. In an organic way, one finds the gleaning and *peah*. However, in an organized method, there were two charitable organizations that distributed to the poor. These organizations were financed by the community as a whole (though the poor were exempt from contributing). One organization was the *tamchui* (tray). This was a daily collection. The second charity was a daily collection of food to be given to those who had a special need for the next day.[199] This was a soup kitchen-type of idea that would provide basic sustenance (such as bread and shelter) to anyone who had need. The other organization was the *quppa* (basket) or the charity fund. This charity went from house to house and to the marketplace to solicit contributions for the poor, either in money or in produce. The poor who belonged to the village received most of the dole, but provision was also made for poor strangers and transients.[200] This was a more complex system of distribution that sought to restore the poor to their previous standard of living. The guidelines for receiving from these charitable organizations were established by the *Tosefta Peah* 4:10 which discusses the criteria for distribution.[201]

---

[198] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 44.

[199] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 151.

[200] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 151.

[201] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 60.

In Second Temple Judaism, giving to the poor was both obligatory and organized. When one examines background teaching of giving to the poor, the organization of the church in Jerusalem and the radical sharing of resources begins to come into focus. Additionally, Paul's admonition and connection of the gospel to giving becomes clearer. This is the culture in which the first church was established.

This organized effort was led by the Sanhedrin. As the ones given the responsibility of the local government on behalf of Rome, their method of taking care of the poor was considered the "social welfare system" in Judea during the first century. Funded by the obligatory nature of the Mosaic Law, they were able to establish the systems needed to take care of the poor. This serves in contrast to their Roman counterparts.

Greco-Roman Society and the Poor

A primary difference between the Roman and the Second Temple dealing with the poor is the role of religion in the effort. For the Jewish culture, God's involvement in the equation was undeniable. From the law governing instructions to receiving to the inclusion of God in the transaction (favor of the poor, righteousness, etc.) one can see God at the center of the Jewish practice of giving to the poor. However, Roman culture did not see the gods as a part of that transaction. In fact, religion was not much help to the poor. The poor were not seen as being favored by the gods. Being poor was often seen as a lack of favor from the gods. There was a god for foreigners and a god for supplicants, among others, but there was not a god for the needy. The rich were seen as the favored of the gods with wealth being visible evidence of that favor. On the other hand, the impoverished state of the poor was seen as a disadvantage in their contact with the gods.

Additionally, while religion was not a source of relief for the poor, the state was not much help either. The empire did not provide much relief for those in her citizenry even though nearly three out of every four were in need. On the rare occasion that the government got involved, it would distribute food to some who needed it. "The Roman *frumentatio publica*, or the imperial dole, is perhaps one of the better first-century analogies to state-sponsored welfare."[202] This dole was open to any adult male citizen residing in the city of Rome. They could take part in the lottery to receive this regular imperial benefit. Ultimately, it was available to about 20 percent of the city's population. This lottery was not, however, primarily about care for the poor as any adult male could receive the gift. It is worth noting those excluded from the distribution included women, children, slaves, foreigners, and non-citizens. All the people in these categories were marginalized and often lived below the sustenance level. This makes the dole a step toward state-sponsored welfare, but it does not specifically take care of, or even begin to address the masses of the poor. Outside the city of Rome, there is not much more that looks like systematic state-sponsored care for the needy.[203]

The closest that Rome gets to a welfare program is the offer of discounted grain to the people of Rome. "Among the reforms that Gaius proposed was that the government procure an adequate supply of wheat to be sold at a low and fixed price to everyone who was willing to stand in line for his allotment once a month at one of the public granaries that Gaius had ordered to be built."[204] However, like many government-sponsored programs today, someone had to pay for this program. To cover the cost of this discount, taxes were increased on the population. At

---

[202] Hays, *The Early Church*, 171.

[203] Hays, *The Early Church*, 171.

[204] Henry Hazlitt, *The Conquest of Poverty* (Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y: Foundation for Economic Education, 1996), 77.

the time of Julius Caesar, there were 320,000 people on the grain relief.[205] Julius Caesar worked to cut the number of people on the rolls by applying a means test. In doing so, he was able to reduce the number of people to 150,000. After his death, it rose again to 320,000 until August Caesar took over. Again, there was a means test which reduced the number to 200,000.[206] Thus at the time of Jesus's birth, nearly twenty percent of the city of Rome qualified for the grain discount purchase. This program was sustained to appease the masses. The program was not altruistic or value-driven but instead was a means of avoiding a revolution of the masses in poverty. This gain distribution could hardly pass as charity because it was offered to all who met the means test and was not distributed according to need - all got the same discount on however much was wanted to purchase. Again, like the dole, the poor were not singled out for their economic state. Instead, all who received gifts benefited from them. As Satlow notes, the poor received them as charity. The slaves received them as paternalism. The sharecroppers received them as forgiveness for their debts.[207]

It is this mode of "giving" and "receiving" that perpetuates the patron-client relationship. Though this is not the preferred way of operating toward the poor, it is simply a by-product of reality. "Sometimes what is given establishes or perpetuates a patron– or benefactor–client relationship. In the Greco-Roman world, status difference is the key to telling the difference between a gift and not-a-gift."[208]

The closest example to voluntary distribution to the poor came through *collegium*. These associations (like trade unions) helped its own members. When others could not afford their

---

[205] Hazlitt, *The Conquest of Poverty*, 68.

[206] Hazlitt, *The Conquest of Poverty*, 68.

[207] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 63.

[208] Satlow, The Gift in Antiquity, 73.

dues, or when those in the *collegia* had needs, the *collegia* would underwrite the expense and provide for them.[209] Collegium behaviors included banquets, patronage, and benefaction. It is interesting to note that the first century church throughout the Roman empire acted in many of the same ways. The Church had regular banquets (the Lord's Supper). The Church provided for the needs of the community (patronage). And the Church gave to the community as a whole (benefaction).[210] The Church served as a social *collegia* - connected through a relationship with Jesus Christ - and as such, provided for those in need.

While the collegium serves as an analogy to the Church, there is one major divergence in behavior between the two. Christians departed from the *collegia* custom and applied their practices of civic generosity to the poor. In short, the Jewish motivation for charity was a divine commandment and that the poor were in God's protection made in His image. As such, the motivation was a love for God married with the aid for the needy. Nowhere is that religious principle stated more forcefully than in the words of Jesus in the Gospel of Matthew, when he says to those who fed the hungry and clothed the naked: "You did it to me" (Matthew 25:40). This caused the Church to stand out and be different from the state sponsored and collegium methods of distribution. Some believe that Christianity and the church served as an example that the secular world would follow in taking care of the poor. "In brief, Christians independently developed a rudimentary welfare system for their own co-religionists and thereby helped the Roman Empire to be more organized in care for the needy. Christians were not originally looking for the government to care for the poor."[211] One could argue that this basic system of taking care

---

[209] Hays, *The Early Church*, 163.

[210] Hays, *The Early Church*, 163.

[211] Hays, *The Early Church*, 173.

of the poor served as the model upon which Constantine would implement his own state-sponsored welfare state.

In Roman culture, those with means were not obliged to support and help the poor. This serves as a significant difference between the Second Temple world and the Greco-Roman world. The Latin verbs for being beneficent do not have the poor as their object. It is a much more generic idea of "doing good" without consideration to a specific group (i.e., the poor). As such, beneficent does not invoke the idea of almsgiving either. The Greek word *philanthropia* also does not have the idea of modern philanthropy. Instead, it is the love of humanity, specifically with the pursuit of an educational ideal of excellence in body, mind, and spirit - but nothing of the poor. Additionally, *eleemosyne* (alms) originally referred to mercy and pity, but not financial means. All this notes that the original ideas behind Roman and Greek ideals were not driven by taking care of the poor.

Instead, the driving forces behind Greco-Roman giving were honor and reciprocity. Since giving often locked the receiver into a patron-client relationship, voluntary gifts were not common. Since reciprocity was expected in gift exchange, the giver would expect to get something in return. However, this is not possible when dealing with the poor - otherwise they would not need the gift. Additionally, with honor and status as a desire for the gift giver, there is none to be received when giving to those who cannot provide it. As a result, individual giving was not a discipline practiced much in the Greco-Roman world.

Jesus and the Poor

With consideration to the Second Temple mindset, Jesus Himself would have been very familiar with the cultural considerations surrounding the poor. There are some indications that

Jesus Himself was in the poor category. As such He would have identified with most of the Jewish people.

For starters, the apostle Paul comments that Jesus voluntarily gave up His position on the throne and took on human form, even in the position of a servant (Philippians 2:7). Furthermore, Paul observes, "For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9) indicating that he became poor.

From the circumstances around his incarnation narrative, one can see that He (and His earthly parents) were from modest means. Regardless of the occasion of the census, His birth in a stable and placement in a feeding trough for animals is less than an expression of wealth. Additionally, the sacrifice offered for the purification of Mary (after the birth of Jesus) was two turtledoves (Luke 2:24) based on the allowance by Mosaic Law in Leviticus 12:7-8. If one was unable to sacrifice a lamb, a sacrifice of lesser value was acceptable.

In his adulthood, one can see the continued lowly position of Jesus. In His own words, He had no place to lay His head (Matthew 8:20). Jesus used a borrowed boat from which to preach (Luke 5:3). He borrowed the fish and loaves that he multiplied to feed the multitude (John 6:9). For His triumphal entry, Jesus had to borrow a colt upon which he rode into Jerusalem (Mark 11:3). On the night in which He was betrayed, Jesus and His disciples borrowed the upper room (Mark 14:14-15). Upon His crucifixion, He was buried in a borrowed tomb (Matthew 27:59-60). Jesus even had to borrow a coin to make a teaching point about giving unto God and Caesar (Matthew 22:19). In Luke 8:2-3 one can find multiple women meeting the undisclosed needs of Jesus. Additionally, Mark 15:40-41 once again refers to women who *diakoneō* or met His needs. Jesus was found to be sympathetic, and even empathetic, to the poor because he was one of them. "Jesus is so closely identified with the poor that any kindness extended to a poor person is imagined as having been given to him as well."[212] This idea goes to support the reasoning that Jesus is Messiah as much of the Messianic ministry was to be to the poor.[213]

However, there is also indication that Jesus may not have found Himself in a lowly state His whole life. Clearly, something must have changed after His birth in the stable as the arrival of the Magi found Jesus, Joseph, and Mary in a house (Matthew 2:11). The gifts of the Magi (gold, frankincense, myrrh) would have also been a financial boost to the family. Additionally, one finds in Luke 2:41 that the family had means to take an annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem - as an entire family - for the Passover.

As a man, Jesus followed His father's steps in trade and became a carpenter. Living in Nazareth indicated a step up in status and He was no longer at the bottom of the status scale. But even in His "elevated" state, He still would have had to find and do manual labor. However, "Given land scarcity, a landless peasant from Nazareth would be forced into wage labor. Jesus is called a *tektōn* in the Gospel of Mark (6:3). The meaning of this trade has been debated; it probably refers to a worker in wood or stone and a building generalist."[214] As such, Jesus was an artisan. Manual laborers were met with mixed reviews. By some, they were accepted as much of society found themselves needing to labor. By others, they were disdained as labor was considered below them. By no means would Jesus have been considered rich and He was far from elite. Yet, at the same time, He was less than the masses as a craft worker in his hometown. Jesus was of such a level financially that "that Jesus' travels and experiences, reflected in the

[212] Satlow, *The Gift in Antiquity*, 38.

[213] In the Old Testament, Isaiah 61:1-3 points to the Messiah's ministry to the poor, which Jesus read from in the synagogue in Luke 4. Additionally, Zechariah 9:9 indicates that the Messiah Himself would have a humble (poor) lifestyle, which was fulfilled in Matthew 21.

[214] Esler, *The Early Christian World*, 108.

parables especially, had more to do with finding work than conducting a religious mission."[215] Moreover, the parables and sayings also show knowledge of estates and markets in the cities. "Still, it remains that Jesus lived under conditions typical of ancient agrarian societies. To understand him in this background is to add new contours to the investigation."[216] There is some indication that Jesus experienced some of the benefits of status and wealth. His associations with Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Zacchaeus, and Levi - all men of means - indicate that Jesus was not ostracized from those with wealth.

However, it was in how Jesus treated the poor that one can see the truest sense of His attitude toward them. As Jesus modeled giving to the poor, it is important to consider the significance of His example. Following the laws of Moses, Jesus, who was without sin, would be found fulfilling the law and giving to the poor. However, there is also a Messianic tenor to His actions. "Giving alms to the needy is not for Jesus merely charity, however. This action is not just to help needy people any more than Jesus's miracles were performed merely because people were sick (though both of these actions certainly were done in part for those reasons). Both actions are signs that the kingdom of God is breaking into history."[217] Jesus looked at meeting the needs of the poor as a part of the Good News that He was preaching and living. "To literally care for the poor or the hungry is integral to Luke's view of the gospel and not to be viewed in isolation from the spreading of the word itself, or other kinds of need."[218] As Jesus unrolled the scroll and read from the prophet Isaiah (61:1-3), He assured the people that this passage was being manifest before their very eyes. He again uses this prophecy - which indicates "the poor

---

[215] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 5.

[216] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 5.

[217] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 156.

[218] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 138.

have good news preached to them" - from Isaiah when he addresses John the baptist's question about Jesus being the Messiah. This affirms to John that He is in fact the Messiah. Jesus encourages the poor as He states, "Blessed are you who are poor…" (Luke 6:20). This seems to be different from Matthew's emphasis which is spiritual and from the context, this passage indicates physical - literally the poor.

In the Gospel of Mark, one can find Jesus answering the questions of the rich young ruler (10:17-31). The young ruler has many acts of righteousness: no murder, no adultery, no stealing, no false witness, no defrauding others, and honoring his parents. Yet Jesus remarks that there is one act of righteousness that has not been fulfilled. He must sell all that he has and give the proceeds to the poor (10:21). As one might infer from his reaction, the mere mentioning of the Jewish expectation and obligation to give to the poor created angst in his demeanor as he realized he had failed in this area of righteousness.[219] After the young man walks away disappointed, Jesus uses his reaction to teach his disciples that being wealthy can be a difficult hindrance to a relationship with God (10:24-25). In Mark 12, Jesus tells the story of the sacrificial gift of a widow. Jesus notes that she gave regardless of her financial state. In contrasting her actions against the rich, He states, "For they all contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in everything she had, all she had to live on" (12:44).

In Mark 14:3-9, while visiting the home of Simon the Leper, Jesus has his feet anointed by a woman. Some of those present, presumably disciples, thought this action was a waste of resources and could have been sold for a large sum of money. Yet Jesus in His response, corrected them. He starts with a reference to Deuteronomy 15:11 in mentioning that there would also be the poor among them. In that text, the Law encourages the forgiveness of debt during the

---

[219] See earlier comments on the Second Temple expectation of achieving righteousness through taking care of the poor.

sabbatical year. The text continues in the admonition to help the poor and needy. In the context of Mark 14, Jesus admonishes his followers that there would always be the poor among them and that they should do good to them when they can (14:7).

The Gospel of Luke, more than any other of the gospels, shows Jesus giving special attention to the disenfranchised. Early in Luke's Gospel, one sees the ministry of John the Baptist (3:11) and finds the continuation of said ministry through the ministry of Jesus. As Scheffler notes, "Luke has been widely known in scholarly circles as the 'Gospel for the poor'."[220] Scheffler continues with, "Luke (more than any other evangelist) emphasizes the care for people in various situations of suffering and need (physical and psychological needs, poverty, political enmity, ostracism, guilt [regarding sin])."[221] Additionally, Luke pays attention to Jesus meeting those needs, as well as His followers following suit. The "Gospel of Luke is peculiar in that, besides calls to charity and almsgiving (11:39–41; 16:19–30), it prompts Jesus followers directly to share (3:10–14) or sell their possessions (12:33; 18:22) in view of giving to the poor."[222] In Luke 16, Jesus uses the parable of Lazarus. In this parable, He makes a stark contrast between the judgment of Lazarus and the poor man. The poor man is honored and received by God, while Lazarus - a man with human honor - was separated from God.

In Luke 14, one can find two examples of Jesus using the poor to communicate that His followers should take care of them. In the parable of the Great Banquet, Jesus taught His followers that when inviting people to a banquet, one should not only invite those who could pay him back. This invokes the hearers' understanding of reciprocity and honor and the pressure it

---

[220] Eben Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy in the Acts of the Apostles," *Neotestamentica 50,* (2016), 131.

[221] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 131.

[222] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 135.

played in giving. Instead, Jesus showed that the host should invite "the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you" (14:13-14). He extends the analogy and talks about being rejected by so many, but eventually inviting "the poor and crippled and blind and lame" (14:22). Luke records as more people gather around, Jesus continues to teach about the cost of discipleship (14:25-33). In this pericope, Jesus arrives at the conclusion, "So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple" (14:33). Jesus does not demand that one give up everything literally. Instead, it might be understood that one should be *willing* to give it up. Jesus is showing that His followers should not be concerned with the material things of this world. Generally speaking, "We must here emphasize that Jesus was not making poverty in itself virtuous and wealth in itself a vice. In this society wealth was usually acquired by depriving someone else of his patrimony. Wealth is land, and wealthy people are almost always large landowners. Thus, wealth and exploitation or greed seem to have gone hand in hand."[223] Instead, "Jesus values simplicity (or, in our terms, subsistence survival) over luxury and rejects the power that comes with wealth."[224]

At the beginning of His ministry with the disciples, Jesus teaches what is known as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7). In this sermon, Jesus addresses how to give to the poor (Matthew 6:1-4). Jesus speaks of giving to the poor in a discreet way. He implies that one's giving should be done quietly and personally. Giving should not be systematic and before an audience. Giving should be organic and with purpose.

A foundational passage for the Church to follow is found in Jesus's admonition from the Olivet Discourse during the Passion Week. In prophesying about the future Kingdom, Jesus

---

[223] Fiensy, *Christian Origins*, 57.

[224] Roland Boer and Christian Peterson, *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 156.

eventually speaks to His true followers. In doing so, He comments on the behavior of those who are going to be found His own in the future judgment. As such, His comments are, “For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison, and you came to me” (Matthew 25:35-36). To such people (sheep), they would receive a reward from God, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). When asked when Jesus was seen in this state, He simply replies, “Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40). According to Matthew, these words were shared during the last week of His earthly life, and as such, Jesus is giving instructions to His disciples.

As Jesus is talking about the end times and the future Kingdom, His imagery invokes the pattern of the new way of doing things. Giving to the poor was not just a means of meeting needs. To Jesus it was not altruistic behavior to allow His followers to feel better about themselves. Instead, Jesus viewed taking care of the poor as spiritual warfare in weakening the strongholds of Satan on earth. Jesus saw this as a complete reversal and overturn of the power of the evil one. Jesus and His ministry to the poor was simply ministry; it was not a revolution.

> He preached his message of the kingdom to the wealthy and poor alike and waited for God to bring about the end-time judgment and reversal (Matt 13:47–50). The ministry to the poor was not a program, then, that had as its goal the creation of a utopian society, but the affirmation of belief in and solidarity with the kingdom of God and God’s ultimate overthrow of injustice. As Troeltsch wrote, “It is rather the summons to prepare for the coming of the Kingdom of God.”[225]

The Early Church in Acts and the Poor

It is of great value to understand Luke’s narrative of Jesus dealing with the poor as Acts is the “continuation” of the gospel. Acts tells the story of the early Church and how she would

---

[225] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 157.

imitate the teaching and behavior of Jesus. The book of Acts is descriptive in its practical theology toward the poor. “Whereas the Jesus of the Gospels’ ministry consists of preaching the kingdom and caring for the needy, the focus in Acts seems to be on preaching the word of forgiveness of sins brought about by Jesus. However, the preaching of the kingdom and caring for the needy is not abandoned and still occupies a prominent place.”[226] The Church emulated and continued the Jewish practice of taking care of the poor. Since the early Church was composed of Jews familiar with these practices, it follows naturally that they would continue. Additionally knowing the teachings of the One they followed, they would have continued. “The apostles function as agents of Jesus of Nazareth and continue the latter’s compassionate care for the needy.”[227] Jesus’s teaching in Matthew 25 sets the stage for the behavior of the Church. “The Jerusalem church, then believed it was living out the kingdom of God as Jesus defined it. They believed that Jesus had said to ‘sell your possessions (*hyparchonta*) and give alms’ (Luke 12:33); thus, the believers did not consider any of their possessions (*hyparchonta*) to belong to themselves (Acts 4:32).”[228] In reading the book of Acts, one can find the followers of Jesus carrying out three primary methods of taking care of the poor: sharing of possessions, the sharing of meals, and the deacon system.[229] Acts also gives a sneak peek into the life and actions of Paul with regard to the poor.

---

[226] Scheffler, “Caring for the Needy”, 160.

[227] Scheffler, “Caring for the Needy”, 160.

[228] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 158.

[229] Scheffler, “Caring for the Needy”, 134.

Sharing of Possessions

Acts 2:42-27 and Acts 4:32-35 summarily describes the sharing of possessions by the early Church. These two passages find their origins in the teaching of Jesus. “And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need” (2:45). This echoes the admonition that Jesus gave in Mark 10:21. Additionally, “...no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common…There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need” (4:32, 34-35). It is worth noting that the same author, Luke, uses different language from his gospel to Acts. Instead of using the word and concept of “destitute” like he does in Luke, in Acts he uses “needy” (4:34). This seems to broaden the application of the practices of Jesus’s teaching.

Some find this radical sharing of one’s possessions follows the example of the Essenes. The Essenes were known for sharing their possessions with one another. “The Essenes both according to the Scrolls (1QS 1:12; 6:16–20) and Josephus (War 2.122–123) practiced a form of communism in which the novice retained possession of his private property until his final vows, at which he turned over everything he owned to the community.”[230] As such, the Church took the teaching of Jesus and the example of the Essenes to find their own methodology for giving to the poor. However, the Essene practice was mandatory upon entering the community. The actions of the members of the Church were voluntary and did not require the surrender of wealth (Acts 5:4).

[230] Fiensey, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 151.

The passage in Acts 2 connects the selfless sharing of the disciples with other activities that took place daily: the apostles' teaching, the breaking of bread, and praise. When one looks at the regular on-going everyday activities of the church, one cannot find a separation of duties or acts. In fact, one finds the sharing of resources to be an expression of worship. For the early Church, "radical sharing and traditional worship were not interpreted as being two different modes of religion, but as an expression of single radical commitment to God."[231] Additionally, the disciples had the responsibility to take care of the poor. Scheffler continues, "Jesus's disciples had the direct responsibility to care for the poor (Luke 9:13) and even in Acts 2:42 the "teaching of the apostles, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers" are mentioned in one breath.[232]

It is worth noting that the possession of wealth was not offensive to God or the followers of Jesus. The selling and sharing of one's possessions were voluntary. In Acts 5, one can read the story of Ananias and Sapphira. In that narrative, Ananias and Sapphira sold a piece of property and held back some of the proceeds instead of sharing. Peter's indictment of the two was not founded on their wealth, but in their lying. Notice Peter's questioning of Ananias: "While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God" (5:4). Peter does not seem to condemn Ananias for being rich or selling the property and instead focuses on him lying to the Holy Spirit.

[231] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 136.

[232] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 136.

Sharing of Meals

The second method of sharing with the poor was in the sharing of meals. This communal act of breaking bread together showed once again the sharing of possessions within the Church. It is worth noting that Acts 2 expressly states the followers gathered daily for the shared meal. This daily bread invokes the imagery of the prayer that Jesus taught (Matthew 6:11) The disciples lived out the prayer that Jesus taught in the daily taking in of bread – they could eat as they gathered for worship. This would serve as the founding for the Lord's Supper found later in the New Testament. "In Acts, the poor followers of Jesus could get food at communal gatherings while worshiping. One should therefore be reminded that the Eucharist had its roots in the open table fellowship of Jesus with his disciples, social outcasts and opponents."[233] Paul's admonition to the church at Corinth (1 Corinthians 11) echoes this idea of the meal being shared by all levels of wealth and poverty. This sharing of the meal together was another expression of the apostles carrying out the idea of taking care of the poor.

The Ministry of Deacons

The third way in which the Church cared for the needy is using deacons. Acts 6:1-6 tells the story of how the early Church solved the problem of taking care of the Hellenist widows' daily needs. As widows, they would have had a difficult time making ends meet. Being Jewish, they would have some relief through the Temple and the requirements of Mosaic Law. However, as followers of the Way, they would have been ostracized from such a distribution system and be left to fend for themselves. The resulting demands on the apostles' time and energy was too much to handle. As a result, they set up a system to allow their daily needs to be met: deacons.

[233] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 136.

This daily distribution of food hearkens back to the daily breaking of bread (Acts 2:42) and Jesus's prayer (Matthew 6:11). Ultimately, this distribution through the deacons fulfilled the mandate to take care of the poor. As Scheffler notes, "the daily material care is regarded as a most important task, to be done by Spirit-filled people appointed through prayer and the laying on of hands (v. 6). The measures are for the benefit of the poor."[234]

The church at Jerusalem was fulfilling the words of Jesus when He taught about the separation of the goats and sheep at the end of the age (Matthew 25). Essentially, "the early church believed that Jesus wanted them to commit radically to helping the poor."[235] The early Church rejected the world's values (wealth) and instead put their possessions into service of God, following the example and words Jesus issued to the rich young ruler (Mark 10). The deacon system just organized this commitment to fulfill the expectations of Jesus. "To some degree, it seems that the church set out mechanisms and models for governments to fund and follow."[236] One can see in Acts that taking care of the poor and following Jesus's teaching on the topic was a priority.

Others and the Poor in Acts

Acts continues to paint a picture that helps the reader see the foundation for Paul's writing. Paul was distinctly different from Jesus in his self-perception of the poor. While Jesus allowed for His needs to regularly be taken care of by others, Paul would write of his state in 1 Corinthians 9 as he declines receiving such aid. In describing his "right" to claim assistance from

[234] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 138.

[235] Fiensy, *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*, 156.

[236] Hays, *The Early Church*, 172.

others, he states, "But I have made no use of any of these rights, nor am I writing these things to secure any such provision." (9:15).

Luke describes Paul's actions throughout the book of Acts. In Acts 20:35, Luke writes, "In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" Luke presents Paul as someone who takes care of the needy - following the example of Jesus. In fact, Paul presents a quote of Jesus that is attributed to Him in 1 Clement 2:1 and Sirach 4:31.[237] In doing so, Luke presents Paul's actions as being aligned with the philosophy of Jesus. "Lukan Paul depicts his action as being in full agreement with the Jesus tradition of the Gospel and one which the elders of the church should follow."[238] Again, Luke describes Paul's giving nature when he makes sure the sailors eat after having gone for two weeks without (Acts 14:33-37). It is worth noting Luke's detail that they broke bread, bringing to mind the daily breaking of bread.

However, Luke does demonstrate that Paul received some assistance when he needed it. Specifically on Malta in Acts 28. He received "unusual kindness" (*philanthropia*) from the Maltese (28:2). Paul experienced the hospitality of Publius (28:7). The people of Malta then gave Paul's travel party with all they might need for the trip that lay before him.

Additionally, Luke makes specific mention of charity when describing the character of Tabitha (Acts 9:36). He does the same multiple times when telling the story of Cornelius (Acts 10:2, 4, 31).

[237] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 138.

[238] Scheffler, "Caring for the Needy", 138.

Conclusion

When one begins to think about first century practices of taking care of the poor, it is helpful to remember that the Church was revolutionary within Roman culture as there was no system in place to take care of the poor. Second Temple Judaism offered a clearer system, that was compulsory, but it was still more charitable than the Romans. The ministry of Jesus brought clear focus to the poor and meeting their needs. Jesus, in His Messianic role, preached the good news to the poor. His gospel message brought spiritual healing to the poor in Spirit (Matthew 5:3). Still, Jesus taught that the righteousness of God was found in taking care of the needs of the poor (Matthew 25:35-40). In his gospel, Luke clearly shows the gospel was both for the poor and to the poor. The book of Acts brings the proto-type Christianity to a close with it model of shared possessions, a shared meal, and deacons. Of those, one will find that the apostle Paul gives further instruction on all three. Paul addresses possessions when he writes of the pursuit of material things and contentment. About the shared meal, Paul will explore the shortcomings at Corinth and its importance for unity regardless of economic condition. Finally, Paul deals with deacons and the distribution of resources to widows as he establishes criteria for receiving assistance.

Chapter 5: Paul on Economics

Pauline literature is sometimes maligned for its perceived lack of addressing the disenfranchised or poor. Most often the themes found in discussions of Paul's writing are theological in nature. Still there are major practical everyday issues that Paul addresses (*Haustafeln* or household codes), but the criticism remains that he does not address the plight of the poor and their economic issues.

Perhaps that criticism arises out of the lack of commentary on Paul of the issue. In a non-extensive brief overly simplistic survey, one can see this issue in the contents of Pauline authors. Thomas Schreiener (*Paul: Apostle of God's Glory in Christ*) lists the glory of God in Christ; suffering, sin, salvation and transforming grace (sanctification and justification); life in the Spirit; unity; baptism and Lord's supper (ordinances); and the hope of God's people as the primary themes of Paul. Stanley Porter (*The Apostle Paul*) mentions that Paul can be summed up with key theological terms or concepts: grace and faith round out what Porter calls "fundamental beliefs," followed by "developed beliefs" such as justification, law, reconciliation, sanctification, salvation, triumph of God, gospel, church, and Jesus' death and resurrection. Douglas Moo (*The Theology of Paul and His Letters*) writes of Paul's theology directly: Christ and his gospel, the beginning of salvation, the problem of sin, the benefits of salvation, final eschatology, the people of Jesus Christ, and how to live out the faith in the here and now - yet there is simply a passing note of living out one's faith toward the poor. Yet, all of this is for good reason as much of our theology today has been shaped by Paul.

However, Paul addresses or is influenced by economic issues throughout his writing. Paul (or Pauline thought) is sometimes attributed to writing thirteen of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament. Of those thirteen epistles, no less than eleven address economic issues as well as texts from Luke in the book of Acts. One will easily find that the term "poor" occupies a central position in Pauline thought and terminology.

It is worth noting that "economy" in the scripture involves more than just the physical means of life. It also includes questions about household relations and how those relations serve God's purposes for life. As such, a biblical view on economics involves spiritual and political dimensions as well. Readers and interpreters of scripture should be mindful of the encompassing nature of the term "economics". "The 'economy of God' is a term in the Scriptures and the tradition designating God's all-inclusive history with the creation and the human response to God's economic work."[239]

Yet, when one contemplates what Paul says about God's work regarding the poor, one must ask themself, "What does it mean to be poor or have wealth?" Though not comprehensive, wealth might be considered to include that which is needed daily to help one survive and fulfill their call as a Christ-follower. Oslington seeks to define wealth likewise, "The dividing line for defining wealth is twofold: (1) what is necessary to survive the day and (2) what is necessary to fulfill one's calling as a child of the covenant or as a disciple of Jesus Christ."[240] In essence, the one who has more than needed to survive the day and fulfill their calling is considered wealthy. The one who is below that line is in poverty. The discrepancy between the wealthy and the poor is where the tension lays and one can find that much of scriptural admonition regarding economics is demonstrating how the two can co-exist. This is due largely to the unique perspective of God in relation to the poor: they are to be cared for. That is to say that those with

[239] Paul Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

[240] Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, 8.

have a responsibility to help those without as commanded and modeled by God. "The genuinely distinctive feature of the biblical perspective on economy is God's relation to the poor."[241] While the Bible addresses the need to care for them through the Mosaic Law and the words of Jesus, it continues through the words of the apostle Paul. Yet, the influence of Paul on economic issues goes largely unnoticed. "Biblical studies, theology, and the church at large are unaware that the authentic writings of Paul contain some of the most elaborate literary reflections on the flow of money surviving from the ancient World."[242]

Though Paul would have been familiar with and influenced by Second Temple Jewish thought, Paul does not use the Law as his sole motivation. He moves from the burden of the Law to freedom in Christ (as Galatians notes). Gotsis notes that Paul is "keen to emphasize the move away from the letter of the Old Testament Law (where much of the Jewish economic ethic is laid out), and towards the spirit of Christ's law."[243] This is not a rejection of the Old Testament Law, but instead an embrace of Christ Who fulfilled the Law. Yet Paul's writing still preserves the important relationship that members of the body (nation of Israel) have to one another. In doing so, "Jewish economic thought has always been strongly rooted in the special understanding of the mutual responsibilities the members of the faith and Nation have to one another."[244] Paul's "new" world was one where faith and nationality were separated and as such, taking care of the poor was not a common thought. Even so, as Fiensy and Longenecker[245] note, poverty abounded.

---

[241] Oslington, *Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, 9.

[242] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 13.

[243] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 14.

[244] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 14.

[245] See chapter 2.

Even in the move from agrarian to urban settings, the existence of the poor was prevalent. Geographic location did not determine one's station in life. Moreso in the context of Paul's writing, the urban environment and his adaptation to that world was instrumental in his letters. "In such an urban milieu, the economic problem had to be redefined and re-evaluated; the problem of scarcity emerged, not in the context of an agricultural population, as in the Gospels, but between urban Christians engaged in a variety of economic activities."[246]

While the prevailing thought of Paul was to "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10), one finds that Paul was not totally opposed to the wealthy. In fact, Paul had benefactors of his ministry who were wealthy who provided material needs both personally as well as for the church. Those with means provided places for ministry to happen. This caused Paul to have a divergent philosophy (from Jesus and the early church) toward wealth and those with resources. "This may be why the Pauline epistles do not reveal a profound hostility to economic processes, such as capital accumulation, investment, and ownership of wealth, as did the Synoptic Gospels, and especially Luke."[247] Even in the context of giving, Pauline thought contrasts with the Gospels. Paul's view on giving was that it was to be connected to the gospel message. It is in the Gospels where "economic attitudes and practices take place in the context of a generalized reciprocity, i.e., a form of interpersonal relations centered on altruistic giving, without any immediate expectation of possible return."[248] Yet, Paul views giving in the context of "large-scale economies of balanced reciprocities, based on a secure return, in the form of an exchange

[246] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 16.

[247] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 16.

[248] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 16.

of money and grace, or honor."[249] A deeper examination of Paul's writing will help the reader to see this tenet of the gospel in action.

Exposition of Texts

While Paul wrote regarding economic issues in eleven of the thirteen epistles attributed to Pauline thought, this paper will break the analysis of the texts into "major" passages and "lesser" passages dealing with these topics. In the major category, one can find: Galatians 2:1-10; 2 Corinthians 8-9; 1 Corinthians 11:17-34; 1 Timothy 5:3-16; Philippians 4:10-19; and Romans 15:25-29. One will find issues dealt with in lesser terms in Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Philemon.

"Remember the poor"

In Galatians 2:1-10, Paul recounts his journey to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the church. The purpose of this section of the letter is to justify his ministry to the Gentiles. As Paul recounts his encounter in Jerusalem, his posture is one of confidence in his position. He is not asking permission, but instead is ready to argue his position. It can be said that he is seeking a legal and binding agreement from the church and is entering as a negotiator not as a beggar.[250] The outcome of his discussions with the pillars would produce a binding direction of his

[249] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 16.

[250] Hans Dieter Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016), 87.

ministry. There was legal ramification of the agreement, as Luke proposes in Acts 15.[251] The outcome of the meeting was positive and they actually affirmed his work among the Gentiles. "On the contrary, they acknowledged the validity of his ministry and considered it to be parallel to their own, asking only that he 'continue to remember the poor.'"[252] His overall purpose was to establish his authority to preach his gospel message.[253] Specifically, Paul spells out his argument against circumcision as a necessary act for the Gentiles. Most scholars attribute this referenced exchange to the events reported by Luke in Acts 15. Ultimately Paul's ministry is affirmed and given approval (though Paul did not necessarily feel it needed). As the pillars extended the right hand of fellowship to signal the acceptance of his gospel message, in which circumcision was not required. "There was also, however, a basic unity between them, which was signaled by the Jerusalem apostles in their giving the "right hand of fellowship" to Paul and Barnabas. On Paul's part this unity was to be expressed by his continuing 'to remember the poor.'"[254] While the primary issue was circumcision, it is of value that Paul arrives at two additional conclusions separate from that discussion. The first is that the leaders' "only" request was that Paul would remember the poor. The second was that he was "eager" to do so. In stating his eagerness to do so, Paul basically shows that he was at least planning to do so and quite possibly was already engaged in that activity. The text indicates that Paul's "zeal" *spoudazō* serves as evidence that the agreement had in fact been concluded and that he had never stopped honoring its terms.[255]

---

[251] F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982), 126.

[252] Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (Dallas: Word Books, 1990), 44.

[253] Betz, *Galatians*, 86.

[254] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 44-45.

[255] Betz, *Galatians*, 102.

Not only did Paul continue the collection, but he had initiated it prior to the encouragement from the pillars.[256] Analysis of the text, based on the tenses used, indicates that enthusiasm for taking a collection for the poor was something he always wanted to do. "In the translation, therefore, we have tried to highlight this feature of Paul's thought by the use of the word "always"; 'which is what I have always been eager to do.'"[257]

From the text there are two things that are also clear. First is that circumcision was not required to become or demonstrate oneself as a follower of Christ. Second is that one demonstration of being a Christ-follower is taking care of the poor. It is clear that there was no "new" requirement placed on Paul's gospel to the Gentiles, "only" taking care of the poor was emphasized. Grammatically, the use of the adverb *monon* ("only") separates the first part of the argument from the next. It demonstrates that the discussion on circumcision is done, but there is something new that goes along with it. "In effect, by its use Paul is saying: Only this one request was made in addition to the agreement referred to above, but that request was not related to the point at issue and so is immaterial to the conflict stirred up by the Judaizers in Galatia."[258] While he states that no "new" requirement was placed on his message, he does concede that the additional expectation was to remember the poor.[259] "Remembering the poor" was not just a spiritual ask or expectation. Instead, "remember the poor" specifically invoked the idea of financial assistance. "Almost all commentators assume that the request "to remember the poor "

---

[256] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 126.

[257] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 61.

[258] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 59.

[259] Betz, *Galatians*, 101.

has principally to do with money."[260] This idea of *mnēmoneuō* ("remember") here refers to a specific, ongoing financial subsidy.[261]

One can see that to the leaders of the church, there were no additional requirements for faith. As such, circumcision was not a necessary act. However, giving to the poor was considered so great an act of righteousness, that it was mentioned as a "substitute" for circumcision. Historically, a defining and separating act of Judaism and dedication to God was circumcision. However, since the leaders agreed that was not necessary, they chose giving to the poor as a defining trait. This was a value or ethic unique to Jewish culture and rooted in practice and custom. Giving to the poor was rare in Gentile culture and this is the reason for specific mentioning by the pillars. As such, one can infer that taking care of the poor was closely associated with the gospel message. Ultimately, Peter, James, and John suggest that Christ-followers should take care of the poor. Geography did not matter in this discussion. "An economic surplus in excess of the needs of the Christian should be distributed to the poor and the needy. This is suggested by the urging of the Jerusalem community that Paul should remember the poor (Gal.2:10)."[262] Bruce argues that this was a plea for on-going concern.[263] However, for the Jerusalem apostles, this requirement may have functioned as more than the mere proviso that Paul implies. As Paul recounts his encounter to the Galatians, it is reasonable to think that his words understate the "suggestion" of the apostles. Perhaps their admonition was stronger than that which we have from Paul' writing. As Keener notes, "Implication of the pillars to take care

---

[260] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 60.

[261] Betz, *Galatians*, 101-102.

[262] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 25.

[263] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 126.

of the needy was an "on-going" thing - not a one-time event "If a regular activity is in mind, Paul's later collection for the needy in Jerusalem is simply the supreme fulfillment of his commitment to this understanding."[264] Paul downplays this request, minimizing its assertiveness, but one should not dismiss the authority of the church pillars asking it. Perhaps this minimizing was due to is inconsequential impact on the debate at hand (circumcision), but it was to be heeded, nonetheless. "Paul clearly plays down this additional request, saying that there was only this one, and it was supplementary, unrelated to the main points of the debate, and immaterial to the present crisis in Galatia. From Paul's words it appears that what had been requested and granted was a kind of philanthropic gesture"[265] However, it remains that the pillars did make the request and likened to an act of righteousness on par with circumcision as a marker of following Christ. "Thus the request (or would Jerusalem have phrased it more strongly?) that Paul should "remember the poor " (Gal 2:10) may have been understood (in the light of the importance given to alms giving within Judaism : Dan 4:27; Sir 29:12; 40:24; Tob 4:10; 12:9; 14:1011; Acts 10:35) as the next best thing to circumcision, as the act of righteousness most important for the loyal covenant member."[266]

With regard to the motivation for the strong words from the pillars, there are some who view this offering for Jerusalem as a continuation and expansion of the temple tax of the Second Temple era. It was seen as a means of supporting the leaders of the first church. Holl suggests

[264] Craig Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 158.

[265] Betz, *Galatians*, 101.

[266] James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 874.

that "the collection was effectively a tax imposed by the leaders of the Jerusalem group, which had assumed a leadership and supervisory role vis-à-vis all other Christ groups."[267]

However, others suggest it to be a free will offering with the purpose of bringing unity among the different congregations of the church. With the historical animosity between the Jews and Gentiles being an issue, the giving of one's resources to another (from Gentile to Jew) was a sure way to show that they were unified under the banner of Christ. Paul's later words in Galatians shows that "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). "Munck insisted that it was in fact a free offering, taking 2 Corinthians 8:7 and 9:7 at face value and not as Paul's desperate attempts to appeal to the Corinthians' generosity in order to persuade them to continue the collection project. Munck's main contribution, however, was the suggestion that Paul's motivation for the collection was ecumenical."[268]

There is also a small group of study that categorizes the effort of bringing resources to Jerusalem eschatologically. The belief is that in the end times all resources would come to Jerusalem. Additionally, the first church believed that they were living in the end times. Thus, the marriage of those two beliefs would cause people to send their resources to Jerusalem.

However, it is important to remember that Gentiles would not have recognized free will offerings for the poor. This was not a part of their culture. Instead, they would have been familiar with communal collections through the family or the *collegia*. "The collection, maintenance, and distribution of communal funds were extremely common throughout the ancient Mediterranean

---

[267] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 308.

[268] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 308.

world, and many of the practical issues that Paul's groups had to face find close parallels in other small groups and in the administration of Hellenistic poleis."[269]

However, regardless of the reason for the imperative to give, the ever-present cultural influence of reciprocity is in play. Taking up a collection is seen as an act of reciprocity. The idea is that the birth of the church allows them to experience the hope of Jesus in their own world. Some attribute the collection as a form of repayment for all they had been given. As such, it is viewed as "temple tax" of sorts. The collection "might have been considered a 'tribute' to the church at Jerusalem from the gentiles."[270] As such, they are simply "giving honor to whom honor is due" with patronage (gift to the church "fathers") from the client (church at Galatia). As such it was a sort of repayment of moral debt. Since Paul was seeking validation from the leaders (Acts 15), this was a way to recognize their support. This follows the cultural norm of a gift given (Jerusalem church to other churches) and reciprocation (honor and money being given back to them). "Benefaction demanded reciprocity, and the pillars may have seen Paul's commitment to the needy as an appropriate response to their endorsement."[271] Blanton extends the thought, "The initial agreement, described by Paul in Galatians 2:9–10, involved recognition of Paul's law-free gospel by the "pillars" (James, Peter, and John), a benefit that placed Paul in the debt of the Jerusalem group and put him under an obligation to reciprocate. The reciprocation asked of Paul and of the Antiochene group was material support for the poor members of the Jerusalem group."[272]

---

[269] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 311.

[270] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 127.

[271] Keener, *Galatians*, 158.

[272] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 309.

Since giving was not natural to the Gentiles and taking care of the poor was not in their normal pattern of behavior, Paul relied on reciprocity to convince them to take part. "Paul even encouraged the agonistic nature of euergetism, whereby benefactor and beneficiary would exchange roles in a continued game of gift and counter-gift."[273]

Regardless, the collection was a free will act of righteousness. The church at Galatia and all those throughout the empire would have been familiar with the behavior of the first groups of believers and their radical practice of sharing resources. To emulate their acts, giving to the poor would have been a priority. In doing so, their giving was their own choice – no something forced upon them by the church at Jerusalem. "The collection was a matter of a free decision of those groups, not a legal imposition of the Jerusalem group."[274]

Additionally, in the context of Galatians 2:10, the idea of giving was connected to the gospel message of Paul. This entire pericope flows from a discussion of what was needed for faith and the gospel message. Paul's own desire to encourage his converts to remember the poor naturally comes out of his discussion of the gospel message. It is as if Paul felt taking care of the poor was part of his (and all believers) calling. "After all, part of Paul's apostolic burden was to remember the poor (Gal. 2:10)."[275] For the pillars, circumcision was no longer an expression of righteousness, but giving was. For all involved, a demonstrable act of living out the gospel was giving to the poor. "The original agreement was the recognition of different expressions of one gospel and the collection was the means by which this recognition was expressed."[276] The

---

[273] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 310.

[274] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 310.

[275] Scott Hafemann, *2 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text -- to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 418.

[276] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 308.

collection for the poor was part of Paul's mission and purpose in life. "Paul's collection was willing, and it was "an important part of his apostolic ministry."[277]

With various motivations for the offering, it does bring the "poor" into the discussion. Paul's use of "the poor" was different from the ambiguous "poor" used by Jesus in the sermon on the mount. Paul's "poor" was clearly about the resource deprived - those without. "The 'poor' here are genuinely economically needy."[278] Use of the word *ptōchos* was typically reserved for those who were in the lower classes.[279] Paul clearly is communicating about economics regardless of whether or not he is writing about those in Galatia or in Jerusalem. Additionally, "poor" was a term that the church in Jerusalem often used to describe themselves.[280] The idea of Jewish righteousness or *anawim* piety was often used to describe the believers in Jerusalem. "Jewish Christians not only referred to themselves as "those of the Way" (cf. Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), but also, it seems, as 'The Poor'."[281] Regardless, the resource-deprived applied to both categories. Keener states, "Paul's other relevant uses of the term and its cognates imply economic need. Thus, whether the 'poor' are located specifically in Jerusalem or not, what is distinctive about the title is their economic need."[282] This is a further example of Paul's transversiveness. Infrequently mentioned, the poor was not a people group that was cared for in Paul's day. Additionally, as some argue, the collection in question could have been for the Jews

---

[277] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 127.

[278] Keener, *Galatians*, 158.

[279] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 59.

[280] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 126.

[281] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 59.

[282] Keener, *Galatians*, 158.

and thus cross-cultural. “The ‘poor’ as such were rarely the express object of such undertakings…Paul’s collection was framed not only as a collection for the ‘poor’ but as a collection for members of a different ethnic group.”[283] The idea that Paul was not only writing about the poor, but foreigners, invokes additional issues for consideration.

There is some question as to whom ethnically, the phrase “take care of the poor” applies. There is some debate as to whether the leaders were specifically referring to the Jerusalem community of believers or the poor in general. “Marcion seems to present the statement as gentile and Jerusalem churches on opposite sides, thus Paul’s enthusiasm was for concern for the gentile poor.”[284] However, Paul’s later insistence on the continued and specific collection for the church at Jerusalem indicates that the collection was for both. The vagueness of the passage lends itself to interpretation. “The phrase ‘remember the poor’ signaled the special relationship between the gentile church and Jerusalem church which is something which Paul wanted to do.”[285] Betz argues that the reference is undefined and undetermined.[286] While there is no indication of geography in the Galatians passage, on more than one occasion, Paul is found taking up an offering for the saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8-9, Romans 15). As spelled out earlier, the conditions of the empire were universal: nearly eighty percent lived below the line of poverty; essentially three out of four were considered poor - whether in Jerusalem or otherwise. However, for followers of the Way, poverty was seen as a badge of honor or reflection of the character of Christ within. “Poverty was embraced by many Jews and Christians as an expression

---

[283] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 326.

[284] Bruce, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, 126.

[285] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 60.

[286] Betz, *Galatians*, 102.

of personal piety. That in the end such piety must rely on outside help is a well-known religious phenomenon elsewhere."[287] While most scholarship leans toward interpretation of the phrase applying to the saints in Jerusalem, Bruce Longenecker differs in his perspective.

Most scholarship on Galatians 2:1-10 focuses on the collection for the saints in Jerusalem yet is some thought that perhaps this passage of scripture has a wider appeal to the mission of Paul. If the admonition from church leaders applied only to the Acts 15 time frame, then perhaps that original agreement had passed its worth. Yet, in Galatians 2, Paul still seems intent on keeping the collection going. "It is interesting that in spite of the separation from Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians, Paul has continued to implement the supplementary agreement. Then Paul must have new reasons for keeping the financial collection going."[288] Longenecker puts forth the idea that Paul's comments in Galatians 2:10, "remember the poor", is for a broader range of people than just the collection for the poor in the church in Jerusalem. Longenecker views the commitment Paul makes as part of his overall missiology and mission work - to support the poor. While the time of writing may line up with famine and distress of Jerusalem, there is not an indication that Paul's acceptance by the pillars was conditional; especially on the condition of taking a special offering for them. Additionally, asking for money would have undermined the quality of their friendship. It could also be seen as insensitive if Paul's reference to "the poor" was to everyone in the assembly, instead of the truly poor. He goes on to comment that Galatians 2:10 is a reference to work that Paul is already doing for the poor. These acts involved the participation of Barnabas in Antioch instead of future offerings or collections from Macedonia.

[287] Betz, *Galatians*, 102.

[288] Betz, *Galatians*, 102.

Instead, Longenecker argues that Paul's concern for the poor is in much of his writing, not just regarding the collection for Jerusalem in 2 Corinthians 8-9 and Galatians 2.[289] Oakes supports this idea and adds Philippians 2:1-4 to the overall thought. Oakes makes the comment on "considering the interests of each other" has the indication of an economic element.[290] The perspective of Longenecker, in looking at Galatians 2:10, is that the pillars would accept that Gentiles would not need to be circumcised, but instead should follow another Jewish virtue: taking care of the poor. That is why Paul responded with enthusiasm.[291] Longenecker then makes the connection to Galatians 4:12-15 (them taking care of Paul in his need) and 6:9-10 (perseverance in doing good) as the climax to walking in the Spirit (Galatians 5:13ff). He takes his cues from sow "to the Spirit," and "do good to all, especially to the household members of the faith". However, as Oakes notes, there is not much support for this position - specifically as it relates to Galatians 2.[292] Instead, he finds an argument for unity, expressed most keenly in concern for the poor. This unity is found through love, echoing the words of Jesus that believers would be known by their love for one another (John 13:25). "Serious love is practical, bearing one another's burdens (6:2), doing good in a way that often finds focus in giving to deal with the difficulties of those who are under economic stress."[293]

An initial reading of Galatians 2:1-10 does not indicate any geographic connection at all. Jerusalem is not mentioned. In other writings, Paul does reference a collection for the saints in

---

[289] Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 154-160.

[290] Peter Oakes, *Galatians* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Publishing Group, 2015), 72.

[291] Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 198.

[292] Oakes, *Galatians*, 73.

[293] Oakes, *Galatians*, 73.

Jerusalem. However, if the events of Galatians 2 line up with the events that take place in Jerusalem in Acts 15, then one can infer that the leaders of the church were in fact mentioning the poor of Jerusalem. Yet, it does not have to be an either/or discussion. Understanding the economic conditions and needs of his day across the empire, Paul simply is stating that where he takes the message of Jesus, he will also take the admonition to take care of the poor. Paul's concept of remembering the poor was written in the context of arguing for what is essential to the gospel. Circumcision is not. Remembering the poor is. The idea of taking care of the poor is more closely connected to the message of the gospel than it is to geography.

The Collection for the Saints "Part II"

The next passage to explore does deal directly with the collection of the saints in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul is addressing the congregation with the intent of generating alms for the church in Jerusalem. As he references the churches in Macedonia (8:1), he is clearly referencing the church in Galatia (1 Corinthians 16:1). The origin of the offering is in Galatians 2:1-10[294] but 2 Corinthians 8-9 is the most extensive writing on the Jerusalem collection. Scholars use the collection to help build a timeline for Paul's ministry. "Reference or absence of mentioning of collection for Jerusalem helps scholars develop a timeline for Paul's ministry."[295]

There has been some significant textual criticism of these two chapters, and in the larger scope all of Paul's Corinthians writings. The way in which these two letters appear to be multiple letters is an issue of scholarly debate and discussion. The two chapters at hand, specifically 2 Corinthians 8 and 9, are perceived to be two separate letters conjoined into one continuous

[294] Philip Francis Esler, *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary*, (New York: T&T Clark, 2021), 229.

[295] Ralph P. Martin, Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, and Lynn Allan Losie, *2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014), 422.

thought in the composition of 2 Corinthians. There are different theories as to how 2 Corinthians and chapters 8 and 9 are held together, or better said, put together. However, one thing remains about these two chapters: they go hand in hand speaking of the collection for the saints in Jerusalem. If one is to consider them as separates works put together, the reader still sees the overarching purpose of the chapters as an encouragement by Paul to take a collection for the saints in Jerusalem in two parts.[296] While the separation of the letter is not wholly accepted, many conservative scholars see the letter as unified, it should not impact the nature of these two chapters. They can be viewed as chapter 8 being narrative and chapter 9 being exhortation.[297] The two chapters wholly contain instruction on the collection.

Contextually, much of 2 Corinthians is Paul's defense of his apostleship. In doing so, Paul writes of his own suffering (in the most expressive book of his personal life) and shows the Corinthians how to live during suffering themselves. Paul is establishing his authority for the benefit of the gospel. In doing so, Paul asks them to be strong in their faith and give generously. The foundation of this section of the letter is the idea that repentance leads to gracious living and generous giving. Christians are to give generously according to their means and at times beyond them. Additionally, believers are to give across national lines and give cheerfully, not out of compulsion.

Purpose of the offering was to bring economic relief to Jews in Jerusalem. This was reasonable considering the famine of the mid-40's. There might have been additional reasons for the economic state of believers in Jerusalem. Some suggest persecution or the church's own

[296] Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016), 5.

[297] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 5.

creation due to its radical sharing. Martin notes, "(the) cause for need for collection: famine, extreme sharing of early church, persecution (exclusion) of Christ-followers from Jewish economy."[298] However, the need for the collection is not the primary concern. In addition to the general impoverished state, the conditions of the people would have been exacerbated by the famine in Palestinian region. Gotsis comments, "Whilst Paul was carrying out his missionary work, the church in Jerusalem fell into particularly dire financial straits, due in no small part to the famine of 46AD. Paul spent a great deal of time and effort coordinating a relief effort, and this fundraising also gave shape to his theology."[299] Though a part of his personal theology, there was simply a pragmatic approach to taking up the collection for the church in Jerusalem. Gotsis continues, "Mostly, this precept is a necessary means to overcome scarcity, the inadequacy of resources, underlying the numerous food crises and shortages of goods that affected many Roman territories during 44-49 AD, Jerusalem included."[300] Regardless of the conditions that facilitated the poor conditions of the saints, Paul may have been taking up a collection for a multitude of reasons. The collection fulfilled the promise of given to the pillars (Acts 15 and Galatians 2), he was pursuing equality within the body, he was building unity in the Church, and he was fulfilling the eschatological impact in the *heilsgeschichtlich* (salvation-history) of the Church.[301]

However, many of the people in Corinth were also poor. The poverty of Macedonia was a result of Roman conquest among other reasons. "Whatever the affliction of the Macedonians

[298] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 423.

[299] Gotsis, "Economics in Pauline Epistles", 17.

[300] Gotsis, "Economics in Pauline Epistles", 20.

[301] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 431.

may have been, their “abysmal poverty” *ptōcheia* was a part of it. Ancient sources indicate that poverty was a way of life in Macedonia generally and not only a result of their conversion to Christianity. Indeed, there must have been severe economic hardship in that part of the country.”[302] Though Corinth stood out as relatively different due to its wealth, it was still not impervious to the economic conditions that plagued the empire in the first century. This paradox that Paul wrote of was a difficult thing for the Corinthians. They were to be generous despite their affliction. Yet Corinth was a key city in the economy due to the travel patterns of the empire and its religious center. Still, there was something that caused them to be financially destitute. “Their “joy” coupled with “deep-down poverty” (2 Cor 8:2) is an item of their history that can only be known from what Paul’s letter here says.”[303] Perhaps the church at Corinth was facing persecution for their newly found faith. Martin observes, “We may trace their economic hardship to persecution (e.g., Phil 1:29– 30; 1 Thess 1:6; 2:14; 3:3– 4; cf. 2 Thess 1:4– 10), rather than to a general depression, since Barrett draws attention to their flourishing trade.”[304] Still, Paul challenges them to turn their extreme poverty (destitute) turned into abundance of giving (8:2). He does so by reminding them that God was the One who meets all their needs. Paul is using both their spiritual lack (not becoming more like Jesus) and their financial lack (not giving) to challenge them. “It is noteworthy that Paul could speak at both the material and the spiritual level of the Corinthians' lack. When he spoke of the deficiency of the Corinthians, he had something spiritual in mind. Yet a material deficiency is implied as well: despite their

---

[302] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 43.

[303] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 432.

[304] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 432.

wealth, the Corinthians had not yet been able to raise the money."[305] Their poverty has been transformed into abundance. "In the context of Christian experience, however, the misery of poverty had been transformed miraculously into something positive. This miracle… is basic to Christian experience."[306] Yet, in this admonition, it is God Who receives the glory for it is He Who has done the great thing among them. "The Macedonians are no fools for giving out of their poverty. But neither are they great religious heroes. It is not the Macedonians who are praised in this passage, but the God who brought about their giving by first having given them joy in himself in the midst of their poverty in this world."[307] In doing so, Paul paradoxically shows that their abundance flows out of their lack. "Note the paradox of poverty spilling over into wealth *ploutos*, which is obviously not material but relates to a richness that pertains to a generous spirit that loves to give and whose giving is not measured by the amount but by the sacrifice entailed."[308] As Betz comments, "(Paul's) expression of it takes the form of an oxymoron: "their abysmal poverty has overflowed into the wealth of their liberality."[309] This flows out of a Hellenistic philosophy common in Paul's day. Prosperity was a gift from the divine while wealth was obtained unethically.[310] Paul was asking them to give out of their abundance. As such, it was expected to give a gift that when gifts were bestowed upon a person. If one did not respond by giving, it was considered greed and ingratitude. "A gift of blessing is given in response to

---

[305] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 58.

[306] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 44-45.

[307] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 419.

[308] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 433.

[309] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 45.

[310] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 97.

blessings received, while greed represents a failure to respond in kind, owing to one's failure to receive anything as a gift… the gift of blessing [results in this cycle]: receiving, enjoying, and giving."[311]

He continues to show that they gave according to means; invoking the imagery of the widow's mite from Luke 21 (8:3). As such, Paul is drawing upon the idea of giving out of grace, and specifically in the believer's life, salvation through Christ. "In the view of the ancients, the generosity of the simple folk was always a response to divine grace. In Paul's theology, this general notion is specified: the divine gift is defined as salvation in Christ."[312] Paul notes that they gave to God first and encourages them to excel in giving. "The terminology Paul employed in this connection comes from the area of administration, in particular financial administration: they gave *dynamis* ("according to ability"), and even as Paul emphasized through an oath (*martyreō*, "I am the witness")."[313] He uses the imagery of Jesus in demonstrating His heart for the poor (8:9) in echoing the relationship between the Macedonians and Corinthians. (Betz 46) "In Paul's theology, God's gift of grace (*charis*) involves Christ's self-sacrifice as well as God's sacrifice of his own son."[314] Paul uses the example of Jesus to communicate his point. Martin notes, "this illustration shows how Paul's mind can oscillate between material goods (in helping the Jerusalem saints) and spiritual enrichments that come into human experience."[315] It was the practice in ancient times for sacrifice to be a symbol of self-dedication. As such, Paul is invoking

---

[311] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 97.

[312] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 45.

[313] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 46.

[314] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 46.

[315] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 439.

the imagery of sacrificial giving as a symbol of one's dedication to God. "The sacrificial cult, so widely practiced in the ancient world, was regarded as a symbolic substitute for human self-dedication; as such, it was the only proper response to the beneficence of the deity."[316] If they give, then it would be a reflection of the gospel at work in their lives. If the collection for the church in Jerusalem is successful, then it is a demonstration of God's grace in their lives in both a spiritual and attitudinal manner.[317] In translating the spiritual gifts into material gifts, Paul is transversive, or perhaps even subversive, on his take on traditional cultural exchanges. "As part of his larger attempt to locate Paul's use of the concept of *charis*, "grace, gift," in the context of the Hellenistic reciprocity system, Harrison argues that Paul never merely accepts, but also critiques and transforms, the values of Greco-Roman patronage."[318]

It is worth noting that Paul invokes the idea of honor before men in 8:21. In chapter 9, Paul challenges them to give without reciprocation - an unusual and new idea (9:5). Also, one can see in the beginning of chapter 9 that Paul equates grace with giving money; four times in verses 1-5. In verses 6-11, Paul gives instruction about giving. He notes the return (sparingly and generously). This passage gives clear reference to Paul's agrarian influence. As he would have grown up and been familiar with these terms (sow/reap). Specifically in this passage Paul does nothing to make the principal explicitly Christian. Instead, he is simply referring to the agrarian sow-reap analogy.[319] He notes the heart (cheerful not compulsion). He encourages them that God is provider of their needs, quoting Psalm 112:9. He closes out this section by making a

---

[316] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 46.

[317] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 48.

[318] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 426.

[319] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 98.

connection between the gospel and giving to the poor as well as invoking the *koinonia* or sharing from Acts 2:42 (9:13). While Paul acknowledges their limited ability to give, he does not shy away from giving to those outside the local scope to people they probably would never meet. Keener notes, "one in five had 'wealth' and lived above poverty. Nevertheless, they could at least care for one another, and there were hints that, where possible, this concern should extend beyond their communities (Rom. 12:13, 16; 2 Cor. 9:13; Gal. 6:10; 1 Thess. 5:14– 15)."[320]

It is interesting in this passage that Paul writes of the public nature of giving. Since giving in the first century was for honor and done publicly, this should not come as a surprise, but it is different from today's culture which emphasizes private giving - following the example of Jesus (Matthew 6:4). Paul was merely contextualizing the act of giving to his culture. "Clearly, when it came to public behavior, Paul shared fundamental starting points with the prevailing culture of his day, especially since it was predominantly religious in its worldview, and it often understood the link between outward actions and inner states of being."[321] Additionally, Paul is appealing to the competitive, or imitative behavior found in human nature as he challenges them to be like the Macedonians. "Paul is not encouraging competition but imitation."[322] Yet, he is also appealing to the "rich" Corinthians over the poor Macedonians. He notes that the Macedonians gave, and they should as well. "(Harris 565) Macedonians gave in their poverty on their own initiative and of their own free will."[323] In doing so, Paul is tapping into the first century issues of status and stratification. "Having recounted the enthusiasm of the

[320] Keener, *Galatians*, 158-159.

[321] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 418.

[322] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 240.

[323] Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005), 565.

Macedonians for the collection – in a manner representing them as exemplary, not as a spur to compete with them… Paul now appeals directly to Corinthians to abound in this work just as they do in other areas of life (faith, speech, knowledge, eagerness and love)."[324] Esler continues with the idea that through the Christ-movement identity, which the Macedonians have, "Paul seeks to align the experience and identity of the Macedonian Christ-followers with that of the Corinthians. The Macedonians are prototypical in respect of eagerness, and the Corinthians need to be so too."[325] Paul's invokes the technique of syncrisis by using rhetoric and historiographic terminology to provoke a healthy competition between rivals through comparison.[326] Betz extends the thought with, "We may also assume that the choice of the Macedonians was not coincidental. Paul must have known of the rivalry, both ethnic and political, between the Macedonians and the Corinthians. It is interesting to observe that he did not hesitate to make use of such rivalry."[327]

In seeking relief for the poor of Jerusalem, Paul is appealing to the desire for equality in Jesus. Paul's motivation for comparative rhetoric shows demonstrates his desire to see all under the name of Jesus as being equal. "Paul's efforts, to ground the appeal for the collection in the notion of equality is not one of equal civil rights but of sharing economic resources."[328] The concept of relief for poor Christians was central to Paul's theology. "Relief for the poor was at the center of the primitive Christian ethos as demonstrated by Paul: 'I do not mean that there

---

[324] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 244.

[325] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 245.

[326] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 48.

[327] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 48.

[328] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 327.

should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.'"[329] Additionally, there is consideration that at some point, the favor may need to be returned. This takes into consideration the first century concept of reciprocity. "During the present time, your surplus should supply their deficiency, in order that there might be equality. Paul envisages (at least for the sake of the argument, if not in actuality) a future time when their roles may be reversed."[330] Yet this idea of reciprocity was not balanced or equal gifting. This was more of a familial exchange and specifically groups within the new family of Christ. Paul does not command or use dictatorial language, but instead appeals to them on friendly terms.[331] These groups collectively would be the congregations of the church. As part of the collective, one group would help another so that all might do well. "One part of the Christ-movement that has a surplus will help another that has a deficiency, in the knowledge that it itself may be helped by the donee later, with the quantum of the respective gifts irrelevant."[332] Paul promoted the economic idea of 'the equalization of resources between people of different social classes through voluntary redistribution.

However, Paul speaks to how one should give. While he encourages sacrificial giving, he also aware of the means that each has. Paul does not expect them to suffer beyond their already difficult situation. "Paul is not calling upon them to abject poverty or asceticism - instead calling

---

[329] Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, 10.

[330] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 248-249.

[331] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 576.

[332] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 249-250.

to generous and sacrificial giving."[333] Paul also considers that those means are not the same for everyone. "It is also important to emphasize, as a matter of principle, that Paul stresses proportionate giving."[334] This is to ensure that Paul's admonition to give has an impact on all - not just the wealthy. Instead, he encourages people to give according to their means, not beyond their means.[335] In doing so, there is none without excuse to participate. Giving was to be in line with what one has and not beyond. "Yet, in a realistic way, the Pauline call to give is moderated: the giving is in accordance with what people may have, not what they do not possess. No one will be criticized if his modest means do not allow exceptional sacrifices."[336] Using the imagery of Christ and the example of the Macedonians shows that one's giving is not to be dependent upon ability, but sincerity of heart. The attitude behind the action is everything. In doing so, the reader finds the stratification within the first century church is similar to today. "In applying this text, we can be confident that Paul is speaking to a church with the same kind of economic diversity reflected in most of our own."[337] Paul was in fact advocating for equality – not that all would be rich, but that all would have what they need for meeting basic needs[338]; which was difficult in Paul's world.

Balancing that equality was the desire by Paul for the new Christ-followers to find *autarkeia*, or self-sufficiency. This was a popular concept in Stoic and Cynic philosophy of the

---

[333] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 580-581.

[334] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 419.

[335] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 585.

[336] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 443.

[337] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 419.

[338] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 589.

time. In an economic sense, it was taken to mean freedom from all external circumstances, including people. It was a product of self-discipline not divine assistance.[339] However that is different in the case of Paul, and by extension Christ-followers. Instead, Christ-followers are to find their dependence on God and contentment in all circumstances. “In striking contrast, Christian contentment, relying on God’s promised provision, leads to doing ‘every good work’ for the sake of others. Among the ancients, the motive for giving was to show one’s moral superiority. For Paul, the motive was to glorify God for his grace.”[340] Instead, Paul leans into the idea and puts it on relationship with other people and Christ. As Gotsis notes, “In 2 Corinthians (9:8), Paul also, whilst soliciting funds for the Jerusalem collection, wishes *autarkeia* for his readers. Given the context, it seems likely that this means material sufficiency.”[341] This invokes the ideas found in his writing in Philippians 4 (see below). Additionally, one finds their ultimate fulfillment in God. Additionally, as one lives out the character of God, they would give to those who don’t have. As such, self-sufficiency, or *autarkeia*, “cannot therefore be dissociated from the precept of benevolence (9:9), from the ordinance of using material goods to the advantage of others.”[342] Ultimately, Christ-followers would always have what they needed; regardless of if it was in abundance or minimal, it would be enough.

Though mentioned briefly in the discussion on Galatians 2, the idea of reciprocity is on full display here in 2 Corinthians. Gift giving in the Greco-Roman culture was always embedded with the idea that gifts would be given in exchange. While these gifts may not be equal, it was

---

[339] Esler, *2 Corinthians,* 26.

[340] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 419.

[341] Gotsis, “Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles”, 20.

[342] Gotsis, “Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles”, 20.

expected that gifts would be reciprocated. "With respect to the Pauline collection, Joubert interprets the Jerusalem church's recognition of Paul's "Law-free gospel" (Galatians 2:1–10) as a benefaction offered to the apostle. Paul and Barnabas, therefore, were obligated to reciprocate this benefaction by fulfilling the charge of the Jerusalem leaders 'to remember the poor.'"[343]

Additionally, one can see the reciprocity in a more literal and tangible way. Paul appeals to their senses and practical understanding of reciprocity. "Instead of issuing a mandate, Paul firmly sets his appeal on the principle of reciprocity (vv 13– 15), based on an OT text."[344] The Gentiles are in debt to Israel (Rom 15:27). Let them honor that obligation by sharing their surplus to match Jewish penury in time of need. In the example of the collection for the Jewish saints, one can see this to be two-fold. First the church would give financial resources because of Jerusalem's investment in their beginnings. "The flows of monies from areas of surplus, to areas of need, will generate returns of grace from the Jerusalem 'saints' to their benefactors, and will be a way for the Gentiles to 'pay' for their inclusion in the Jewish family of Abraham."[345] This is not to be thought of in the context of a "membership fee" or club privileges, but instead it contextualizes the idea of giving (especially to foreigners) in its own world. "Paul alludes to ancient expectations of reciprocal benefits in describing the collection elsewhere. He explains the collection from gentile churches for the Jerusalem church to the Romans, declaring that the gentile churches "were pleased" to share their resources and were obligated to do so (Rom. 15:26– 27), for those who had shared spiritual blessings from Jerusalem owe physical blessings

[343] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 425.

[344] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 438.

[345] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 28.

in return."[346] Paul also taps into the secular idea of charitable service, which can be described in secular terms. "Paul employed this familiar political and legal concept here in its secular, not in its metaphorical, religious sense. Indeed, the collection for the poor in Jerusalem was, in accordance with the secular meaning of the term, a charitable donation by one group of people acting voluntarily on behalf of another."[347]

The second is that giving of their financial resources would result in God giving them even more. As they have been supplied, giving out of that supply invokes the idea that God would continue to provide for them and bless them for their faithfulness. "In return for supplying his needs out of their poverty (cf. 2 Cor. 8:2), he asks God to meet all their needs out of his riches, in accordance with his vast assets, 'on a scale worthy of his wealth.'"[348] However, this does not mean that Paul is simply thinking of spiritual or eternal reward. He implies the immediate physical needs being met. Note that this does not mean wealth or abundance, but instead sufficiency through Christ. Paul putting a spiritual twist on this concept is transversive yet again. The nature of rich and poor is not a Christian idea, but with Christ, they take on a different meaning. "Again, there is nothing specifically Christian about these ideas; all antiquity knew that whether one is rich or poor depends as much on economic realities as on one's perceptions and values."[349] While spiritual rewards exist, there is nothing in the text to indicate that Paul is writing about anything other than material provision. "There is no reason to think

---

[346] James Thompson, and Bruce W. Longenecker *Philippians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 134.

[347] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 117.

[348] Christopher Morgan, and Robert A. Peterson, *The Glory of God and Paul* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022), 184.

[349] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 115.

that Paul has in mind a reward that will be received in the next world. - Paul is thinking materially in the here and now"[350] This provision will continue the cycle of giving to those without. "The central idea of the verse (9:8) is that God provides abundantly to them so that from their sufficiency they may contribute abundantly to every good work."[351] God's love comes in the form of provision to be a blessing to others. Paul himself experienced life both with and without (Philippians 4). Paul's own suffering as a result of being without is an example to show his readers that even so, God provides. "What they can be assured of is that God will sustain his people by meeting their needs in himself, at the same time providing for them circumstantially, for the sake of others, as he deems wise."[352] Furthermore, since God has given so much to them, such as His grace, it is only expected that they give back to him - through the offering to the poor. Paul is quick to let new believers know that wealth is a sign of God's blessing. Material prosperity is a divine gift, a result of God's grace (2 Corinthians 9:10-11), but these gifts are for a purpose - generosity. "Selfish charity is an insult for the recipient, while true generosity relieves the poor (2 Cor. 8:7)."[353] Summarily the divine, or spiritual, and the material are connected to one another. Betz notes, "consequently, wherever the language of wealth and abundance occurs in the text, both the economic and spiritual realities are present, and are a part of the argument."[354]

---

[350] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 261.

[351] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 262.

[352] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 420.

[353] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 26.

[354] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 115-116.

While all of these contribute to a better understanding of Paul's writing to the church at Corinth, not to be missed is Paul's theology that comes through. First, Paul is encouraging giving to the poor. As he wrote in Galatians 2:10, he notes that he is eager to encourage Christ followers to do so. These verses flow out of the overall teaching that Paul is providing about new believers. "Paul asserts to the new converts, for example, that he embodies Jesus's life (2 Cor. 4:10-11) who became poor for man's cause, so that by his poverty you might become rich (8:9)."[355] As a part of their new relationship with Christ, they are to love. The act of giving must be dictated by pure motives, by a genuine inner commitment of the human heart.[356] Giving is a sign or act of righteousness in a new believer. Throughout his writing, Paul uses different words for offering: *logeia* (collection), *eulogia* (blessing), *leitourgia* (offering), *diakonia* (ministry), and *charis* (grace); all equated to sharing. Therefore, Paul sees the act of giving money to those in need as different acts of righteousness. This goes to show that Paul saw this as an act of worship to God with the focus being away from money. Instead, the focus is on doing the will of God and worshiping Him because of one's new relationship with Him. "It is therefore even more surprising that Paul's word choices for describing the collection 'are all derived from the vocabulary of human relationships with God and sacred acts of worship', and none of them make any direct mention of money."[357] As such, it must be viewed that Paul's view of giving is for the benefit of the believer; for their maturity in Christ. "Any application of Paul's thoughts on "giving" must therefore emphasize (and be convinced of) Paul's theological justification for giving. Paul's primary concern is not the "budget," but the fruition of genuine grace in the lives

[355] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 26.

[356] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 26.

[357] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 421.

of believers."[358] The gospel produces heart change. That heart change results in generosity. Paul notes that their wealth was intended for every kind of generosity.

Additionally, Paul appeals to his theological position of unity within the body of Christ. Taking a collection for another congregation, namely a congregation that crosses cultural lines, is a demonstration of love and unity for the Church. While Paul may have been appealing to their sense of reciprocity, he also made sure that the church would give of their own free will. Paul's "purpose was not to subjugate to mother church, but to fulfill promise; to unify body of Christ (gentile - Jewish); show physically their indebtedness to spiritual foundation; win over Jewish believers and their suspicion of gentiles."[359] Martin suggests that Paul's theology goes beyond the idea of unity. He notes that there is an eschatological reason for the offering as well as the idea of redemptive almsgiving.[360]

This reflects Paul's conviction that giving to fellow believers in Jerusalem is an essential part of the ministry of the gospel and a genuine expression of worship. Indeed, the collection is a ministry of the gospel precisely because it brings about worship. Its purpose is praise and prayer among those to whom it is ministered, the two essential elements of magnifying God's character: We praise God for what he has done in the past and pray for what we depend on him to do in the future.[361] "The generosity of the Corinthians produces thanksgivings to God. That God deserves this generosity is manifest in his central role in the whole process as described in 9.6-11."[362]

---

[358] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 420.

[359] Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 553.

[360] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 423.

[361] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 420.

[362] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 266.

In reference to the gospel, Paul notes that giving is a critical part. As he defends himself and his authority in 2 Corinthians, here in chapters 8-9, he notes that righteousness comes through the gospel of Jesus, not some other act. "Paul meets this claim by insisting, to the contrary, that righteousness comes from his version of the Gospel, not from that of his opponents."[363]

Ultimately, a summary of 2 Corinthians 8 and 9 can demonstrate the theological nature of Paul's appeal. He makes clear connection between the practice of giving, the life of a believer, and this life in the context of the body of Christ. Betz provides an excellent outline of chapters eight and nine when he writes,

> This substructure has a number of aspects: (1) the connection between the divine gift of salvation and the human response of self-sacrifice; (2) the connection between the charitable giving expected of Christians and God's beneficence; (3) the common ancient understanding of the nature and function of gifts; (4) the connection of gift-giving with the cult.[364]

The Collection for the Saints "Part III"

The third primary passage on the collection for the saints in Jerusalem is found in Paul's letter to the church at Rome. In Romans 15:25-29 he writes of his plan to take the offering to Jerusalem while observing the generosity of the Macedonian churches. In this passage, Paul is writing of the financial collection specifically for the benefit of the poor. There are some who interpret Paul's actions as a spiritual contribution, but the text teaches otherwise. "Paul gives no hint of such a nuance here; and surely an economic meaning is more likely in a context where he

---

[363] Esler, *2 Corinthians*, 264.

[364] Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9*, 46.

is talking about a financial contribution."[365] Clearly, as the text indicates, Paul is writing about the economically depressed. The "poor in Romans 15 is not 'poor' in a theological sense but economic."[366] There is some indication that the term "poor" referred to the religious adherents in a general sense (Qumran 81 and Ebionite movement). However, Paul's use of "the poor among the saints" seems to make a distinction beyond the generic sense. "Nevertheless, Leander E. Keck has argued on historical and grammatical grounds that "Paul does not designate the recipients as 'the Poor' but thinks of them as saints who are now distressingly poor." This requires the more normal partitive genitive, "the poor among the saints," which implies a continuation of the adverse economic circumstances."[367]

In addressing the collection for the saints in Jerusalem, Dunn argues that Paul has several motivating factors. Some of his reasons are theological and some are motivational, but all are for the purpose of advancing the gospel. "Taking the collection to Jerusalem is (1) of first importance - frequency of mentioning; (2) obligation in salvation-history: payback and mutual interdependence; (3) unity of churches; (4) eschatological theology; (5) stir Jews to jealousy."[368] At its most basic roots, the passage indicates a fulfillment of Paul's agreement before the Jerusalem council (Acts 15 and Galatians 2). "(Jewett 927) this service involved sharing of material resources needed for the common life and sustenance of Christian groups in and around Jerusalem, fulfilling the commitment Paul had made at the time of the Apostolic Conference

[365] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 920.

[366] Richard Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 1044.

[367] Robert Jewett, Roy David Kotansky, and Eldon Jay. *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 929.

[368] Dunn, *Romans 9-16,* 873-874.

(Gal 2:10), which is considerably more concrete than contemporary understandings of the "general service of love" might be."[369]

The text also demonstrates that the preaching of the gospel is primary in Paul's mission, but also providing some degree of social justice in alleviating the plight of the poor is secondary. As stated elsewhere, often Paul is accused of not addressing social status and economics. However, as Richard Longenecker notes, "(He) often demonstrates (1) concern for the economically poor was integral to Paul's gospel proclamation and (2) such thoughts should be of primary concern for Christ followers."[370] Paul sees no disconnect from the preaching of the gospel and the living of the gospel (giving). As "Paul was on his way to Jerusalem in Romans 15:29– 32, about to deliver money to the poor. This passage reminds believers that mission is not just about preaching the word but also about social justice and the alleviation of poverty."[371] Paul shows the Roman church that it is important to share Christ verbally to the lost and simultaneously care for the poor. Paul does not see a distinction between the importance of the two. Nor does Paul give priority of one over the other. He sees them as two sides of the same coin. As Longenecker observes, "the Christian "love ethic" was to be applied to societal situations within the empire (poor)."[372] Though the reference to the "poor" could apply to all believers, the text indicates that he is specifically referring to those without financial resources. "The poverty of (many of) the Jerusalem Christians was also, in economic terms, a consequence

[369] Jewett, *Romans*, 927.

[370] Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1044.

[371] Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to its Background, Theology, and Themes (Volume II: The Pauline Letters)* (Ashland, OH: Lexham Press, 2022), 102.

[372] Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1046.

in large part of the overenthusiastic resourcing of the common fund by means of realizing capital in the earliest days of the new movement is very probable."[373]

Once again the reader finds the first century cultural norms of reciprocation and honor in Paul's words. As referenced earlier, Paul's use of the need for Gentile churches "giving back" to their Jewish foundation is both critical and normal. Paul "explains the collection from gentile churches for the Jerusalem church to the Romans, declaring that the gentile churches 'were pleased' to share their resources and were obligated to do so, for those who had shared spiritual blessings from Jerusalem owe physical blessings in return.[374] Paul argues that spiritual blessings and material blessings are mixed. "The gentiles were obligated to Israel and should respond to the spiritual blessings experienced with material assistance."[375] Paul is showing that the congregations are dependent upon one another. In fact, the Romans were indebted. "The debt was moral, but the obligation had been readily accepted by Paul as part of the very important agreement achieved in Gal 2:9-10."[376] Dunn also observes that the collection was, "an obligation on the part of the gentile churches to those through whom the stream of salvation-history blessings had flowed to them. It was therefore not simply an act of mutual service between fellow Christians, but an attempt to express the continuity of salvation history, and the mutual

---

[373] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 876.

[374] Thompson, *Philippians*, 134.

[375] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 349.

[376] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 876.

interdependence."[377] This a theme that runs throughout the book of Romans. In its continuity, the book explores spiritual blessings repaid with real and tangible acts (Romans 12:1).[378]

Another component of giving in the first century was honor. With regard to honor, when arriving in Jerusalem, the receivers would have taken the offering as well as a roll of those who gave; either by name or group involved.[379] As such, the givers would have received honor for their generosity. Additionally, Paul would have been honored, and his ministry strengthened, for having delivered the collection, which was a sign of honor.[380]

However, Paul may have had additional rationale beyond the reciprocity of the church's origins. Paul may have been writing from an eschatological perspective. In the end times, God will direct resources to return to Israel and as such, Paul was taking resources for that purpose. "Paul may also have intended to express unity in the church between Jew and gentile and to see fulfillment of the eschatological hope that the nations would bring wealth to Zion."[381] One sees Paul's Judaism creeping into this writing as there is no doubt he would have been both aware and supportive of such an idea. As Dunn notes, "Also important would have been the widely held Jewish expectation that the wealth of the nations would flow into Jerusalem in the end times."[382]

Still, a bigger issue and achievement through the collection for the church at Jerusalem is unity within the body of Christ. There must always be a desire to build and preserve the unity of

---

[377] James Dunn, and John W. Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Romans* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2021), 398.

[378] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 876.

[379] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 318.

[380] Blanton, *Paul and Economics*, 318.

[381] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 349.

[382] Dunn, *Romans,* 400.

the body of Christ, even across societal and cultural boundaries. Unity is a mark of genuine love and Christlikeness. "Thus, in the construction of a true and vital Christian biblical theology, there must always be alive and present… a passion for the unity of believers"[383] A means of building and preserving that unity is in giving to others. This unity, as emphasized in Romans 15:26-27, might partly be achieved through Paul's collection for Jerusalem. "The collection for Jerusalem may advance Jewish-gentile Christian unity, as apparently in Rom. 15:26– 27, precisely because of this interest among the leaders in Jerusalem."[384] The hope of Paul was that the body of believers, regardless of Jew or Gentile, would be one. Longenecker comments, "Paul was motivated in his ministry by the desire to see unity within the body of Christ and that was manifested in giving as seen in Romans to Jerusalem – they were building a bridge."[385] As Paul matured in life, a large part of his ministry was unity in the body. Perhaps this comes from more believers from different walks of life becoming a part of the church, but nonetheless it is critical to his teaching. Paul considers practical financial giving as "sacred ministry" and that should not come as a surprise to the reader.[386] As Keener notes, "The collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem was in fact a major concern in this phase of Paul's ministry."[387] Jewett comments, "the ethical assumption lying behind this reference is also plain: both in Judaism and early

[383] Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1051-1052.

[384] Craig Keener, *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2009), 159.

[385] Longenecker, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 1050.

[386] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 876.

[387] Keener, *Romans*, 208.

Christianity, it was the obligation of the righteous to share resources with the poor and thereby to demonstrate solidarity."[388]

Even so, Paul viewed his collection as a ministry. In doing so, Paul referenced the acts of the Gentiles as acts of righteousness toward the Jewish believers. He specifically uses the idea of ministry in his writing. "By speaking of the collection as a 'ministry', Paul points to the fact that it was a means by which Gentile Christians could express in a very practical way their love and concern for their less well- off brothers and sisters."[389] Beyond consideration as ministry, Paul saw this collection as a part of his mission, central to what God called him to do and not as an add on to appease the leaders of the Jerusalem church. "Clearly Paul regarded it as of first importance: he devoted much energy to it."[390] Yet, still it was voluntary. This demonstrated maturity within the believers. "Paul is stressing that the decision to participate in the collection was wholly theirs, freely made."[391] The voluntary approach to the offering created a paradox within the believers at Rome. They were to give voluntarily, but they were to understand, within their context, that it was something that was owed. Dunn notes, "(they) gave voluntary but were morally obligated… it was an act of fellowship."[392] Still, Paul views the offering as mutual beneficial. "Paul presents the Jerusalem offering as neither a quid pro quo in line with the cultural tradition as reflected in Seneca nor an acknowledgment of the superiority of the

---

[388] Jewett, *Romans*, 930.

[389] Moo, *Romans*, 919.

[390] Dunn, *Romans,* 398.

[391] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 875.

[392] Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, 876.

Jerusalem church, but as an expression of mutual indebtedness that binds the ethnic branches of the church together."[393]

In the Romans passage, Paul also uses the collection as a means of promoting spiritual growth and maturity. Historically, other issues divided Christians (circumcision in Acts 15 and Galatians 2) but giving to the poor was a unifying issue amongst believers. Earlier in Romans, Paul addresses food and calendar dates as issues of division, but in this passage the reader finds a unifying act – giving to the poor. "Whereas food laws and sacred days were a matter which divided Christians, the responsibility to care for the poor Paul saw as a strongly consistent and still binding obligation of biblical revelation, essential for communal harmony and for the unified identity of the scattered congregations."[394] In the pursuit of unity, sharing was a common idea. From the first church in Acts 2 to Paul's writing here in Romans, *koinonia* was a critical mark of spiritual development. He had a desire for the church in Rome to demonstrate that type of relationship with one another. Paul "wanted his converts to regard their resources as held in common with and for other Christians, or that he saw such financial sharing as the expression of their common life in Christ."[395] Additionally, one finds gratitude and worship as marks of maturing believers. In that vein, again, Paul finds those marks of righteousness in the giving of the offering to the poor. Paul clearly considers the blessings of God coming as a result of acts of righteousness. In that sense, he encourages giving to fulfill maturity. "There is a sense in which the spiritual blessings of the new age belong especially to the Jewish Christians; and Gentile Christians should acknowledge and give thanks for their "sharing" of these blessings with them.

[393] Jewett, *Romans*, 930.

[394] Dunn, *Romans*, 399.

[395] Moo, *Romans*, 875.

And it is by "serving" the Jewish Christians with "material things" that the Gentiles can express their sense of indebtedness and thanksgiving."[396] In summary, this effort by Paul "was more than a charitable enterprise; it was a strategic theological/practical enterprise as well."[397]

The Shared Meal

Another expression of Paul addressing economic issues is found in his admonition on the Lord's supper in 1 Corinthians 11. There is no shortage of scholarship on the divisions within the Corinth church surrounding the Lord's supper. Yet in short, the division all comes down to economics. Paul's purpose for providing correction around the shared meal is due to the different economic status of the different members of the church. "In 11:17– 34 Paul responded to a report of divisions among the Corinthians in their observance of the Lord's Supper that ran along socio-economic lines."[398] This once again provides Paul an opportunity to speak into economic issues. In Acts 2, the early church met together (daily) for the purposes of sharing life together, providing a model for other groups to follow. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul is providing correction to the church regarding their behavior at the Lord's supper and the misbehavior is rooted in economics. In short, their behavior is disrespect to the body of believers and to Christ. "The Corinthians destroy its character by their conduct."[399] As a summary, the passage deals with divisions (11:18-19), inappropriate actions (11:20-21), status (11:22), instruction (11:24-26), judgment (11:27-32), and admonition (11:33-34). In general, Paul's first letter to Corinth

[396] Moo, *Romans*, 921.

[397] Moo, *Romans,* 922.

[398] Mark Edward Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, Vol. 28 (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2014), 52.

[399] Hans Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016), 194.

was corrective in nature bringing correction where Paul deemed necessary, and the Lord's supper was no different. Regardless of whether the "shared meal" was a full meal agape feast (found in the church of Jerusalem) or a sacramental practice separate from the meal, the Corinthians were creating disunity.[400] However, the language is somewhat indicative that it was an organized church function and it was not a group of friends having a meal together.[401] It was done daily. Yet Paul noted that the church was not following the Lord's instructions. Instead, they were gathering to satisfy their hunger, not worship. They were eating ahead of others or excluding them. Paul encourages them to resolve their divisions and celebrate Jesus appropriately.

It is worth noting that when Paul writes that he can believe what he has heard is happening (11:18), it shows his familiarity with the people and church at Corinth. In writing about the divisions (11:18), Paul is directly addressing the factions (11:19) created along socio-economic lines. The theme of division comes from 1 Corinthians 1:10-17 where Paul introduces the idea. In that section, the context is clear that he is writing about division among believers. In the context of 1 Corinthians 11, those divisions are narrowed more to fall along status. Suggestively, Paul's disgust with the divisions along these lines shows his affinity for taking care of the poor. Much like in 11:2-16, the verses 11:17-34 continue the overall admonition on issues of honor and shame. In these verses, the issue is the behavior that brings shame on the poor.[402] The reason that this became an issue was to the idea of kinship. In the Pauline community, there was a fictitious family. This closely knit living group demonstrated collective living familiar with the Mediterranean world. "Since the Pauline communities adopted the form of fictive kin

[400] Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 196.

[401] Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000), 856.

[402] Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 52-53.

groups, the shame and honor of these groups within the larger community became an important issue. This demanded economic self-sufficiency, but also that the group behave in a way that would not result in shame in relation to outsiders, a theme to which Paul returns frequently."[403]

The letter indicates that there are some who are eating ahead of the others and eating to satisfy their hunger. Paul finds the disunity within the body is driven by the disparity between the classes. Paul is essentially addressing the "disruptive and divisive nature of their meetings for what amounts to a meal in the house of a wealthy patron does more harm than good."[404] This clearly falls along economic lines. The rich were eating first and to their heart's content. They were served first and left the remains for those who were poor. Perhaps they were eating because they did not have to work and so they were there. Latecomers who had to finish work would be seated separately in the adjacent area and they did not have the opportunity to share with the rest. This would have been normal behavior for the culture of the day. "Most commentaries since 1980s contribute the splits and dissensions to economic issues - the space of a large Roman villa (size limitations) and cultural customs relating to separation of classes (status)"[405]... especially relating to quality/types of food House churches adopted many of the typical customs of the local trade associations and groups. However, those who were wealthy or not working saw nothing wrong with their behavior as it was customary. "No doubt there were affluent Christians in the church at Corinth who took it for granted that such differentiations were part of the nature of things."[406] Paul recognized that the issue of the Corinthians love feast was due to stoical

---

403 Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 21.

404 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 856.

405 Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 860.

406 Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 254.

stratification. There was a "problem at the Lord's Supper: to patronage relations, implicit in the agape-feast which allowed food distribution according to one's place in the social strata – the best for the rich, the worst for the poor (1 Cor. 11:33-34)."[407] Perhaps they were just living in the cultural norms of the pagan parties and celebrations with selfish indulgence and reverting back to pre-Christ behavior. Regardless, their behavior bothered Paul. The presumption of the wealthy created the impetus for Paul's corrective writing. "The Corinthian correspondence informs us that the Christian community there was divided by existing social inequities of power, property and wealth (1 Cor. 11:21), thus having to face the problem of conspicuous consumption of the wealthy members (11:22)."[408]

It is important to note that Paul was not suggesting that families should not eat. He was speaking in the context of the love feast Lord's supper. Paul was writing to address divisions at a meal when unity was a primary function. The Lord's supper love feast was occasion to bring the people of God together for a common purpose – worship through remembering what Christ had done. In this vein, what was happening was a violation of the intent. "Paul doesn't object to the well-to-do enjoying a reasonable quantity or quality of food in the privacy of their own families (11:22a). But in this church setting, their satiating themselves at the expense of the "have-nots" proves singularly inappropriate (11:22b)."[409] Instead, Paul is suggesting that they should come together in unity and love. The shared meal is not just a meal, but an act of worship that is minimized due to the conflict. The Lord's Supper is not merely a meal to be eaten, but a

---

[407] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 27.

[408] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 27.

[409] Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 254.

celebratory event, and its character is destroyed when not shared.[410] That they should wait for one another, or they welcome one another is not a distinction or admonition that Paul gives. That is not the main teaching of Paul's correction. Instead, Paul is teaching that they should be participating in the meal together with the unity of Christ. "'Wait for' (11:33) might also be translated 'welcome'. The main point of the public Christian meal is to share with one another rather than to satisfy one's own needs."[411] Instead he simply asks for unity in love which is without discrimination. "Their factious behavior, which discriminated against the poor, was the very opposite of the essence of the meaning of the meal, the very antithesis of love for one another. Such behavior shows contempt for the church of God (11:22)."[412] This invokes the imagery of the first church and their generosity toward one another.

Some believe the divisions to be eschatological. The divisions are between true believers and "false" believers. Yet the text indicates that the issue has been raised by the poor and addressed by Paul. Yet "it seems most probable that the phrase expresses an excuse or pretext made by householders in Corinth for the way in which the Lord's Supper was conducted, for it is likely that complaints had been made by the poor about the outrageous effects described in vv. 20– 22 and corroborated in v. 33."[413]

---

[410] Thiselton, *The Epistle to the First Corinthians*, 862.

[411] Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 260.

[412] Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 53.

[413] Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, 54.

Taking Care of Widows

The next passage to examine again echoes the practices of the early church: taking care of the widows. The first church established the role of deacons to take care of the widows (Acts 6). Here, in 1 Timothy 5, Paul is writing to a young pastor Timothy expressing further instruction on that practice. With specific consideration toward the text, this passage can be divided into two sections: part one is the taking care of widows and part two is the expected behavior of the widows, yet the passage remains as one unified text.[414] There is some scholarly debate about the group of whom Paul is writing. Some argue that there is already an existent order of widows (organized, structured, with specific duties). A differing view is that the text provides a description for those who qualify for benefits describing desirable character traits and behaviors. Mounce argues that the structure of the text suggests the latter.[415] In this context, Paul is overtly addressing the different economic classes within the congregation. With the existence of different classes, there is conflict that should be addressed. "We are dealing with a section which intersperses a general teaching about duties with instructions for specific classes within the congregation. Formal discrepancies result from such a procedure."[416] As such, Paul is clearly writing to those who have financial need. "The subject of this section is not the influential and rich (except possibly in v 16) but the poor and unsupported."[417]

---

[414] Martin Dibelius, and Hans Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles; a Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972), 73.

[415] Williams D. Mounce, Glenn W. Barker, David A. Hubbard, and Bruce M. Metzger, *Pastoral Epistles*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), 274.

[416] Dibelius, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 73.

[417] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 275.

Overall, Paul is writing to encourage him and to help establish behaviors for the church. In this text, Paul addresses the role of the family (5:4,8) and the qualifications for those who should receive assistance (5:5-6, 8-16). Paul not only supports the acts of the early church, but he also further establishes criteria for the church to follow. Yet, in all of this, Paul again deals with unity within the body. "The unity of belief and action is presupposed."[418] In doing so, Paul is concerned with the spiritual maturity of his readers. Paul demonstrates the dire consequences for those who do not demonstrate a vital relationship with Christ as expressed in taking care of one's family financially. "Paul expresses the terrible implications of not caring for one's own: It amounts to a denial of Christianity and an action and attitude worse than that of an unbeliever."[419] Knight continues, "Paul marks not caring for those in need (widows) as sin and a demonstration of denying the faith (apostasy)."[420] In referencing back to those "without reproach" (verse 7), Mounce notes, "those who do not care for their extended families, especially their immediate families, have denied their Christianity and do not even measure up to the socially accepted norms of familial responsibility."[421]

One of the first things to notice about this passage is that it is unique to the Judeo-Christian ethic. There was not anything in the history of the Greco-Roman world to help take care of widows. "One of the most important things to be said about this discussion is that it is not an adaptation of conventional Greco-Roman advice, and it only partially echoes Jewish wisdom

---

418 Dibelius, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 74.

419 George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992), 220.

420 Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 221.

421 Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 284.

on the subject."[422] Perhaps the only thing in common between the widows in both cultures was that they were destitute and without in both worlds. However, practice within Judaism provided a more robust system of taking care of widows. This is not a surprise as the character of God is revealed through His Law. God always cares about those in the margins of society and specifically, the poor. Additionally, the character of God is to be reflected in the Church and thus the church is tasked with caring for the poor. Yet God also provides avenues and ways in which they can be taken care of as seen through the deacons taking care of the widows.

Paul starts the text in 1 Timothy 5 with giving honor to widows. It is worth noting that while Paul is writing specifically to Timothy using the second person imperative *timaō,* (honor), the implication of the text is that it extends to the church as a whole. Women were marginalized in the first century. Women without husbands even more so. Therefore, Paul suggesting that the church gives honor to widows was counter-cultural. In doing so, Paul gives the transversive idea that woman have value and extends the challenging thought that women without means also (and still) have value. "Paul began his discussion by urging the church to give proper recognition (honor) to … widows. This refers to financial or material support and care."[423] As a means of showing his clear connection to economics, Paul uses the same terms when discussing the paying of pastors in 1 Timothy 5:17.

Paul then moves into the criteria for those who should receive charity. No one under sixty years old (5:9) should be eligible as they can remarry and be provided for. He suggests their life lived be something of consideration as they must have been good parents or taken other children

---

[422] Ben Witherington III, and Cindy Kiple, *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: Volume 1, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy, and 1-3 John* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 265.

[423] Max Anders, Knute Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary - 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 215.

in (5:10). Younger widows should remarry and build their families (5:14). In this text, perhaps one of the biggest admonitions is that one's family has the primary responsibility of taking care of the widows, not the church. It is the church's responsibility to teach the family if they are not taking care of their widows. The second admonition is a different church responsibility. That is to take care of the qualifying widows if they are godly and destitute. Only women who are growing in their relationship with God should be taken care of by the church. The church should not be expected to provide for everyone. This is not the church's responsibility. Instead, the church should be discerning and help those who are growing in their relationship with God. "The limited resources of the church should be extended only to those who reflect the church's mission and spiritual communion with God."[424]

It is interesting to note that the church is under no obligation if their family is available to help. Paul addresses the familial responsibility to take care of their own. He even goes so far as to suggest the primacy of the family's role. Paul opens the discussion (verse 4) and ends the discussion (verse 16) on this note. He mentions the familial role three times in this passage. "The duty to which children are called with reference to widows involves material provision, so that the church will not have to provide such aid."[425] This invokes the cultural idea of kinship and living in collectivism. The family has the primary role in taking care of one another. In fact, this idea actually hearkens back to the teaching of Jesus in the gospels. When Jesus speaks of honoring one's parents, the implication is taking care of the financially (Matthew 15:5-6).[426] Additionally it goes back further to the Mosaic Law, and specifically the fifth commandment: to

[424] Anders, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 216.

[425] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 216.

[426] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 216.

honor one's mother and father.[427] This is another outcome of one's spiritual growth. "Paul understood that those who gave proper care to their family had put their religion into practice, and this is pleasing to God. This is the practicality of faith, the essence of belief, for God tells us to honor our parents (Deut. 5:16; Eph. 6:1– 2)."[428] The independence of the West often destroys this idea. Now for those who have no family, the family relationship in the Pauline community becomes one's family. As such, one might view the church as a family taking care of the widows. However, the church is not to be the first option. "The church should not weaken this God given duty by assuming the care of everyone."[429] This does not, however, lessen the church's understanding of its role in helping widows. In fact, the idea of taking care of widows goes back to the acts of the church at Jerusalem. Knight notes, "the church already understood its role in this through the early church (Acts 6)."[430] A summary statement of Paul's teaching is that the church would take care of qualifying widows if their families do not,[431] but should take care of those who cannot take care of themselves.[432]

Additionally, taking care of widows, as Paul writes, should not be driven by financial need. As Anders notes, "Need alone is not sufficient reason for financial support. For the sake of the church's reputation, the church should give financial backing only to those who exhibit true need along with spiritual maturity and service."[433] Overall, in this passage, Paul notes that

---

[427] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 279.

[428] Anders, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 216.

[429] Anders, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 219.

[430] Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 216.

[431] Knight, The Pastoral Epistles, 230.

[432] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 277.

[433] Anders, 1 and 2 Timothy, 216.

financial behavior should be influenced by one' spiritual maturity and growth. "The passage shows how community duties are increasingly felt to be specifically Christian."[434]

Contentment

The next extended passage of Paul on economic matters is Philippians 4:10-19. Paul wrote the letter to the church at Philippi in prison. The text here is somewhat of a postscript to his letter. In 4:8 he states, "Finally…" Paul then picks up another train of thought in 4:10-19. Summarily, Paul is writing about being content in all things and Paul is addressing the church's concern for him. In this particular text, one can see the full range of Paul's ability to connect with this audience. The language of this section (4:10-20) is at once "priestly", liturgical, commercial, and personal, showing Paul's versatility in his command of speech."[435] Eventually Paul's conclusion is that contentment (*autarkeia*) is the antidote for being in need. Paul argues that being rich meant that one was content. "True wealth in this perspective was held as a means to maintain humanity in a contented way of life, in terms of the self-sufficiency ideal."[436] In doing so, Paul goes through a series of comparisons, all of which he is familiar with – brought low and abound (4:12), plenty and hunger (4:12), and abundance and need (4:12). On the heels of these comparative concepts, Paul writes of the partnership with the church in his affliction (4:14) and yet he maintains his gratitude (4:16-18). He concludes with the promise of God's provision to them for God's glory (4:19-20). While one may find Philippians 4:13 as one of the most misinterpreted and misapplied verses in scripture, one must be careful in examining this entire

[434] Dibelius, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 74.

[435] Gerald Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Glenn W. Barker, *Philippians*, (Nashville: Nelson, 2004), 277.

[436] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas and Pauline Epistles", 27.

passage through the right lens. There is much to consider when one looks at the passage depending on their culture and economic status. "The text will be read in a different way by those who study the Scripture in a world of poverty and economic distress."[437]

Though the Philippian church would have been familiar with Paul's ministry and life, he goes to great lengths to set the table in writing about his condition. In prison, Paul still exudes joy, not because of his physical circumstances but because of his spiritual standing. As Paul works through his list of haves and have-nots, he concludes that he can find contentment in all of it. This contentment (*autarkeia*) is not economic in nature, but divine. It is through Christ that he can do these states (4:13). This is where the deviation from Stoic philosophy of detachment becomes evident. *Autarkeia* was the goal of human existence.[438] Paul's use of *autarkeia* is borrowed from Stoic and secular thought as this is the only place in the New Testament where the phrase appears. *Autarkeia* "referred to that independent spirit and free outlook on life that characterized the wise man. It expressed the doctrine 'that man should be sufficient unto himself for all things, and able, by the power of his own will, to resist the force of circumstances'"[439][440] However, Paul's self-sufficiency (a Stoic pursuit) was not self-achieved at all. It was only through Christ. In fact, as Hawthorne notes, the difference between the self-sufficient Christians and the self-sufficient stoic is great.[441]

---

[437] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 277.

[438] Thompson, *Philippians*, 135.

[439] Hawthorne, *Philippians,* 264.

[440] *Cynic Epistles*, 124.25; Diogenes, *To the So-Called Greeks* 176.12; Diogenes, *To Plato, the Sage* 244.4

[441] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 264.

He was able to achieve this non-dependence because of his total dependence. "The self-sufficiency of the Christian is relative: an independence of the world through dependence upon God."[442] This Christ-sufficiency has come through years of practice and circumstances. "Paul's self-sufficiency has been acquired not through practice but by religious insight, and it is sustained by the inner strengthening that the spirit of Christ provides: "I have the strength to deal with all things in him who empowers me" (cf. 1:19)."[443] It was his spiritual maturity that led to his contentment.[444] He learned from all his varying conditions and stages of life. "He does not mean to say that he automatically knew the secret of a contented life; rather he makes clear that he came to know this secret through difficult process that could be described as an initiation."[445] The circumstances which Paul experienced covers the spectrum to economic conditions. "Paul's description of his own *autarkeia*, in fullness and hunger, in abundance and want, carries Stoic overtones of detachment from the vagaries of his circumstances and fortunes. On the other hand, this self-sufficiency is not due to his own efforts, but to God who gives him strength (4:13)."[446] In this singular verse (4:13) Paul both affirms his contentment and his source, regardless of modern misapplication. "Paul now both reaffirms his self-sufficiency and qualifies it in these famous words, often misunderstood as a type of triumphalism."[447] Fee states that the Stoic self-sufficiency is radically transformed into Christ-sufficiency.[448] As such, Paul embraced a life that

---

[442] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 264.

[443] Paul Holloway, *Philippians: A Commentary,* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017), 187.

[444] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 263.

[445] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 265.

[446] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 20.

[447] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 266.

[448] Gordon Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1995), 271.

was similar to the life of Jesus; often seen in his hardship lists. Furthermore, Paul was putting forth the idea that sufficiency or contentment in Christ leads to generosity. He indicates that once a believer is content, they can then give to others – without resentment or need.

The leads to Paul's writing to the Philippians (4:14-20) that seems to echo that which he wrote to Corinth (2 Corinthians 8:1-5). In writing to the church at Corinth, he mentions the generosity of the churches in Macedonia and the church of Philippi would have been one of those that was generous as they partnered with him (4:15). While the language is applicable in this giver-receiver relationship, many view the transactional language as metaphorical. Nonetheless it does bring to light Paul's knowledge and use of economic terms. "This has long been recognized as a metaphorical use of "commercial" language, traditionally interpreted as indicating Paul's stance toward their gift(s)."[449] In recognizing their earlier gifts, Paul refers to them as having a "partnership" (*koinoneo*) in giving and receiving money to him and for him. This partnership or friendship is within the Greco-Roman framework based on mutuality and reciprocity, though it is stretched as Paul has nothing with which to reciprocate the gifts.[450] Conceptually, friendship was created through the giving and receiving relationship. Since the Philippians had a long history of giving to Paul for his giving (ministry) to them, they had become friends. The friendship is marked by the fact that ""giving and receiving" is the first mark of friendship in the Greco-Roman world; that they had had a long history of "giving" to him (as vv. 15– 16 make clear)."[451] It is worth noting that financial means was not the only way in which giving and receiving could take place. "Although these terms (giving and receiving)

---

[449] Fee, *Philippians*, 279.

[450] Fee, *Philippians*, 270.

[451] Fee, *Philippians*, 271.

refer to literal financial transactions, they were also commonly used with the extended meaning of the relationship between friends: "giving and receiving"—the mutual exchange of gifts and services— was regarded as essential."[452] Paul viewed their partnership and friendship as that which allowed them to have things in common.[453] Holloway comments on the paradoxical relationship between these two. "Paul writes to console and thus as a friend; he writes to thank the Philippians for their financial support and thus as a partner; and he writes as a Christ-mystic anxious to restore their sense of camaraderie with Christ and with each other."[454]

Paul saw their friendship and partnership (financial) as being a key to the advancement of the gospel. However, Paul clarifies that he did not seek the gift (4:17). In fact, one can see the struggle of Paul's own thinking in this matter. He has always been independent financially as much as possible, but is appreciative, nonetheless. "Paul's solution to this problem is ingenious if not altogether successful: Paul himself did not need the gift, but it was pleasing to God and will add to the Philippians' 'account.'"[455] Additionally is the tension between Paul's teaching and demonstration of his own contentment (*autarkeia*). "Paul insists that what he has just said is not due to a sense of "lack", for he has learned to be indifferent to his situation (*autarkeia*, "self-sufficient") whatever it might be (cf. 1:10)."[456]

Paul's primary purpose was the growth and spiritual development of the church. "This suggests that he had no desire to enter into the reciprocity that defined ancient friendship. His

---

[452] Thompson, *Philippians*, 134.

[453] Holloway, *Philippians*, 187.

[454] Holloway, *Philippians*, 188.

[455] Holloway, *Philippians,* 186.

[456] Holloway, *Philippians*, 186.

concern was not the establishment of the reciprocity between friends, but the well-being of the Philippian church."[457] Yet, ultimately, Paul recognizes their act of giving as an offering of worship. Therefore, Paul does not lead into the convention of reciprocity, status, and honor for their gifts. Instead, he references the spiritual reward for giving. This is different from his encouragement to the Corinthians in which he implied that God would honor them materially. In this instance the reward or pay back was spiritual. In Christ, Paul's relationship with the Philippians has been settled or made even in its own divine way. "This is why the climax is expressed in terms of their gift being a "fragrant and pleasing offering to God," who in turn promises to pick up Paul's end of the reciprocity, all of which outbursts in praise of God's glory, the very glory that God has already abundantly lavished upon them both in Christ Jesus."[458] This gift comes with a reciprocal fulfillment from God. Paul notes that God would meet all their needs (4:19) as they are faithful to give. "So in return for supplying his needs out of their poverty, he asks God to meet all their needs out of his riches, in accordance with his vast assets "on a scale worthy of his wealth" (Phil 4:19)."[459] What Paul desires is for them to experience "an ever-increasing balance in their spiritual account" (divine reciprocation), and a present "reciprocation" is promised in v. 19, now in terms of God supplying their various needs (including material ones)."[460]

Some seem to argue that Paul's lack of "thank you" to the church for their gifts can be categorized as insensitive, a lack of gratitude, or arrogant. The delayed expression of gratitude is

---

[457] Thompson, *Philippians*, 135.

[458] Fee, *Philippians*, 271.

[459] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 277.

[460] Fee, *Philippians*, 277.

considered by some to create doubt as to Pauline authorship. However, Paul's delay is more likely to be a reflection of his desire to not depend on gifts.[461] Additionally, a better understanding of cultural norms helps to alleviate this concern. It was not unusual for gratitude to be delayed. "The recipient frequently responded with an expression of endearment but did not normally give a verbal expression of thanks. Thus, to assume that the thank-you note should come at the beginning of the letter is to superimpose modern conventions on the ancient text."[462] Additionally, often the primary objective of the message of gratitude was to acknowledge receipt of the gift. "The principal purpose of such an acknowledgment was not to express the recipient's gratitude—although that too was expected—but to assure the sender that the goods indicated had been delivered."[463]

Still Paul expresses his gratitude for the gift and the givers. As Thompson notes, "The giver should not give only in order to receive something in return, but the recipient was nevertheless obligated to express gratitude by reciprocating a gift of equal or greater value than the gift that was received (Aristotle, *Ethics Nicomachaen* 8.14.1; 9.1.8– 9; 9.7.1)."[464] However, Paul never mentions a reciprocating gift beyond the divine. Paul's focus is on God making things "even" for the church. "With his attempts to define the nature of the gift, he ensures that the Philippians do not understand their relationship according to Greco-Roman expectations. He does not mention the obligation of reciprocity. All mention of repayment is omitted."[465] In his

---

[461] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 259.

[462] Thompson, *Philippians,* 132.

[463] Holloway, *Philippians*, 186.

[464] Thompson, *Philippians*, 134-135.

[465] Thompson, *Philippians*, 135.

thank you, Paul is most honored by the spiritual maturity of the Philippians. He acknowledges their gift as a reflection of their growth in Christ. "Paul says thanks not because he needed the gift, but he's happy for their maturity and Christian growth… he saw in this act of generosity a truly Christian deed of sacrificial self-giving love."[466]

In all this Paul develops a counter-intuitive formula for peace regardless of one's economic condition. Paul's conclusion is that one can experience contentment through Christ-sufficiency in their lives. "The secret of Paul's independence was his dependence upon Christ. His self-sufficiency came from being in vital union with the One who is all-sufficient."[467] Additionally, for the Philippians, there is a new admonition. There exists a new equation in a Christ-follower's life. One can find the "thoroughly Christian equation of 'affliction + poverty = abounding in generosity.'"[468] This generosity, as an expression of worship, for the furtherance of the gospel is life changing for the giver and the receiver. Though grateful for their gifts, Paul is not consumed with their generosity. Instead, Paul is most concerned with their spiritual maturity. "Thus, he concludes that money— material support of his own needs— is ultimately irrelevant; what counts is what God is doing in their lives. Their gift serves as evidence of "fruitfulness" that will only gain interest toward their eschatological reward."[469]

---

[466] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 263.

[467] Hawthorne, *Philippians*, 266.

[468] Fee, *Philippians*, 271.

[469] Fee, *Philippians*, 282.

Other Writings

While the previously addressed six texts deal with Paul's economic perspective at length, the following passages deal with economics in some form or fashion that influenced Paul, his theology, and his writing.

Acts

Acts 18:1-4 This passage establishes Paul as a tentmaker. As such he stayed with Aquila because they had the same profession. This shows gift giving in-kind; and offering beyond money. It also showed that Paul worked to support himself. It is unlikely that he was a full-time tentmaker since his frequent travels would make it difficult to establish working relationships and would limit his ability to transport the necessary tools. Nonetheless, Paul worked to alleviate his need for charity.

Acts 20:17-38 This text is preparing the Ephesian leaders for his departure. Near the end of his monologue (vv. 33ff), Paul notes that he did not long for silver, gold, or apparel. He used his own hands to meet his needs, demonstrating work hard and providing an example for others to follow. He then challenges them to meet the needs of the weak (poor). He then quotes Jesus (extra-biblically) by saying "it is better to give than receive," and thus enforcing the idea of Jesus prioritizing giving.

Acts 28:2,7,10 However, it is important to note that Paul was not without occasion to receive. On the island of Malta after being shipwrecked, Paul received charity. He took in "unusual kindness" (28:2) meaning benevolence. Publius received Paul with hospitality or philanthropy (28:7). Finally, Paul felt greatly honored or prized upon his departure (28:10).

Romans

Romans 12:13 Paul's writing in Romans 1-11 is a theological treatise for one's position in Christ. While Romans 12-16 is the practical living out of that righteousness. It is worth noting that Paul mentions contributing to the needs of the saints almost immediately as a mark of a true Christ follower; after loving one another, serving the Lord, and enduring hardship through prayer. The next thing is to be generous and giving toward others.

1 Corinthians

1 Corinthians 3:8-9 Paul is using economic terms metaphorically to explain the return on investment that one makes when they are generous. In doing so, Paul makes the believer a partner with God and His activity. Gotsis notes, "Almsgiving cannot be considered a matter of human choice, but a primary human obligation. It is the believer who is charged with the primary task of overcoming economic necessity."[470] Paul is demonstrating that people are the vehicles of God's generosity.

1 Corinthians 4:8-14 Again, one can see Paul's use of economic ideas as a metaphor. The Corinthians are rich in Christ. Verse 8 highlights that they already have what they want (needs), they are rich (resources in Christ), and they are kings (position in Christ). Later in the text, Paul spells out his physical conditions (hungry, thirsty, poorly dressed, homeless, and laborers). This sets the stage for admonishment to take care of their ministers. All of this, however, is Paul's sarcasm and irony on the Corinthians self-appraisal. Obviously considering the conditions of the first century, the majority were not wealthy.[471]

---

[470] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 26.

[471] Blomberg, *1 Corinthians*, 101.

1 Corinthians 9:3-18 Paul argues that he could (should) be getting paid for the work he is doing, but he does not to avoid being an obstacle or hindrance to those he is trying to reach with the gospel. Paul refused to accept monetary support for himself. He did, however, seek funds for other ministry works and mission efforts, specifically the Jerusalem church.

1 Corinthians 13:3 Paul uses poverty ("give away all I have") as a metaphor for lack of concern with worldly goods. Yet it is worth noting in this chapter on love, he never attacks property and wealth directly, nor the structures which might cause poverty to occur.

1 Corinthians 15: 58 In his major work on the resurrection, Paul uses the language of labor and its fruits. Paul makes the connection between a new life in Christ (through the resurrection) and the good works that one can labor toward. "The economic model introduced by Paul rests on the eschatological conviction of the new life through resurrection, because only this kind of experience provides a pledge that human labor will not be in vain and renders the believers able to excel in good works (1 Cor. 15:58), thus shaping a new economy of hope and mercy."[472]

1 Corinthians 16:1-4 This is Paul's introduction to the collection for the saints in Jerusalem (see 2 Corinthians 8-9 and Romans 15). Paul encourages them to contribute. He also provides a systematic approach: first of the week, put aside, store it, and within one's means. In this text, Paul is advocating for proportionate giving which is somewhat different than the proto-Christianity thinking of the day. "Paul, in fact, urges the Corinthian believers to contribute to the Jerusalem collection, by saving up a proportion of money proportionate to the level of their income. He also proposes a way of administering these holdings which secures proper financial

[472] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 25.

accountability"[473] Much of Paul's philosophy on personal giving can be seen in this passage. It is important to understand that Paul is not against wealth. He is, instead, in favor of giving. Paul understands that giving does not take place in the absence of resources to do so. "The collection for supporting the Jerusalem church reveals that benevolence and charity cannot happen without an existing amount of money funds."[474]

2 Corinthians

2 Corinthians 6:3-10 Throughout this text, Paul uses contrast and comparison between the physical and spiritual. He uses circumstances of lowliness and abundance. Paul reaches a pinnacle as he contrasts being poor but making others rich and having nothing but possessing everything. Paul is showing the relationship between one's physical state and spiritual wealth. In doing so, he shows that the spiritual is of far greater value. Paul makes sure that they understand their physical works are connected to their spiritual condition. Paul notes that their acts of righteousness are rewarded (reciprocity) by spiritual means. "It is this pattern of true piety, so familiar in Graeco-Roman culture, that is promoted here in terms of sincerity of faith and good conscience."[475]

2 Corinthians 12:14-18 Paul shares his desire to come to them, but he wants them to be assured that he cannot and will not be a burden (financial) to them. Using the familial illustration of parents and children, he shows that it is the parents who take care of the children, not vise-versa. He assures them that he has never been a burden to them or taken advantage of them.

[473] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 25.

[474] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 28.

[475] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas in Pauline Epistles", 27.

Galatians

Galatians 6:2-10 Within the context of bearing one another's burdens, Paul is explaining to the church at Galatia about the importance of Christ followers taking care of each other. Paul also stresses the importance of sharing good things (material) with the one who teaches (6:6). This echoes other places where Paul writes of paying teachers. Ultimately, Paul concludes that they should do good to everyone, especially those in the church, without growing tired of doing so. This is the same *agathos* (good) as in verse 6. Therefore, one can conclude that Paul is writing about doing material "good" to those in the church and that doing "good" is in a material sense. By doing good to one another, they would be fulfilling the teaching of Jesus and acting toward one another in love. "In Galatians 6, Paul urges them to "bear one another's burdens" and fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:1), and to sow to please the Spirit and do good to everyone without wearying."[476]

Ephesians

Ephesians 4:28 In this text, Paul emphasizes the importance of work. Paul was a tentmaker himself and, more than not, refused charity for himself. Instead, he worked to provide a model for others to follow. Clearly there must have been some in this congregation who were not (though able) working and as a result, they were stealing. Paul was encouraging the believers to "walk in a manner worthy of the calling" (4:1). As such, working brought testimony to God and allowed them to help others in need. Pauline tradition notes that Christians should not

[476] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 347.

neglect the primary matter of care for the poor and needy. Paul uses work and financial gain as a way to be able to take care of the poor. "Instead of stealing and looking out for what one can have and take, one is to labor so as to be able to give and share with those who have need."[477] Paul establishes a theology of work. While the ten commandments establish a law against stealing, Paul adds to the principle and admonishes them to work and give to others. While stealing was not pervasive, this is still a transversive notion that Paul challenges the traditional norms. As Bock notes, "the exhortation is a call to go from thief to philanthropist."[478] It is also important for today's interpreter to understand that stealing is not the theft one thinks of today. Instead, the thievery that Paul is referencing is probably not stealing bread, but instead overcharging for services or interest or convincing someone to get something they don't need.[479] In persuading them to change their mindset, he sets forth the ethic of work instead of stealing. Paul encourages believers that "work is the antidote to stealing."[480] Ephesus, due to its position as a trade hub and location of the temple of Diana, had the benefit of being a place where employment could generate income; thus, Paul's admonition had great impact in Ephesus. It is interesting to note, in this text on work, that Paul gives honor to work and more specifically, manual labor. For the laborer this was a championing statement. For the wealthy, this was a new thought that was against the grain. This was counterculture for his time.[481] As Paul exhorts believers to work, he concludes the reason for doing so is to give it away to the poor. "Paul

[477] Darrell L. Bock, *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 10 (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019), 142.

[478] Bock, *Ephesians,* 143.

[479] Lynn H. Cohick, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2020), 264.

[480] Cohick, *Ephesians*, 265.

[481] Cohick, *Ephesians*, 265.

offers a reason for his command to toil, namely, so as to have resources to share with those in need."[482]

Philippians

Philippians 2:6-8 In this text, Paul is writing about Christ and his descension from heaven to earth. He uses familiar economic terms and statuses. Paul notes that Christ impoverished himself, so that everything was taken away from him. This Pauline presentation of the ministry of Christ in terms of 'riches' and 'poverty' constitutes a symbolic metaphor, unique in New Testament thought.

Colossians

Colossians 3:5ff. Here Paul is laying the foundation for the contrast between a person's life before Christ with life in Christ. Before Christ, there is a series of behaviors that is reflective of an absence of Christ. In that list, Paul mentions "greedy." The idea that Paul is communicating is the opposite of generous. Therefore, the conclusion can be drawn that without Christ one is self-centered, but with Christ a person is to be giving. Generosity is a character trait of one who professes Christ. Beale comments, "the practice of every kind of impurity [uncleanness, *akatharsia*]" is inextricably linked with "greediness". Though there is no ranking of sin (James 2:10), Paul makes clear that a lack of generosity is sin. This echoes his upbringing as Judaism equates other sins with "idolatry" such as lack of charity or lending to the poor.[483]

[482] Cohick, *Ephesians*, 266.

[483] G. K. Beale, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 215.

1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 In the context of encouraging the church to love one another, Paul exhorts them to work with their hands. Once again, we see Paul giving value to manual labor. Paul's background and Jewish work ethic is clearly on display here. "The proper context for understanding the command "to work with your hands" is not that of Greco-Roman culture (in which philosophers and moralists debated the propriety and fitness of various types and kinds of work, including manual labor), but the Old Testament."[484] On this occasion, he argues that work is rooted in a love for one another. Keown observes, "Paul's constant emphasis on love is inclusive of a concern for the needy."[485] Additionally, Oslington notes, "Neighbor love is the chief identifier of human participation in the economy of God and is the actual experience of salvation."[486] Paul also urges the Thessalonians to engage in labor because of outsiders' opinions and their testimony to a watching world. As Anders notes, "Work is a reflection of our Christian life and ethics; it must not be neglected. Christianity should never be separated from daily routine and obligations. It finds its most eloquent expression in the common traffic of commerce, farming, nursing, construction, and all other forms of work."[487]

2 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 The church at Thessalonica had become idle in their anticipation of Christ's eminent return. Paul is admonishing the Thessalonians to keep on working according

---

[484] Michael William Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998), 98.

[485] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 347.

[486] Oslington, *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*, 8.

[487] Anders, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 65.

to his earlier teaching (1 Thessalonians 4). Paul reminds them of the example of working that he himself had set. His argument to keep working was to avoid taking charity unnecessarily. "Paul asked no more from the Thessalonians than he demanded of himself. Paul did not see working for the Lord as an excuse for a parasitic lifestyle which took advantage of the kindness of fellow believers."[488] As blunt as he could be, Paul says: if you do not work, you do not eat. He encourages his readers to get back to work and continue their lifestyle. Believers who had ceased to practice their trades were advised to return to their previous working and earning state, to provide for their needs and not be a burden.[489] "These people were not only lazy; they were expecting others to support them financially by giving them food and other supplies. They were capable of supporting themselves, but they were looking to others for support, deliberately neglecting their own responsibilities."[490] Once again, one can see Paul's theology of work evidenced. He not only makes the connection between one's work and contentment, but extends the connection to other areas of spirituality as well. "He encouraged believers to avoid laziness and dependence and to provide for their own living (Eph 4:28; 1 Thess 4:11– 12; 2 Thess 3:6–15). He demonstrated this in his self-supporting practice. He warned of the dangers of wealth (1 Cor 5:11; 1 Tim 3:3; 6:6– 10; 2 Tim 3:2) and advocated generosity. His practice and teaching are in line with the teaching and practice of Christ and the early Jerusalem church."[491] Paul believes that one should work from themselves and for the benefit of others. Paul demonstrated this personally and expected other followers of Jesus to do the same. "Paul's point was that no one within the Christian community should presume upon the charity of others, nor should they

[488] Anders, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 131.

[489] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas and Pauline Epistles", 23.

[490] Anders, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 130.

[491] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 349

shrink from work. Every person was responsible to provide for himself and his family. For those capable of work, any other course was wrong."[492]

1 Timothy

1 Timothy 5:17-18 Immediately after teaching Timothy and the church on how to take care of widows, Paul addresses the church on how to take care of their teachers. Though Paul prided himself on never taking a salary for his ministry, he did encourage his churches to pay their elders. The concept of double honor is meant to show that payment should be both monetary and respect. Both are needed, desired, and a form of currency in the first century. Paul admonishes them to provide for them using biblical examples of a muzzled ox (Deuteronomy 25:4) and a worker's wage (Luke 10:7).

1 Timothy 6:6-11 Paul is addressing the issue of contentment (*autarkeia*). Paul teaches them that godliness can be found in contentment and they must avoid greed. "There is great gain in godliness, but only if it is combined "with contentment," the opposite of greed."[493] Paul reminds his readers that we came into the world with nothing. He continues his discussion by telling them that all they need to be content is food and clothing. "Add clothing, given man's need for covering and protection; then add food, given the human need for physical development and health. Now we are set."[494] He argues that the love of money and the pursuit of wealth is a dangerous trap. He does not, however, condemn wealth or being rich. This is divergent thinking

---

[492] Anders, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 131.

[493] Walter L. Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy/Titus: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text--to Contemporary Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999), 258.

[494] Anders, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 235.

in Paul’s theology. He is separating himself from the apparent teaching of Jesus and practice of the early church. Paul’s “acceptance of wealthy Christians has been contrasted with the position of the Jesus Movement: ‘In the light of the harsh words directed towards the wealthy that are reported in the synoptic tradition, it is striking to find an accommodation of the rich within the New Testament where giving to the poor justifies the possession of wealth.’”[495] But upon further examination, one would see that Paul advocates for both wealth and sharing. The reality, to Paul, was that accumulation of wealth was for the sole purpose of being generous. In fact, Anders suggests that Paul was advocating simultaneous existence of both. “Paul was not developing a philosophy that equates the material world with evil. He was not advocating a Christian culture that requires poverty. He was drawing a definite line between possessions and true contentment. The former has no bearing on the latter.”[496]

However, Paul does provide a caution (at a minimum) against the pursuit of wealth and material things. Paul, contextualizing with his culture, begins the verse with some first-century folk wisdom, a saying common in Paul's day: the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Paul shows a connection between covetousness (greed) and a departure from the faith (6:10). “A close relationship between spiritual wealth and the principle of sharing material possessions with the needy becomes a distinct feature of the Pauline tradition.”[497] Greed can also be categorized as the opposite of giving. This shows God’s perfect wisdom in listing covetousness in the ten

---

[495] Gotsis, “Economic Ideas and Pauline Epistles”, 27.

[496] Anders, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 235.

[497] Gotsis, “Economic Ideas and Pauline Epistles”, 26.

commandments. The concept of wandering from "the" faith (a concept seen in Paul's pastoral epistles) references one's personal faith in Christ. "Greedy motives lead away from the truth."[498]

1 Timothy 6:17-19 Paul picks up the discussion on riches and addresses the rich themselves. Notice that he does not condemn them for being rich, but instead encourages them to set their hope in God - not their wealth. Instead, he admonishes the rich to use their wealth for the greater good; to do good and be generous with what they have by sharing. Christianity does not require a vow of poverty or the forsaking of wealth. Paul is teaching his readers that God's provision is to use them as a vehicle for blessing to others. Instead, "God offers material goods with abundance under the condition that this surplus is transmitted to meet the needs of those who suffer."[499] As Liefeld notes, "believers should use their wealth generously in doing good to others. We do not know what kind of "treasure" awaits such people, but we know that good use of their resources in some way lays a foundation for their future in the coming age."[500]

2 Timothy

2 Timothy 3:1-5 As Paul lists the character of people in the end times, it is interesting to note number two on the list is "lovers of money" (1 Timothy 6:10). This type of person is listed alongside of lovers of self, the proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, those without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, and those having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power (3:2-5). Paul then admonishes

---

[498] Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 260.

[499] Gotsis, "Economic Ideas and Pauline Epistles", 29.

[500] Liefeld, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 260.

believers to stay away from those people [lovers of money included] (3:5). The hearers of Paul's words would have been familiar with this list as they were common within the culture to whom Paul is writing. "The list in verses 2– 5 calls to mind the vice catalogs found in Greco-Roman literature."[501] Ultimately, Paul makes the conclusion that people on this list oppose the truth of the gospel (3:7-8).

Philemon

In his letter to Philemon, Paul is challenging him to take back Onesimus. The reader is not privy as to why Onesimus has left, or why he was a prisoner in the first place. There is some indication that the slavery is the result of a defaulted debt. The reason for this is that Paul offers to cover the debt caused by his absence (18). If this was the case, it would not have been an unusual situation. "Slavery was an integral part of the social and economic world of the first century. Estimates vary widely, but one scholar reckons that one-third of the people in cities such as Colossae would have been slaves."[502] As a result, there are high odds that this sets the circumstances that Paul is addressing. "Therefore, Paul's request would fit and not contradict the institution of slavery as it was practiced in the Greco-Roman world."[503]

Summary

Paul did not write a singular treatise on the issue of economics, but one can see that much of Paul's writing did touch on economic issues. From Luke's writing about Paul in Acts to his

---

[501] Liefeld, 1 and 2 Timothy, 259.

[502] Douglas J. Moo, *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008), 300.

[503] Beale, *Colossians and Philemon*, 220.

own writing to Philemon he consistently touches on issues impacted by economics. Since life was not compartmentalized in the first century as it is today, a social issue was not considered separately. Family, social status, work, religion and the like were wrapped up into one life. Since Paul was writing about bringing that life into relationship with Christ under His Lordship and authority, it should not come as a surprise to modern readers that: (1) there is not a separate writing about economics, and (2) economic ideas are interwoven throughout Paul's addressing life issues. Yet with that in mind, there are some themes that seem to rise to the surface in Paul's writing. Paul deals with giving and its connection to the gospel. He writes about work and its reflection of a believer's relationship with Christ. Paul addresses the dangers of the pursuit of wealth. He also offers an antidote: finding contentment through Christ. These themes, included in most of his writing, demonstrate Paul's influence on the believer's perspective on economics.

Conclusion

After a brief exploration of the writings of Paul, one can clearly see the influence and input that the economy had on his writing. One can also note that the issue of economics is much more prevalent than most scholars recognize. Perhaps some think Paul was not strong enough in his efforts to eliminate economic disparity. Some might even categorize his writing as non-committal; much like his writing on slavery or women's rights (household codes). In this lack of an attempt to overthrow the status-quo, it is thought he makes no contribution at all. However, this idea is wrong. Paul makes many contributions to shape the minds and hearts of believers in his context and today. It is better to think of Paul's writing as moving alongside the consensus ideas and thus providing an alternative to the normative practices. It might be viewed as an "off-ramp" to the prevailing thought instead of simply being contrarian to the ideology of the day. In this vein the idea of Paul being "transversive" rather than "subversive". Paul did not write to undermine, but his admonitions regarding money, giving, sharing, and contentment went across the cultural norms of his day. It is worth noting that Paul borrowed from both cultures that shaped him: Second Temple Judaism and Greco-Roman. From the Jewish culture, he invokes the idea of the divine. Both in one's responsibility and in the nature of giving, God's role is evident. From the Greco-Roman world, he takes the ideas of reciprocity and honor.

As such, Paul's practical theology comes through: one's spiritual wealth (through Christ) should lead believers to be generous (materially.) With a new heart that is drawn to and driven by Christ, love should serve as the primary identifier of a believer in Christ. As such, that love should then be reflected in one's behavior and approach to others. While the demonstration of piety and righteousness might have been the practice of the day, Paul notes that the motivation for such acts is new and different. It is worth noting that Paul consistently advocates for taking care of the needy, regardless of the context of his occasion or audience.

Additionally, Paul's concern for believers finding contentment - as he had done - was rooted not in self-sufficiency (Stoic philosophy) but in Christ-sufficiency. Even though Paul encouraged his readers to find this contentment in Christ, it still was to serve as an impetus to working hard and taking care of others. He demonstrated this in his self-supporting practice. Paul warned of the dangers of wealth and advocated for being generous. Paul echoed the teaching and example of Jesus, the other apostles, and the early church.

Chapter 6: Paul in the New Testament – A Comparative Analysis

While Paul wrote a significant amount of the New Testament that shapes the church's beliefs, attitudes, and actions, he is not alone or isolated in addressing issues of economics. Jesus (as recorded in the Gospels) and other writers of the New Testament lived in the same world as Paul dealt with many of the same issues. They were familiar with the cultural norms, the teaching of Jesus, and the expectations of a new life in Christ. It is important to examine, compare, and contrast the writing of Paul to these other writings. There is both divergence and convergence in their schools of thought.

Comparison to the Teaching of Jesus

If one were to put together a sliding scale of perspective on views of the wealthy, Jesus would be the most stringent and Paul might be considered a little more generous. Paul does not appear to be anti-wealth as is the perception of the views of Jesus. "The Pauline School's acceptance of wealthy Christians has been contrasted with the position of the Jesus Movement: 'In the light of the harsh words directed towards the wealthy that are reported in the synoptic tradition, it is striking to find an accommodation of the rich within the New Testament."[504] In that vein, Jesus interacted with the rich young ruler and told him to go and sell all his possessions and give them to the poor (Mark 10). While this was not an expectation on a person's behavior, Jesus went to the matter of the heart and his lack of surrender. Jesus continues His teaching in Mark 10:25 with, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of God." Jesus seems to indicate that the rich would have a difficult time

[504] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 27.

accepting, following, and living out the gospel. Perhaps that is why Jesus, on two separate occasions, mentioned the fulfillment of the Messiah's work of preaching the gospel to the poor. In Luke 4, Jesus reads the prophecy of Isaiah 61 and declares it to be fulfilled. In Matthew 11, it is recorded of Jesus's response to the messengers of John that the actions of Isaiah 61 are coming true, including the preaching of the good news to the poor.

Jesus also mentions the story of the sacrificial giving of the widow (Mark 12). He makes a priority of the concept of giving in the sermon on the mount in Matthew 6 when He teaches on giving and how one should give. In a different context, Jesus references Deuteronomy 15 and notes that the poor will always be with us. Jesus uses the poor in his parabolic teaching when He encourages the inclusion of the poor to a banquet (Luke 14).

Perhaps Jesus's greatest expression of one's treatment of the poor is found in Matthew 25. In this teaching Jesus is talking about the final judgment. In this story, Jesus references those who will be allowed to enter heaven and those who will receive eternal judgment. In this separation of the sheep from the goats, the sheep (eternal reward) are the ones who take care of the poor; the goats (eternal punishment) are the ones who did not. Jesus shows that taking care of the poor is a critical part of following Him.

Paul echoes this sentiment as he closely connects the ethic of caring for the poor as an important part of the gospel message. In Galatians 2:10, Paul demonstrates the desire to give to the poor in the context of gospel expectations (circumcision). Paul is continuing the teaching of Jesus and the carrying forward of the Second Temple tradition. "Caring for the poor, however, was a regular value of Jewish piety, certainly emphasized in Paul's Bible and in the Jesus tradition. Immersed in biblical ethics, Paul undoubtedly viewed caring for the needy as an ethical duty."[505]

While Jesus expresses the perfect example of giving to the poor and the difficulty rich people have in receiving the gospel, one must not be confused that Paul is contradictory to these ideas. Paul is less "strict" than Jesus in his admonition, but nonetheless agrees with Jesus. The teaching of Jesus was about the heart of the Christ-follower and not necessarily a mandated pattern of behavior. "At the same time, we must also be careful to consider the incarnation of Christ a prototype for believers, not a mandate. We do not become literally "poor" for the justification of others. Nor must believers give up their wealth entirely in order to follow Christ's example. Paul nowhere tells his congregations how much to give, nor to give until their economic status is reduced."[506] Paul's use of Christ as an example (2 Corinthians 8:9) is not prescriptive, but descriptive.

Paul's divergence from Jesus's teaching is not contradictory but instead tangential. The teaching of Paul, regarding giving, is often flavored with the idea of reciprocity. While the reciprocal gifts are spiritual, Paul encourages believers to give while receiving from God. This is markedly different from the teaching of Jesus. Jesus advocates for giving to the poor on moral grounds without consideration of a return. "This approach seems quite different from that of the gospels, where no exchange metaphor is used to justify almsgiving (c.f. Mt. 18:23-34, Lk. 14:12-14). For the evangelists, almsgiving is simply the right thing to do. The gospels' model of

[505] Keener, *Galatians*, 158

[506] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 418.

altruistic benefactory giving, without immediate or direct reciprocity, hardly applies to Paul's collection."[507]

Another separation of economic terms is regarding work. Paul is clear on his perspective of work. On multiple occasions (2 Corinthians 11 and 2 Thessalonians 3), he spells out the idea of labor for income. He uses the term *kopos*, or toil, exhaustion, or exhausting labor. It also suggests the idea of something a person does - with all their might - to get results. However, this is somewhat unique from what one finds in the Synoptic Gospels. In general terms, the idea of work is relatively untouched by the gospel writers. Yet this perspective would permeate Christian ethics for generations to come. Work was considered by Paul as a means of worship and love, worship of God and love of others. Paul was groundbreaking for the believer in his approach to work especially when considering his moral grounds for work. "The moral value of work, then, has been introduced, has not yet reached the point of glorifying work per se, as was to happen in the later centuries, but rather because work may express the motive of love, because it may prevent one's becoming a burden to others, because in it one may dispel misapprehensions of non-Christians, work is necessary and meaningful."[508]

Comparison to the Early Church

Though Paul was a founder of many early churches, there is a distinction between Pauline thought and the "early church" of Jerusalem found in the book of Acts (Acts 1-12). Economically speaking, the Jerusalem church was marked by three things: radical sharing of possessions, the shared meal, and the ministry of deacons.

[507] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 29.

[508] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 22.

In Acts 2, one reads of the church's demonstration of their unity. The selling of possessions and sharing of resources was common for them. They engaged in the activity of ridding themselves of earthly possessions and sharing with those both in need and to create a sense of equality among the gathering of believers. However, this philosophy and behavior is in direct contrast to the teaching of the apostle Paul. For the church in Jerusalem, the radical sharing of resources was a defining mark. However, Paul differed from them in this regard. The "renunciation of property and abandonment of riches as a divine precept do not reflect the spirit of Pauline admonitions to the Christians."[509] Paul never instructs his readers to sell their possessions and share the proceeds. Instead, Paul teaches his readers to work to eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10) and provide for themselves. Paul does not encourage the Jerusalem model, which had led eventually to poverty, and his solution to the problem of economic necessity was an alternative option and practical response to the Jerusalem model. As Gotsis notes, "Almsgiving helped to remedy this, although wholesale redistribution was only rarely recommended, as in the Synoptic Gospels and Jerusalem Church."[510] Paul instead admonishes his readers to give, but within their own means (2 Corinthians 8:3). As such, there is a new model for taking care of the poor. "The Pauline epistles provide enough data for an attempt to construct a logically coherent model of Paul's solution to the economic problem."[511] Much of this change in how the church would behave toward the poor was necessitated by a cultural shift within the early church. An urban setting was not conducive to the same radical sharing as was in Palestine. As Thiessen explains,

[509] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 26.

[510] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 25.

[511] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 17.

> This can be explained by the assumption that symbolic individuals, the Jesus Movement's wandering charismatics, could act out the repudiation of wealth on behalf of the rural communities they both ministered to and depended on. But, as their ministering and evangelical role was subsumed into the (Pauline) urban community itself, such complete rejection of property seemed unfeasible, if not inappropriate. Such an evolution took place as people of considerable wealth joined the church.[512]

While there is divergence in methodology for aiding the poor, the general principle of taking care of the poor was not new and was consistent with the early church. Not only was Paul's teaching about generosity consistent with the past, but it would also provide a model for the future. "Caring for those in need was a non-negotiable fundamental value of the Christian movement, which ultimately sparked charitable initiatives for the poor to an unprecedented degree within the Greco-Roman world."[513] Keown continues the thought with, "As seen in Jesus' ministry and the economic *koinōnia* of the Jerusalem church (Acts 4:32– 37), believers are charged as God's people to care for the poor, needy, and marginalized."[514]

About the shared meal of the early church, this was the vehicle for the fulfillment of the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In Acts, the church had "all things in common" and celebrated willingly and harmoniously. However, Paul experienced difficulty in such a meal. In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul expressly addresses the differences and the need for unity within the church. The differences surrounding the shared meal were economic in nature. Those who had resources were presumptively partaking of the meal with no regard to the poor. Paul admonishes them to celebrate the meal in such a way that honors the Lord and remembers Him appropriately.

---

[512] Theissen, *The Social Setting*, 115.

[513] Keener, *Galatians*, 158.

[514] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 350.

The ministry of deacons (Acts 6) was started in response to the Hellenist widows. The deacons were chosen for the daily distribution of food so the apostles might focus on their ministry of the gospel. Though Paul does not write about the food distribution of the deacon ministry, he does address the distribution to widows. First Timothy 5 provides clear instruction for the church in addressing the needs of widows. In this passage, Paul supports the church taking care of widows, but he is more instructive on the distribution. Paul adds to the practice the importance of families taking care of their own. Additionally, Paul places criteria on those who should receive care.

When one considers the overall comparison between the early church and the writing of Paul, there are some similarities, but as the ministry context shifts, so does the admonishment. Initially, concern for the poor and active almsgiving was obligatory amongst the people of God. Poverty was considered a form of injustice and people had an obligation to help remedy that. However, these actions and attitudes were counter cultural. "Judaism, and Proto-Christianity, encouraged charitable practices that appear progressive when compared with similar Graeco-Roman attitudes."[515] Though Paul's admonitions were considered transversive (not necessarily subversive), they were respected by society. "Christianity's casual observers (i.e., Lucian of Samosata) and its fiercest critics (i.e., the emperor Julian) seem to differentiate the practices of Christians from those of their non-Judeo-Christian contemporaries."[516]

Paul's economic teaching was supportive and not contradictory to Jesus or the early church, but also clearly different. "Paul's divergence from the two earlier phases of proto-Christianity, and the substantial subsequent influence of his view of an appropriately Christian

---

[515] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 25.

[516] Keener, *Galatians*, 158.

economic behavior, make him a worthy subject of examination."[517] These differences were rooted in the cultures involved. Second Temple Judaism and the Greco-Roman worlds were different. Behavior rooted in Judaism was more generous than that which was found throughout the rest of the empire. "Paul's economic ideas, once identified, and set in their socio-cultural context, are found to be markedly different from those of the Jerusalem Love Community, and strikingly dissimilar to the Jesus Movement's perception."[518] As such, they required a different methodology to handle the same issues of taking care of the poor.[519] Jewish economic thought was that the economic problems would be solved by God's blessing of the whole nation. Paul, in his Roman context considers the individual. "Paul generally focuses on the individual, or household, micro-level as that where the economic problem should be tackled by hard work and self-sufficiency."[520] This is one of the key differences between the early church and Paul's writing. The early church prioritized co-dependency through its sharing or resources. Yet Paul encourages self-sufficiency. "*Autarkeia*, or self-sufficiency, was to be a major theme of the Church Fathers. Its Christian origins, as we have shown, are Pauline, rather than being an original edict of the Jesus Movement."[521]

Paul's theology of work and his emphasis on the topic is another way in which he stands out from the typical writing and thought of the day. Again, Paul presents himself as transversive

[517] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 14.

[518] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 14.

[519] Perhaps the greatest convergence of Paul's dichotomous life was at Thessalonica. Acts 17 gives indication of a strong Jewish influence due to the diaspora. His reference to imitating the believers of the church in Judea (1 Thessalonians 2:14) indicates a Jewish audience amid a Gentile cultural context.

[520] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 23.

[521] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 21.

in this area of thought. For much of his audience, work was not a bad thing. Most of the people in his congregations would have been from the working class. As such, they saw no problem with doing manual labor. "There was no shame attached to daily work amongst the bulk of the Pauline congregations, manual workers and craftsmen, small businessmen and workers on the land, all of whom had a great respect for honest labor."[522] However, some conflict remained. Paul's encouragement to work would have been a challenge to the wealthier members of those congregations. "However, the idea of the necessity of work was a major pastoral problem for the instruction of some new converts, especially those of Greco-Roman or pagan origins, and from higher social strata. This was due to the widely held view in such circles that manual labor was a degrading feature of human life, unworthy of free human beings."[523]

Comparison to Other Epistolary Writers

Paul is not the only writer of the New Testament that addresses economic issues. It is important to note that in Galatians 2:9, Paul refers to James, Cephas, and John as being pillars to the Jerusalem church. Acts 15 tells the narrative of Paul's interaction with these church leaders. Those pillars reminded Paul, "...to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do," (Galatians 2:10). It is of significance that two of those pillars - James and John - also wrote on some of the same issues that Paul writes.

---

[522] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 23.

[523] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 23.

James 1:27-2:16

The epistle writer James was the half-brother of Jesus. Initially not a believer that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5), after the resurrection, he became an advocate for the gospel of Jesus and a Christ-follower (1 Corinthians 15:7; Galatians 1:19). After that experience, James became the leader of the Jerusalem church. One can see this leadership throughout the book of Acts. James was the one Peter wanted informed about his release from prison (Acts 12:17). Paul visited him and took advice from him on his final visit to Jerusalem (Acts 21:18). Additionally, James oversaw the "Jerusalem Council" (Acts 15:13–21). This Jerusalem Council convened with the purpose of evaluating Gentile salvation and more specifically the issue of circumcision.

It is worth noting that many commentators often highlight the parallels between the epistle of James and the sermon on the mount. Thus, the writing of James echoes the words of Jesus and his ethic toward the poor. Additionally, one must consider that the audience to whom James was writing was Jewish believers throughout the diaspora. As such, the historical-cultural influences on the readers would have been much different than those on Paul. For example, the Second Temple expectations of taking care of the poor would have been on James's mind as he wrote and the readers' minds as they received his words. Paul's writing, on the other hand, would have been more influenced by gentile culture – both in his writing and the readers' minds.

In this text, one finds James's own words when talking about issues of economics and the poor. "Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction" (James 1:27). The orphans and widows would have been considered vulnerable - and poor - people groups in the first century. The entire text is seated in the context of being rooted in the Word (1:18). From there, James encourages his readers to be active in doing what the Word teaches (1:22). James makes a connection between the Word of God and the believers' behavior. "James' concern in this paragraph is clear: those who have experienced the new birth by means of God's word (v. 18) must 'accept' that word (v. 21) by doing it (vv. 22– 27)."[524]

The reference in 1:27 describes a pure religion and worship to God. It is important to note that this list (two things) is not comprehensive of all that worship should include, but it does list the things that should not be excluded. James summarizes the whole ideal of God's will for His followers. This entails a heart matter or worship and an active ingredient or work. This verse "epitomizes the whole "package" of God's will for believers."[525] As such, followers of Jesus should make sure that they are engaged in these two activities. James gives admonition for believers everywhere to help those who need it. "Christians whose religion is pure and faultless will imitate their Father by intervening to help the helpless."[526] These two ideas were prominent in the Old Testament and important to Second Temple Judaism. In his writing, James shows his Jewish context. "He uses vocabulary that derives from ritual worship but here applies it to moral purity."[527] Considering James's emphasis on writing to Jewish believers, it is not surprising that he addresses them. He admonishes his readers to follow the example of the Old Testament. The "care for orphans and widows is commanded in the Old Testament as a way of imitating God's own concern for them."[528] This passage echoes the prophet in Isaiah 1:16-17. God instructs the nation of Israel to do right, seek justice, defend the oppressed, take up the case of the fatherless

---

[524] Douglas J. Moo, *James an Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 109.

[525] Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008, 79.

[526] Moo, *James*, 117.

[527] Blomberg, *James,* 87.

[528] Moo, *James*, 117.

and plead the case of the widow. James seems to be writing with an understanding that much of his audience fits into the category of having need, but this is not a shock as most of the people in the first century fits in this category. This text presupposes, “the poverty of most of the believers to whom James writes. This is not surprising. Throughout the early history of the church, those with little to hold them to this world found the spiritual promises of the gospel attractive.”[529]

The admonition of James (1:27) references social justice and moral piety. This demonstrates that in James’s idea of the gospel, the outcome is not an either/or behavior, but instead a both/and practice. This is manifested in generosity. Taking care of the poor is “the true outworking of a life of faith, personally and ecclesiastically, clearly requires both.”[530]

In the verses following 1:27, James furthers the discussion rooted in one’s faith while connected to the Word by writing about favoritism. Those who were wealthy were oppressing the poor (2:6-7) and there was disunity caused by a preference given to the rich. This is in violation of the “perfect” or “royal” law (1:22-25) which is a reference to the words given by Jesus: “Love your neighbor”. In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus not only teaches who one’s neighbor is, but also how to treat them - with love, which includes economic resources. In doing so, Jesus provides an example of how to treat those in need out of love. “Here is a classic example “of what the doers of the [perfect] law do,” namely, that Christ’s followers must attend to the most helpless of society.”[531] Additionally, James is supporting the idea of the sovereignty of God in one’s salvation. As such, the poor and marginalized believers were testimonies of God’s grace and attitude toward them. This gave them value and importance and because they

---

529 Moo, *James*, 125.

530 Blomberg, *James*, 91.

531 Blomberg, *James*, 87.

were expressions of God's grace, then they deserved all that God would do for them – namely defense of the defenseless. "These people, poor in the eyes of the world, were in fact rich in the sight of God. James here echoes the contrast between status in this world and status in God's kingdom from 1:9– 11."[532]

James continues the thought in 2:13 when he writes of "showing mercy." Showing mercy is what love requires. When one dishonors the poor, they are not showing mercy. James once again echoes the Old Testament with a nod to Zechariah 7:9-10. The consequences are dire for those who do not show mercy to and dishonor the poor. James focuses not only on the positive of following God, but the negative if one does not. He spells out the punishment if one discriminates based on status. "If James' readers continue to discriminate, they place themselves in danger of facing a harsh judgment. The reciprocal relationship between human mercy and God's is brought out repeatedly by Jesus, most strikingly in the parable of the unmerciful servant. (Matt. 18:21– 35; cf. also Matt. 6:14– 15)."[533]

In this text, James is elevating the poor to be equal to the rich in the sight of God. He does so with the prohibition of favoritism. In doing so, James equates favoritism with sin and by elevating the poor he gives them value. "In his typically practical manner, James in this paragraph gives voice to an important Christian value: the equal worth of all people in the sight of God."[534] All of this flows out of one's obedience and following of the gospel. Therefore, as an outflow of the gospel and one's faith, "Christians must not discriminate either in favor of or against anyone because such behavior is inconsistent with God's choice of the poor, the conduct

---

[532] Moo, *James*, 123.

[533] Moo, *James*, 131.

[534] Moo, *James*, 132.

of the rich, and the law of love."[535] One's demonstration of their belief in Christ is at stake. "It implies that one does not really have a commitment to Jesus if one shows favoritism."[536]

The favoritism of James 2 echoes the teaching of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11. Both passages deal with the relationship between the rich and poor. Both address this relationship in the context of a worship setting (shared meal and worship gathering). Both James and Paul provide strong correction to those involved by mentioning the judgment that will come upon them (James 2:13 and 1 Corinthians 11:29). Paul and James are both showing that believers are dishonoring those to whom God has extended His grace. "But these Christians have dishonored the very ones whom God has honored, which means that they have insulted their great patron, God."[537]

It appears that Pauline thought is more in line with that of James than perhaps the traditional thinking that Paul and James were in opposition to one another. In fact, on economic issues, there seems to be a coming together of thought. "The Pauline school seems to converge with the Synoptic Gospels, and the more radical epistle of James, where capital accumulation implies a degree of uncertainty, of falsified expectations, if disassociated from the perspective of eternity (1 Tim. 6:17 and 19; James 4:14). Bondage to Christ leaves no room for slavery to money and to the things money can buy'."[538]

---

[535] Blomberg, *James*, 97.

[536] Peter H. Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014, 56.

[537] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 59.

[538] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 27-28.

1 John 3:11-24

The apostle John was also one of the "pillars" from the Jerusalem Council. John was one of the "inner circle of three" and an early follower of Jesus. Called the "disciple Jesus loved" (John 13:23), John would have been very familiar with the words of Jesus.

Contextually, John is addressing the bigger issue of love. John is writing about God's love for us and our love for one another. The passage of Scripture being examined here is rooted in how believers treat one another – namely in love. "This pericope is integrally related to 3:1–10 because, despite the paragraphing in the Greek NT, the causal clause (introduced with *ὅτι*) gives the reason why the believer who does not love a brother and sister (3:10) is counted as someone who does not live rightly."[539] Then, out of that issue arises John's view on the gospel and taking care of the poor. John equates the works he writes of with the message of Jesus that the believers received – the gospel. "Of equal importance is that those deeds are done "in truth". John uses "truth" throughout his writings to refer to the gospel message. The words and acts of the believer must be consistent with the spiritual truths God has revealed in Christ. Loving others through acts is consistent with the gospel and is how the believer returns the love they have received from God in Christ (cf. John 3:16)."[540] John views taking care of others as an outflow of God's love for us. It is important to realize that John is writing about the believer's course of action that flows from the gospel. "In the light of Christ's self- giving love for them, the author says, they ought not to close their hearts toward fellow believers in material need."[541] John even argues that they cannot close their hearts to others and still claim to have the love of God within them.

---

[539] Karen H. Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014, 152.

[540] Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 160.

[541] Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John*, Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020, 148.

"There it is emphasized that love for God and love for fellow believers must go hand in hand."[542] This love must not be mere words but extend to deeds and physical goods. John is pointing back to the verses leading up to this as he continues his argument to show that actions are connected to faith. "If "this then" refers back to preceding verses (esp. to 3:18), John seems to be linking Christian assurance to ethical behavior. If we love in deed and not word alone, our standing before God is confirmed."[543]

The whole passage echoes the ethic of Deuteronomy 15:7-9 and the Mosaic Law. This passage sets the groundwork for taking care of the poor and those in need. Throughout the Mosaic Law, one finds must about believers' responsibility to help take care of the downtrodden and defenseless. "Jewish religion of the first century went to great lengths to care for the poor. Josephus boasted that 'no Jew depended on outsiders for charitable support, since the Jews cared for all of their destitute and disabled brethren.'"[544] Jesus continued these principles in His own teaching when he talks about sacrificial living for others. Jobes extends the thought hearkening back to John's quote of Jesus in John 15:13, "laying down one's life as the proper expression of love involves meeting the need of others for the basic necessities needed to sustain life."[545] As such, John seems to reinforce the thinking of Paul that God's provision of taking care of others happens through His people. "God is the ultimate source of all provision, but most often he distributes it through people helping people."[546]

---

[542] Kruse, *The Letters of John*, 149.

[543] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude, 149.*

[544] Davids, *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*, 147.

[545] Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 158.

[546] Jobes, *1, 2, and 3 John*, 158.

Much like James, John here invokes the idea that Jesus taught in the parable of the good Samaritan. In doing so, he shows that love is the fulfillment of God's purpose for us. Jesus redefines the concept of love and John puts forth that new idea (commandment). In this parable, Jesus communicates that the Samaritan makes unusual efforts to see that the victim has his physical needs met – shelter, food, medical care. Jesus helps his listeners to see what a neighbor is but also how to love their neighbor. "The parable not only defines a neighbor, but also defines what love for others looks like."[547] John not only addresses love, but also provides a contrast in hate. In doing so, he implies that not taking care of those in need is demonstrating hate to them. "Understanding love in this way provides further insight into how hate, which John defines as the failure to provide for the life-sustaining needs of another, amounts to murder (3:15)."[548]

One of the basic elements of John's writing is the theme of love. In this context love is shown by taking care of the needs of others. In 1 John 2, John admonishes the reader that he is not just reminding them of an old commandment but adds an extra element to the consideration of that commandment. Now, John adds, is that the commandment to love one another incorporates intentional acts of consideration toward their brother. "Love is the most basic expression of Johannine ethics, the kind of love that goes deeper than mere words and platitudes and becomes a willingness to act on the behalf of the best interests of others."[549] Love as the Bible defines it is doing what is needed to care for the needs of others. While different in expression, this sentiment of love unifies the attitude toward economics by Jesus, the early church, James, John, and Paul.

[547] Jobes, *1, 2, 3 John*, 159.

[548] Jobes, *1, 2, 3 John*, 159.

[549] Jobes, *1, 2, 3 John*, 159.

Summary

The apostle Paul's extensive writing on economic issues clearly reflects the teaching of Jesus and the early church. Additionally, his thoughts agree with the contents of non-Pauline epistles. However, while not contradictory in thought, there is some divergence and tangential nuances in what he writes. In some instances, Paul is clearly pushing the ethic forward.

One of the major differences is in Paul's attitude toward the rich. Paul encourages unity between classes (1 Corinthians 11), but he does not berate the wealthy. While he cautions the rich (1 Timothy 6), he - and his ministry - is a beneficiary of the wealthy. On the other hand, Jesus clearly demonstrates that it is difficult for the rich as he sends away one who is asking what he must do for salvation (Mark 10:17-27). However, Paul does not appear to speak against the rich. In fact, Paul argues that giving to the poor is justification for being rich. Paul does, however, write against selfishness and putting material things ahead of God. Such attitudes and behaviors are incompatible with being a Christ follower.

Another difference is Paul's approach to communal sharing of resources. Nowhere does Paul suggest common ownership or the pooling of possessions within the body of Christ. This is in direct contrast to the church in Jerusalem (Acts 2, 4). Although there exists divergence between Paul and Jesus and the early church, many of Paul's ethics are still held today. This gives additional motivation for looking at what Paul writes regarding economic principles.

Separately was Paul's writing about work and manual labor. Relatively absent from the early church model, James, and John, Paul seems to be blazing a trail for his readers in the area of work. Manual labor was often maligned in the first century, but Paul celebrates work as an act of worship and a means of self-sufficiency. This view, however, presented some problems among new believers in the Greco-Roman world and was transversive to common thought.

Yet not all of Paul's economic writing is unique. Some of his ideas and ethics are echoed throughout the Synoptic Gospels and the other writers of the epistles. Jesus taught on sacrificial giving. Paul asks his congregations, on more than one occasion, to give to the saints in Jerusalem and the poor. Jesus spoke about taking care of the poor. Paul demonstrates this ethic on multiple occasions. Perhaps one of the strongest connections is Jesus's demonstration that a true relationship with Him is found in those who take care of the disenfranchised. Paul echoes the idea of the connection of taking care of the poor with the gospel message.

Regarding the early church, the shared meal (Acts 2) that became the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11), sees that Paul's writing resonates with the practice found in the Jerusalem setting. Recognizing the differences (pooling of resources), one can also find the unity of the shared meal. In Acts 2:42, the believer shared the meal together as an expression of worship to God and love to one another. Paul provides instruction in 1 Corinthians 11 that the believers need to eliminate divisions and demonstrate a similar unity. The first church made a priority of taking care of the poor. Paul wrote to his followers to do the same. The church at Jerusalem took care of the widows (through the deacon ministry). While Paul encouraged the church to minister to widows and take care of them. This pooling of resources and taking care of the marginalized flow out of the transformed lives of the believers and the gospel.

James writes of taking care of the poor or marginalized (widows and orphans), as does Paul. James roots his argument in the Word (Jesus) and the outflow of true religion. James notes that the outflow of a relationship with God must produce works. Paul also closely connects taking care of the poor to the gospel message. James expounds upon favoritism that is happening in worship gatherings while Paul addresses the preference of people in his admonition in 1 Corinthians 11.

The apostle John writes of the love of God and the love of others leading believers to take care of the poor. He notes that this action is "true" and thus relates it to the truth of God and His gospel message. As such, the gospel - alive in its believers - leads to taking care of the poor. John argues that it is the outflow of the gospel being active in a person's life. All of this is found in the tenor of Paul's writing on the issue.

One can see that Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, has some unique and different economic ideas. However, while there are some differences between Paul and the others (Jesus, early church, James, John), there are also a great deal of similarities in economic terms.

Chapter 7: Paul's Theology and Economics

Paul's theology has shaped much of the history of the Church. The systematic theology of the church is unmistakably Pauline. The Church's systematic thoughts on soteriology, hamartiology, and ecclesiology (among others) are predominantly founded in the writings of Paul. However, Paul also contributed much more to the theology of the church than those often-taught over-arching categories. Additionally, Paul's thoughts on much of his cultural perspective are heavily influenced by the world in which he lived and the background of his life.

The apostle Paul grew up in the Mediterranean culture of collectivism. As such, the group (familial or associational) and its own well-being ruled supreme. The benefit of the collective group outweighed an individual's own. As such, decisions about resources, both the collection and disbursement, were contemplated through the lens of the collective group. Additionally, Paul was very familiar with typical Jewish practice and Second Temple Judaism behavior. He would have known and been obedient to the commands of God to take care of the poor. Whether by ritual or love, Paul would have been faithful in obeying God's decrees and demonstrating grace to the defenseless or poor. He also would have been familiar with the commerce of the day. Living in Jerusalem, Paul would understand the functioning of a city's economic system and growing up in rural Palestine, he would have been able to relate to the rural economy. As a result, Paul's audience differed from that of Jesus - not just by culture, but economics. "The economic divergence between such cities and contemporary rural Palestine is significant. While Paul could assume a background of ongoing growth and development in the areas with which he was concerned, Jesus was addressing a stagnant economy on the brink of extinction as an entity."[550]

---

[550] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 16.

Also, Paul ministered throughout the Roman empire for much of his adult life, so he understood the nuances and similarities of the various cities in which he resided. He would have been familiar with the Galatian region. "'Paul's mission is confined to the world of the polis', a clearly demarcated territory comprising 'Christian congregations in Greek poleis, or Latin colonies probably thoroughly Hellenized'."[551] As Paul was a tentmaker and laborer, he knew the ins and outs of places like Corinth and Ephesus and how they operated economically. Paul would have also known the stress points of the social scale. The people with whom Paul would identify economically would have been on the lower end of the spectrum and would have understood their plight. Yet, Paul still knew some with means and the Church's make up would have been somewhat reflective of society. Throughout his writing, Paul often challenged the common thoughts, beliefs, and practices of the day that were contrary to God's design. Issues like slavery and the treatment of women and children were addressed by Paul. The economy was an additional issue about which Paul writes.

Personal Responsibility

Paul's Gospel and the New Life

Perhaps one of the consistent themes in Paul's writing and theology is the truth of one of the outcomes of a person who comes to Christ and makes Jesus their Lord. Paul states that a Christ-follower is a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:17). In Romans 12:2, Paul observes that followers of Christ should be transformed in the way they think. Paul describes some of the behavior of one who has been changed and now follows Christ in his letter to Ephesus

[551] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 16.

(Ephesians 4:20-32). He furthers that idea by writing that Christians are actually not even their own when he writes that it is no longer "us" but Christ who lives within us (Galatians 2:20). It is worth noting that Paul is simply expounding upon the idea proposed by Jesus Himself when talking with Nicodemus (John 3). Paul writes to the Romans about the believer's death to sin and new life in Christ (Romans 6).

In Colossians 3, Paul writes of this newfound attitude and behavior as a Christ-follower and its influence over every aspect of a believer's life. Paul's *haustafeln*, or household codes, give believers direction on how to handle and live everyday life (see also Ephesians 5). In these passages, Paul deals directly with slave-owner relationships, wife-husband relationships, and children-parent relationships. Paul argues that a life transformed by the power of the gospel will behave and act differently. The gospel message of Jesus is a new life by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8-9), but the gospel is not to be divorced from action. The verse that immediately follows states, "... [believers are] created in Christ Jesus *for good works*, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them…" (Ephesians 2:10, emphasis added). In fact, Paul suggests that the gospel demands a new ethic demonstrated by the believer. Specifically, 1 Corinthians 6 suggests that those sanctified and justified by Christ have an obligation to bring their behavior, as well as their thoughts, under the authority of Jesus. Paul, in his paramount piece on freedom, suggests that one is free from the demand of the law and now free to fulfill the law of Christ: which is to love one another (Galatians 5).

The apostle James seems to back up this idea and support Paul's assertion. James writes, "So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." (James 2:17). Instead, James argues that works are necessary for faith to be real. Using the example of Abraham, James reasons that Abraham was justified by his works of faith - the offering up of Isaac on the altar (James 2:21-

23). As James 2:22 puts it: “[the] faith [of Abraham] was active along with his works, and faith was *completed* by his works” (emphasis added). Thus, faith to both Paul and James is what saves and justifies a person, but faith is not alone. There must also be demonstrable acts with that faith. It is worth noting that Paul’s inclusion of taking care of the poor was a part of this new life. As Bruce notes on Galatians 2, Paul’s desire to remember the poor, “in no way could be construed as an ‘addition’ to Paul’s gospel.”

Paul closes out his letter to the church at Rome with the doxology, “Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to *my gospel* and the preaching of Jesus Christ” (Romans 16:25, emphasis added). The doxology continues with Paul’s admonition to the “obedience of faith” pointing to a behavioral adherence to the statement of belief (Romans 16:26). This indicates that all which he has shared with the Romans is a part of the gospel message. From the revelation of God (Romans 1) to the condition of man (Romans 2-3), to the futility of man’s efforts (Romans 4-5), to the results of sin (Romans 6), to the work of God (Romans 7-8), and the new life of a believer (Romans 12-16), this is the “gospel of Paul”. There is no separation from faith and behavior.

Paul’s encouragement to new believers is not limited to *Haustafeln* but extends to more areas of one’s life. One can find that Paul also deals specifically with economic issues. Paul addresses topics like the believer’s ethic toward Christ-sufficiency, labor, possessions, and most importantly the poor and charity. Paul’s writings deal with many of these issues that impact a believer’s daily life.

Christ-Sufficiency

As a follower of Christ, Paul argues, one should be content in his Christ-sufficiency. With an overwhelming majority of citizens of the Roman empire living at or below the subsistence level, most people struggled to make ends meet, let alone live in excess. Socially speaking, upward mobility was very limited and therefore one's station in life was pretty much set. This created stress and frustration for people. Paul challenges believers that they should accept the circumstances in which they find themselves and be content. Paul makes the case that Christ is more than enough for the believer and therefore, the believer should find joy in Christ.

Paul's own example of Christ-sufficiency is spelled out in Philippians 4. Regardless of one's economic circumstances, believers in Jesus are to be content. It is important to note that Paul's words on his circumstances flow out of his thought, "our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Philippians 3:20). This echoes Jesus's word in the gospel of John that a believer's citizenship is in heaven (John 3:3). Because a believer's life is in heaven, their thoughts, concerns, and "worries" should be also (Matthew 6:25-34). Thus, their focus should be on the spiritual world and God's grace. "Firstly, in the spiritual realm, believers abandon anxiety about wealth and resources, entrusting themselves to God's grace."[552] Paul encourages those who have come to faith in Jesus to live like this. They are to find their contentment in Christ and His provision, regardless of whether the provision meets needs or not. As such, the believer finds themselves disconnected from all the world's concerns and provision. "This results in a (Stoic-like) detachment from the things of this world. This will have the additional benefit, through God's grace, of allowing them material self-sufficiency."[553]

---

[552] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 20.

[553] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 20.

Even in the context of a collective society, Paul encourages reliance upon God for a believers' contentment and sufficiency instead of others. The Church was a collective group that reflected the behavior of Second Temple Judaism. As such, it reflected the ethic of the Jewish community. "Here, self-sufficiency at the level of the religious community has more in common with Jewish traditions of the duty of care for the poor."[554] However, one was not to be dependent on the care of others and their provision. Self-sufficiency, while to be sought after, is not the goal as it is temporary. "Self-sufficiency is thus temporal and spiritual, individual and communal, and it means slightly different things in each context, although a coherent overall scheme can be perceived."[555] Instead the goal that Paul argues for is contentment as one finds their sufficiency in Christ. To those who become followers of Jesus, Paul encourages them to continue in their condition. In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul admonishes the believers to keep in the state they were in then they were called. Though this statement is in the context of being circumcised (or uncircumcised), Paul extends the application as he writes of being bondservants - an economic social status (1 Corinthians 7:20-21). In all of this, Paul focuses on finding their sufficiency, and more importantly their contentment, in Christ. "An additional reason for remaining within their 'station' is so that the new converts may continue to be economically self-sufficient."[556] Only he takes the argument to a new level in his letter to Philippi when he encourages them to be content in that state.

Thus, as people receive the gospel and become followers of Jesus they are to seek contentment. This Christ-sufficiency is rooted in the gospel that Paul preaches. Paul encourages

---

[554] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 20.

[555] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 20.

[556] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 19.

believers that godliness and contentment go hand in hand; godliness is shown through contentment (1 Timothy 6:6). A believer's life should be different and countercultural as they live in faith and obedience.

Labor

Closely connected to the idea of self-sufficiency, is the thought that one should work for what they get. Though familiar with Second Temple Judaism, Mosaic Law, rabbinical practices for taking care of the poor, and the model of the first church, Paul again encourages followers of Christ to behave in a new way that flows out of the gospel message.

Paul once again sets the example of choosing to labor, regardless of his station in life. Luke describes Paul as a tentmaker - the same as Aquila and Priscila (Acts 18:3). In his own words, Paul wrote of his own labor to support himself as he desired not to be a burden to others (1 Thessalonians 2:9; 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8; 1 Corinthians 9:6, 11-12, 18; 2 Corinthians 11:7). While he did receive some assistance on occasion, Paul's own example was one of labor.

Paul encourages believers in Christ to work. In playing off the idea of patronage and benefaction in the ancient Near East, Paul uses terms invoking the idea of "paying back" the gift that has been given to believers. In a different context, Paul employs this idea when he appeals to Christ-followers imploring them to present their bodies as a living sacrifice which is their *logikos* (reasonable, logical rational) act of service (Romans 12:1). To the church at Colossae, Paul writes that believers are to not only work, but work with excellence. Writing in the context of employees (bondservants), Paul admonishes new believers who have a changed life to work as unto the Lord and not for the audience or approval of man (Colossians 3:23). When writing of salvation, Paul notes that believers are saved for "good works" by grace through faith (Ephesians

2:8-10). The word ‘works’ is *ergon* which is the word for deeds or labor. Though the entire context for good works is works for Christ, the point remains that believers are saved for work.

Paul furthers this idea when he challenges those at Thessalonica to keep working. He notes that he set the example for them to follow and get to work. He argues that idleness is not a trait of godliness. Paul even goes so far as to give a command: “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (1 Thessalonians 3:10). He follows this up with another command when he wrote, “to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Paul is admonishing believers to not become a burden to others. “By continuing to ‘labor’, Christians can ensure that they are not a burden on others, and that they do not give cause for complaint to those outside the church (1 Thess. 4:11-12).”[557] Paul encourages believers who embrace the gospel message to demonstrate life change through their work ethic.

Possessions

Perhaps there is no greater divergence between the teaching of Jesus and the actions of the early church in comparison to Paul’s teaching than in how Christ-followers should handle possessions and specifically, money. Jesus condemns the accumulation of material things on more than one occasion (Luke 12; 18). Jesus goes further and encourages the sale of one’s things and the income be given to the poor. This is like the model of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 2; 4).

However, Paul does not condemn the wealthy. In fact, it can be argued that Paul was a beneficiary of the wealthy during his ministry. Lydia (a homeowner), Erastus (benefactor from Corinth), Philemon (slave owner), and Publius (Maltese official) were all mentioned by Paul as

[557] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 19.

being contributors to his ministry. Their ability to contribute implies their wealth and infers his acceptance of their generosity.

Paul does, however, caution strongly against the pursuit of wealth. In this, he aligns with Jesus and the early church. Even in the church at Jerusalem, Peter permitted the pursuit of wealth, but stood against its sinful grip on the owner (see Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5). This was reflected in Paul's warning in his letter to a young pastor. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul advises against the love of money. He warns that lovers of money lay a trap for sinful desires to take over (1 Timothy 6:9-10).

Instead, Paul encourages the use of money for the benefit of others. Continuing in the vein of 1 Timothy 6, Paul notes that the rich are to use their resources, which are from God, for good works (*ergon*) and they are to be generous and ready to share (1 Timothy 6:18). All this teaching from Paul (both against the love of money and the admonition to be generous) flows from the gospel of Jesus. He notes that his teaching is sound doctrine from the words of Jesus (1 Timothy 6:3). As such, one can recognize the strong connection between the gospel message and Paul's teaching. The new life that a Christ-follower has in Jesus demands that he responsibly handles the accumulation of wealth. Being a disciple of Jesus and the handling of money cannot be compartmentalized and they are inseparable. That is not to say that they are one in the same, but a believer cannot separate the two. "It is easy to put Christian ministry, personal godliness, acts of justice and sacrificial giving on the peripheries of life— to see no connection between these "ideals" and life as we experience it. The truth is that there is no compatibility."[558]

[558] Anders, *1 and 2 Timothy*, 237.

Charity

The greatest economic mark in Paul's gospel and theology is charity. Some might argue that Paul does not address the economic situation of the majority of those living in the empire. Some might say Paul is understated in his addressing the issues of poverty - much like people comment on Paul's lack of writing about slavery or women's issues. On the contrary, Paul wrote much about charity to the poor, as he did on those other social issues. "A cursory reading of Paul could suggest that Paul does not refer to poverty as such because of his own "freedom from worldly concern" (1 Cor 7:28-35) and his contentment in any state of wealth (Phil 4:10– 13). However, closer examination suggests he had a great concern for the poor and those in need."[559]

This can be seen early in his ministry as Paul met with the leaders of the Jerusalem church to discuss the need, or lack thereof, for circumcision by those who follow Christ (Acts 15). Eventually, through the leadership of Peter, James and John, the church decided that circumcision was not required to become or demonstrate they are a follower of Christ. When Paul recounts this exchange in Galatians 2, he notes that the leaders ("pillars") of the church encouraged Paul to take his gospel to the Gentiles without consideration for the issue of circumcision. Seemingly they place no conditions on Paul's gospel - with regard to circumcision - but they do seem to place one "condition" on Paul's message: to remember the poor (Galatians 2:10). It is interesting to note that of all the possible conditions or considerations for new believers, Paul only recounts taking care of the poor. "It is rather an appeal to Paul from the Jerusalem apostles that, as he goes about saving the lost and planting churches, he remembers the needs of the poor. For Paul, authentic Christian mission sits alongside the power of the Spirit and

[559] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 346-347.

concern for social justice."[560] To that admonishment, Paul responds that he was *spoudazo* (eager) to do so. Perhaps Paul was eager because he had seen so many people in his travels that needed assistance. It would have been easy to reach this conclusion with three out of every four qualifying as poor. Yet, a stronger argument for Paul's *spoudazo* is that he saw charity as an outflow of the gospel message's impact in a person's life. He saw no separation between faith in Christ and actions of love toward others. It may have also been because Paul saw charity as an expression of the gospel.

It is important to make a distinction that Paul's encouragement to "remember the poor" was not a condition of salvation, but instead a defining mark of the gospel's effect in a person's life. Much like circumcision does not save Jewish males but it is an outward physical sign of God's covenant with His people (Genesis 17:10-14). Similarly, "remembering the poor" does not save a person but it is an outward demonstrable act of obedience to show God's grace in a person's life. The fact that the conclusion of the Jerusalem council in Acts 15 was circumcision - the founding principle of Judaism - was not required, but remembering the poor was, shows that charity is a key component of the gospel message. In fact, the language in 2 Corinthians – when he takes the collection for the church at Jerusalem – reflects the idea of justification.[561]

Due to his background (Second Temple Judaism) and through his experience (*collegia* distribution and emperor decree), Paul would have experienced some relief to those who needed financial assistance. However, with such a high percentage of those in need, Paul also would have been aware that the needs of the people outweighed the provision. God's grace provided an example to be followed. Creation's sin debt was too great to be paid by people. As a result, God

---

[560] Keown, *Discovering the New Testament*, 347-348.

[561] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 431-432.

the Son had to pay that debt as He demonstrated His grace. Because of His grace and all that God has given the believer, one must in turn extend that grace to others. By grace believers are saved through faith for the purpose to carry out the good works that God has planned for them (paraphrase of Ephesians 2:8-10). "The frequency with which Paul speaks of the collection with the language of *charis* "grace, gift," offers to the contributors to the fund for Jerusalem a new, countercultural model of obligation and reciprocity within the Christian community, shaped by Paul's theological and cruciform convictions."[562] This is the gospel message. Paul's admonition in 2 Corinthians 8-9 is not to be a thesis on the morality of giving, but instead is a command to carry out the example of Jesus. "Paul is not advocating an abstract, moral duty, but a theology. His goal in stirring up the Corinthians to give is to verify the genuine nature of their love as Christians."[563]

As such, in Paul's writings, giving was more than an act of kindness. It was more than living out the collective lifestyle. It was an act of worship that fulfilled the gospel. As stated above, it (giving to the poor) is a theology – a study of God – and how He interacts with His creation. In commenting on the collection in 2 Corinthians 8-9, Hafemann argues, "The collection, however, was more than simple charity. It had a profound theological purpose, both for the Corinthians and for the church as a whole."[564] Esler supports this idea with, "Paul does at times (including in 2 Corinthians 8) suggest a theological under-girding for the project: it is an expression of gospel theology."[565] Paul notes that participating in the collection for the poor had

---

[562] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 427.

[563] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 359.

[564] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 360.

[565] Esler, *The First Christians*, 232.

a sanctifying effect and would make them more like Jesus (2 Corinthians 8:8-10). This was Paul's primary concern for those who followed Christ – that they would mature in that faith. "The Gentiles' sharing willingly with Jews from the abundance of God's provision was a tangible demonstration of the new covenant of the new creation (8:15)."[566] Therefore, taking care of the poor was one way to show that they were growing closer to Christ. Furthermore, this giving to the poor was an extension of the gospel. Hafemann suggests, "In other words, to fail to give to the collection is to expose the false nature of their professed faith!"[567] If they did not give, then it could be questioned as to whether or not they were even believers. The two - gospel and giving - should not be thought of as separate. "Nor is it (giving) an aside from it (gospel), an optional "add-on" for those who are really serious about their faith. Instead, their generosity in giving to the collection is to be an expression of the gospel itself in the lives of those who have already shown [repentance]."[568]

Craig Keener provides an excellent summary to this thought:

> Caring for the poor, however, was a regular value of Jewish piety, certainly emphasized in Paul's Bible and in the Jesus tradition. Immersed in biblical ethics, Paul undoubtedly viewed caring for the needy as an ethical duty (cf. Eph. 4:28; 1 Thess. 4:12), just like avoiding stealing or sexual immorality (1 Cor. 6:9– 10; Eph. 4:28), as an inevitable corollary of loving one's neighbor (Rom. 13:9– 10; Gal. 5:13– 14). Paul regards greed as damnable (Rom. 1:29, 32; 1 Cor. 6:10). Caring for those in need was a non-negotiable fundamental value of the Christian movement, which ultimately sparked "charitable initiatives for the poor . . . to an unprecedented degree within the Greco-Roman world… Both Christianity's casual observers (i.e., Lucian of Samosata) and its fiercest critics (i.e., the emperor Julian) seem to differentiate the practices of Christians from those of their non-Judeo-Christian contemporaries."[569]

---

[566] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 362.

[567] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 362.

[568] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 362.

[569] Keener, *Galatians,* 158.

As one matures in their faith and becomes more like Jesus, giving is both an act of righteousness and an act of worship. The whole idea that Paul puts for regarding the collection is its connection to the gospel and one's response to Who God is and what He has done. "Paul subverts conventions of gift giving in his and his audience's cultural contexts by metaphorically framing his readers' responsive participation in the collection as an act of cultic worship."[570] The repeated use of worship language when writing of the collection gives strong indication that he saw the collection as more than mere charity. "Terms such as "grace" (2 Corinthians 8:1; 4, 6), "fellowship" (2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:13), "ministry" or "service" (2 Corinthians 8:4; 9:1, 13), "sign of love" (2 Corinthians 8:7), and later "blessing" (*eulogia* [2 Corinthians 9:5– 6]) and "liturgy" *leitourgia* [2 Corinthians 9:12]) are all derived from the vocabulary of human relationships with God and sacred acts of worship."[571] While his use of worship language points to the true nature of giving, his lack of language also does. In 2 Corinthians 8, 9, as well as Philippians 4, Paul does not use money terms. He does not use currency, instead focuses on the worship nature of giving to the poor. "The raising of a collection— and it is striking that neither here [2 Corinthians] nor in Phil 4:10– 20 does Paul even once mention money (*argurion* "silver"; *chrusion*, "gold") —is invested with a sacral-liturgical aura and never treated as a mundane secular enterprise."[572] Instead, Paul always considers the taking of a collection as an act of worship.

Paul's encouragement to the church at Corinth was not simply to give in response to what Christ did (as repayment) or doing for others what Christ has done for you (paying it forward).

---

[570] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 427.

[571] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 431.

[572] Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 431.

Instead, giving is expected by those who are made new in Christ. Since they are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17), they should behave in a new way, which, incidentally, was different from cultural norms. "It is, rather, 'Do what is appropriate to your status as those who have been enriched by the grace of Christ.'"[573]

Church Organized

Paul's influence goes beyond the individual believer's personal responsibility. As much of his writing has been foundational for the ecclesiology of the church, so too is his writing for the collective nature of gathered believers - the church. "As a result, the collection illustrates the significance of Paul's theology of grace both for the individual (having received from God, Christians give to others) and for the life of the church (having been accepted by God, Christians accept one another)."[574] Hafemann argues that Paul's completing the collection for the saints in Jerusalem was the theological capstone to his apostolic service bringing his ministry east of Rome to a close.[575] Paul uses economics to describe the importance of unity within the church as well as the prescription for the church organized ministering to marginalized members.

Unity

In the Lord's prayer found in John 17, one sees the heart of Jesus as it relates to the church. Jesus prays that each believer would be unified with one another as Jesus is unified with the Father (John 17:21). This echoes his sentiment when He tells his followers that people will

---

[573] Hafemann, *2 Corinthians*, 359.

[574] *Ibid.*, *2 Corinthians*, 419.

[575] *Ibid.*, *2 Corinthians*, 419.

know they are His followers by their love for one another (John 13:35). This is the design of the church, that she would be unified. The church should be composed of distinct and unique members but unified in worship and purpose.

Paul furthers this thought on more than one occasion in his writing. In his letter to Ephesus, Paul admonishes the church to maintain the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:3). In Romans 12, he encourages Christ-followers to not think too highly of themselves but instead use their individual gifts for the collective benefit of the church (Romans 12:3-8). In Philippians, Paul challenges believers to look out for the interests of others and follow the example of Jesus (Philippians 2:2-5). Additionally, one of the primary reasons for writing the letters to the church at Corinth was to ask the church to overcome divisions that had arisen between its members (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). However, preservation of this unity must have been difficult for the members of the church considering the frequency Paul addressed the issue (and Jesus's prayer to preserve it).

In the collection for the saints at Jerusalem, Paul encouraged the putting aside of cultural differences, and in some instances racist attitudes, to challenge the gentile believers to provide for the needs of the Jewish believers. Paul's removal of cultural boundaries was a common theme throughout his writing (see Galatians 3:28). The asking for money for believers in Jerusalem was one way in which this unity was supported. As Longenecker notes, "The unity of the church even amidst its diversity was of great importance to Paul, as his strenuous efforts with regard to the Jerusalem collection clearly indicate (cf. Rom 15:25-32; 1 Cor 16:1-3; 2 Cor 9:12-15)."[576]

---

[576] Longenecker, *Galatians*, 49.

Specifically for the church at Corinth, some of the division was due to economics. During the gathering of the love feast and celebration of the Lord's Supper, there were some eating before others. Some who were getting their fill of food while others went without. Paul was writing to correct these issues (1 Corinthians 11:17-34). Paul continues his reasoning touting the importance of the bond of love - even in the face of individual giftedness - in the following chapters (1 Corinthians 12-14). The church gathered in a home for this weekly celebration indicates those with and those without both being in attendance. A rich homeowner (host) would have had association and family connections with other wealthy members. Yet the text is clear in showing that poorer members were there as well. This separation of economic status divided the congregation. Paul's admonition was to eliminate the division and live in unity despite the economic differences. In Paul's culture, the economic differences would have been great. Clearly most people were in the poorer category, but there were some rich members. Paul is using the Lord's Supper to teach the importance of unity within the church. It is worth noting that James battles similar issues in his epistle (James 2:1-9).

It is interesting that in a world where collectivism is such a keystone lifestyle, Paul had to address the economic divisions. Paul refers to Christ-followers in terms like "brothers" and "sisters". Paul writes to the church as a family and teaches the church to act as a family. In doing so, Paul is encouraging the collective ideal into the church. The church exists for the benefit of One - namely Christ. The church does not exist for the individual believer, but for the group collectively. As such, there must be unity, regardless of economic status. In Paul's eyes, being rich or poor does not divide, but the Spirit unifies.

Taking Care of the Marginalized

As the collective identity of the church grew, the desire and need to take care of their own would become more prominent. In the absence of the Temple and organized Judaism, the church became a source of provision for those in need. Especially in the absence of a government sponsored distribution, people needed some way of overcoming their economic challenges. Also, as the church grew and became a reflection of the culture in which it ministered, there would have been those from a variety of economic states. While many people were below the concept of poverty, there were some who had more than others. With Paul's individual admonishment to give to the poor, the church also became a source or provision for those in need.

The first church was confronted with this very issue as the Hellenized widows were left out of the daily distribution. The church established the office of deacons who would organize the distribution to them so the apostles could continue in their ministry of the gospel (Acts 6:1-7). Paul furthered the idea of ministering to marginalized widows within the context of the church (1 Timothy 5:3-16). Paul sets up expectations for the marginalized as well as their families. He gives instructions for the church to care for their needs, but balances that with certain expectations of the widows, the widows' families, and the church.

Paul recognizes the collective nature of society and encourages the church to live out that practice. He views the economic issues facing culture as being partially alleviated through the church organized. "As members of the family of the Church, furthermore, generous sharing of resources will allow the needy in the family to also meet their material needs."[577]

---

[577] Gotsis, *Economic Ideas*, 20.

Summary

While Paul's contribution to much of the church's systematic theology cannot be denied, his theological contribution through economics should not be overlooked. When one considers Paul's writings in their totality, he frequently addresses issues within the economy of his day, while still giving admonition to believers today. However, this admonition is not limited to the words of the apostle Paul. The gospel of Jesus was closely tied to the poor and their economic state. He preached the gospel to the poor in fulfilling His Messianic role. The beatitudes address the poor.[578] Jesus ministered to the poor and marginalized. Subsequently, the early church followed Jesus's example and showed that the gospel results in economic behavior such as the radical sharing of resources. Then one can find that Paul picks up the mantle and expressly communicates the gospel message with close connections to the poor and other economic considerations. Ultimately, Paul's eagerness to remember the poor (Galatians 2:10) reflects Paul's subtle, but overt, work of the gospel in the believer's life.

Many times, Paul's approach goes against the grain of societal norms. This creates conflict for newly converted believers. However, Paul's admonition is rooted in his theology of God. The concept of being content both flew in the face of the overwhelming number of people who were poor, but also gave them comfort in their station of life. Paul's teaching to work hard and avoiding idleness confirms his belief that everything a believer does is for the honor and glory of God. Teaching believers to not pursue possessions or teaching how one handles their possessions supports Paul's theology that God is the owner of it all and pursuit of Him alone is

[578] Most commentators deal in extremes between spiritual poverty and economic poverty in 'either/or' terms. However, there is no reason to think the Jesus could not have meant 'both/and' as He preached to a spiritually bankrupt audience who was also in the lower economical strata of society.

worthy of our attention and effort. However, it is Paul's encouragement to remember the poor that looms largest in his theology.

It is worth noting that today's translated word for charity finds its roots in the Greek "*charis*". *Charis* is most often translated as good will, loving-kindness, favor, and in particular to God's merciful grace. An etymological examination would find that charity comes from the Old English as "benevolence for the poor," and "Christian love in its highest manifestation." If one were to consider that grace (charis) is expressed through charity (Christian love in its highest manifestation) then one can see the connection between the grace demonstrated to believers (gospel) and the believer's action (works). This reflects God's grace and His benevolence. Strictly in Paul's economic terms, Paul notes that our patron (God) has given us benefaction (salvation) that we should reciprocate (return the gift) by means of giving to others (benefactors of the Patron). One can observe that the gospel message of Jesus, the early church, and Paul himself is a gospel message which cannot be separated from love and thus, remembering the poor.

However, in addition to the responsibility of individuals, there is also encouragement from Paul for the corporate group of believers. Paul uses economics to communicate the importance of unity. Jesus prayed for the unity of believers in His final recorded prayer (John 17). Therefore, it must have been an issue that Jesus knew would one day be an issue. Paul addresses this when he writes of the Corinthians' behavior at the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11). Paul highlights the economic status of different groups by providing correction to find unity regardless of financial status.

Paul also uses the church organized to demonstrate how the church is supposed to take care of those in need. While he emphasizes the importance of families to be the first source of help – contextualized for a collective society – he establishes certain criteria for those who qualify and the methods of distribution.

Regardless of individual or collective, how one handles their finances, or the pursuit of finances is directly connected to the gospel and their response. This idea not often connected to the writing of Paul, but his biblical theology on the matter is clear.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

It is essential that quality exposition of biblical text considers the background of the writer and his audience. In examining the background, among other things, thought needs to be given to areas such as archaeology, literary style, and history. However, all of the social sciences need to be considered. One of those sciences studies how man obtains his wants and needs by using resources that are not unlimited. This, by definition, is economics. Additionally, economics is constantly changing. The story of the Bible covers multiple millennia and during that time, man's understanding of using his resources has changed. Therefore, one can see the importance of understanding the economic climate of the writers of the Bible and their audiences. Paul is not excluded from this critical element of study. N.T. Wright implies that a newer and necessary study of Pauline literature should be through a sociological lens.[579] Wright goes so far as to use Meeks as an illustrative example of such sociological studies but argues that more is needed in deepening one's understanding of Paul and his writing.[580]

Effective exegesis helps the reader form a biblical theology. When one understands what the writer is saying, in the world he is saying it, to the audience he is saying it, one can better pull out the principles about God that he is communicating. To that end, if the reader can see Paul's world and the world in which his readers lived, then the interpreter can better understand what God is communicating to them about His desire for their lives. As one becomes more familiar with the economic environment of Paul, he better understands Paul's theology about economics. The reader of Paul begins to understand how Paul can write about hard work (and working for the glory of God in 1 Thessalonians); Christ-sufficiency (and contentment in Philippians);

---

[579] Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 330.

[580] In fact, it is Wright's thoughts about the further sociological background exploration of Paul's writing that served as the inspiration for this author's thesis.

possessions (and their purpose in 1 Timothy); and charity (and its obligation from the gospel in Galatians). These biblical theologies flow out of the text and become clear once the reader better understands Paul's economic world.

Summary

Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to show that the apostle Paul developed a theology of economics based on his own cultural context and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Paul's writing about such issues is often overlooked when examining his contribution to mainline Christian thinking today. Yet, when one examines the text of his letters, it becomes clear that he addresses the issues that his audience faced and are still dealt with today.

Paul, as a Pharisee, was very familiar with both Mosaic Law and the practice of Second Temple Judaism. Though some suggest he originally lived in the rural area surrounding Jerusalem, today's reader is introduced to him, via Luke, living in the urban setting of Jerusalem. However, most of today's exposure to the person of Paul finds him living throughout the Roman empire in various cities from Rome to Antioch. As such, Paul would have been familiar with Second Temple behavior as well as Roman behavior. Additionally, he would have known the differences between rural life and the urban environment.

Perhaps one the greatest insights of Paul's writing is a snapshot into socio-economic strata that existed in his day. From Paul's own words, one can see wealthy benefactors and those who could not take care of themselves. Today's reader finds churches meeting in larger homes which was an implication of wealth. The churches Paul founded were of all walks of life and his writing indicates as much. Thus, Paul would have been aware of the stratification of his churches and their surrounding communities. Paul would have understood the dynamics of the issues creating division in the church at Corinth. He was familiar with the needs of widows in Ephesus. Paul, though not an expert in culture, understood his wide-ranging audience.

Familiar with those differences, as directed by God, Paul writes repeatedly on economic issues. Whether in detail or in passing, in nearly every epistle, Paul deals with some topic in the world of economics. Sometimes the treatise goes to great lengths to establish a theology on a topic. On separate occasions, Paul is more subtle and not as overt. Yet, in all of it, Paul's biblical theology on economics can be placed into a few general categories: Christ-sufficiency, labor, possessions, and charity.

However, it is important to understand that Paul is neither unique nor alone in addressing issues surrounding the economy. A significant amount of Jesus's recorded words dealt with money and issues of the heart. In fact, Matthew 25 records Jesus saying that one of the determining issues that marks a Christ-follower is how he handles his wealth. Additionally, the early church in Jerusalem dealt with economics and provides the church of today with a model of how to handle meeting needs (radical sharing and deacons). Paul's epistolary words are backed up by other letters written by James and John. James describes true religion in economic terms. John uses economic terms to explain true love and fulfillment of the new law.

One of Paul's biggest contributions to biblical theology is the concept of a follower of Jesus being a new creation, off with the old nature and on with the new nature. Multiple times using multiple analogies, Paul frequently writes of how a believer in Christ is a new person. Flowing out of the concept of being made new is behaving differently. Though more than behavior modification, it is expected that a new believer in Christ would act differently. On various occasions, Paul includes economic behavior in that description of how a follower of Christ should act. Thus, Paul's theology of the economy is connected to the truth of the gospel.

Further Study

Even with this examination of Paul's writing, as it relates to economic issues, there remains much to discover about such issues. Some of the issues might fall outside the scope of traditional biblical exposition, but nonetheless would have an impact on the interpretation of scripture.

The first issues that should be explored have a sociological impact on biblical understanding. One of the topics that is underemphasized, especially in Western church interpretation, is the influence of a collective society on the study of biblical meaning. As the world in which the Bible was written - and the audience to whom it was written - was predominantly a collective culture, often that concept is not addressed (or considered) when Scripture is interpreted. In Western culture individualism is an ideal in which the audience lives, and it does not embrace - or understand - the nature of collectivism. A better understanding of this culture and way of living would help the reader to understand passages directed at collective living and behavior. A first sub-genre of this study would be the impact of collective living on the formation of the early church. It would be worth investigating how the collective nature of society influenced the formation of the new church. It would be helpful for interpretation to have a better understanding of how the group outweighed the individual. A second sub-genre could be the cultural formation of a "new" collective as one found themselves in community with others. In today's missionary context, the impact of choosing to follow Christ amid Islamic or Catholic settings is often considered for missiology. Similarly, the founding of the church would have been in like circumstances. The early Christ-followers came out of the collective of their own family to a new family with new priorities and pursuits.

A second sociological issue that impacts interpretation of scripture is stratification. So much of the modern understanding of stratification (both societal and within the church) is based on relatively few sources. In cultural study, one can read early works by Ekkehard, Stegemann, Alföldy, and Lenski.[581] Over time, these works have been refined by Friesen and Longenecker. For a look at the stratification of the church, one predominantly relies on the works of Deissmann, Maggitt, and Meeks.[582] While one criticism is the reliance upon such little research, a bigger question is the underlying assumption that the church is merely a reflection of society. While this may be the case, this takes a relatively modern approach to the social science of stratification. Today's Western church reflects society and its makeup and thus one only need to look at first century stratification and apply it to the church. More sociological study and research is needed to support or refute this theory and application.

Closely associated with stratification, but moving into archaeology is the study of the first century house church. Current house church models are built heavily on the Pompeii model suggested by Oakes.[583] This home is tragically preserved and provides a microcosm of what residential living would have been like in the first century, however it is only a singular home on the Roman coast. It is likely that it was not an accurate representation of a typical home in Jerusalem during Second Temple Judaism. Perhaps homes within the Greek *polis* (Paul's primary ministry centers) would have been different as well. Yet much of modern understanding - and influenced interpretation - is based on this lone model. As more archaeological efforts are

---

[581] See Chapter 2: The Ancient Economy

[582] See Chapter 2: The Ancient Economy

[583] See Chapter 2: The Ancient Economy

carried out, a better understanding of the house church (physical structure, geographic location, access, etc.) could provide a deeper understanding of how the church functioned.

Related to this issue is the idea of examining the house church - specifically its spiritual structure - outside Jerusalem. Though Paul's writing was almost exclusively to readers outside of Jerusalem, interpreters are consistently relying on Luke's understanding of how the church functioned in Acts. Interpreters often use the Jerusalem model to help people understand how the church carried itself and served its community. Yet a better understanding of the house church in the Greco-Roman context would help with interpretation of Paul's writing. This is another archaeological effort as more discoveries are made.

Perhaps the next phase of this thesis is to examine Paul's impact on the overall economy of his day. One might argue that Paul's writing was subversive, and thus transformative, on such issues of slavery, spousal relations, and parental issues (*Haustafeln*). In doing so, they would have to examine the long-term impact of his writing on his readers and their influence on their culture. While this could happen, it clearly would take an in-depth study over centuries of time to find its origins in his words. The same might be said of Paul's writing on economics. Much like one could argue that Constantine's model for taking care of the poor was built on Paul's example,[584] one might trace the impact of his words on self-sufficiency, labor efforts, and charity on society's behavior. Again, this would have to be an in-depth study of history and sociology over several centuries looking at the way in which Paul's words changed his audience and then how they changed their communities.

However, the greatest opportunity that exists for further study is for interpreters to use this base knowledge of Paul's world and the economics of his day and apply it to their

---

[584] See Chapter 4: Early Practices

interpretation of "non-economic" passages. Paul did not write in a vacuum. The economic conditions in which he lived would have had great influence on all that he wrote. On multiple occasions, this paper has set forth an example of this.[585]

An understanding of Paul's economic world could help a Bible interpreter to better understand passages like Romans 12:1. On the surface, this verse does not have economic impact, but it demonstrates clearly how Paul's economic world influences his writing. Paul writes of "rational (or reasonable) service" to God in exchange for His mercy. This is a demonstration of the asymmetrical reciprocity in gift giving expected in Paul's cultural context. A second example is found in Ephesians 2:8-9. On this occasion, Paul is helping the reader to better understand that God's gift is free without any expectation of reciprocity. The reader, in their context, would not have embraced a totally free gift without any strings attached. As such, Paul has to restate multiple times that God's gift of grace is, indeed, free. These are merely two examples of how an understanding of Paul's economic world influences both his writing and its interpretation. Another example, like 1 Corinthians 11,[586] which is a passage on the Lord's Supper has, as its core economics. When one reads Paul's writing, they can run the text through the filter of Paul's cultural context and better understand (and thus interpret) why Paul wrote what he did.

Application for the Church

When one considers the application for the "church", one must first ask the question: which church? Does this mean the *ekklesia*, or called out ones, meaning the general body of

[585] See Chapter 3: Patronage

[586] See Chapter 5: Paul and Economics

Christ-followers? Or does this apply to the church organized, or a local body of believers gathered together? In this instance of "Application for the Church" it means both.

For the church organized, there are several points of application. Perhaps the first place to start is that interpreters need to understand the distinction from the Western culture and the Mediterranean culture. The Bible is applicable to all people for all time, but the original audience to whom it was written was in a totally different world than the Western church of today. One of the biggest differences is in the collective nature of the society of the initial writers and hearers. Though writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the authors of the Bible would have run everything through the filter of the world in which they lived. The same could be said of the hearers. As such, today's Western reader would benefit from the understanding that their world is different. About passages that talk about personal interaction, ministering to others, and generally "one another" passages, it would be helpful for readers to understand the collective nature of society in the region and time of the Bible's writing.

Another thing an interpreter (Bible study teacher, preacher, etc.) can do to apply some of these ideas is to refrain from using (and thinking) in terms of capitalism and Marxism. These economic stereotypes are nearly 2,000 years after the time of Paul. When Paul writes, he has no frame of reference for either idea. Additionally, his audience - according to the Friesen scale - would have been primarily seeking survival and not plotting for profit. Additionally, the sharing of resources was driven by love because of the gospel's work in a believer's life, and not necessarily a desire for equitable living conditions. Modern readers have a difficult time not allowing those filters to influence interpretation, but interpreters must work hard to avoid the temptation to use the lenses of capitalism and Marxism.

The church organized can also apply many of Paul's teachings through organized systems. Much like Paul adapted taking care of the widows (Acts 6) into an organized system of action (1 Timothy 5), the modern church can facilitate the ideas put forth by Paul into organized action.[587] To help believers work and provide for themselves, churches could provide work training or apprenticeship opportunities so that they could learn and practice the skills for employment. Churches could facilitate its members to partner and "adopt" others who need work or develop new skills for getting a job. Additionally, churches (who do not already) could implement ministries to help meet the needs of the poor. Food pantries, bill assistance, and/or clothing closets are all ministries that churches might be able to administer to "remember the poor" (Galatians 2:10). As some have noted, many churches that do carry out these ministries often use Jesus as an example. While not wrong, it is important to understand Jesus did so fulfilling Messianic prophecy. The epistles, and Paul specifically, often take the words and actions of Jesus and put them into the context of the actions of Christ-followers. Paul shows an example to provide a structured program to monitor and help those who are using the assistance. These examples strengthen the argument that believers and congregations should engage in such ministries.

Churches could also give financially to those in need, or adapting to modern times, give to organizations that deal directly with the poor. Many times, churches give to missions - which they should - and much of what's left goes to budget or buildings. Giving to the poor fulfills the heart of Paul and demonstrates the gospel's work in believers' lives. Tangentially, churches can give to congregations that are suffering financially. This follows the model of Paul's collection

[587] It is duly noted that there are many congregations which choose to engage in these types of ministries. However, those churches are likely in the minority.

for the saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8). This offering was not missions, but instead it was charitable as the church in Jerusalem was facing financial hardship.

Finally, churches could take the unusual and faith-required step of changing its model and organized structure and become more like the first century house church model. By decentralizing its resources and empowering people to serve as church leaders, the church could then begin to meet the needs of individuals much like the church at Jerusalem did. The church organized would begin to function much like the churches to whom Paul ministered throughout the Roman empire. A model worth examining is We Are Church, started by Francis Chan in Northern California. He left the large church and after a process of self-discovery overseas and through study of the New Testament, Chan launched a new model of house churches. Though not unique in the West, and not throughout the world, the Chan's model does track the mindset transition from large corporate church to house churches. One could make an argument that churches might need to consider this transition due to declining attendance, social pressure, and a growing persecution. Perhaps difficult circumstances might lead the Western church into a state that more effectively operates like a first century church model.

For the church as a collection of called out ones, application is equally important, but perhaps less structured and organized. As individual believers, looking for opportunities to be connected to a community is important. In that community of believers, communal sharing and giving to meet needs is more likely. In a smaller group of connectedness, needs are more freely expressed. As needs are shared, the ability to meet those needs are unencumbered with red tape and organizational structures thus allowing believers to live out the gospel more freely. While pragmatically community groups allow to serve the poor, perhaps a greater outcome is the heart change that takes place in the members of that group. Believers gathered become more sensitive to meeting needs and more aware of needs that surround them outside the group. As such, they can better fulfill the law of love (1 John 3) and take care of the poor.

Additionally, individuals need to embrace the concept of the fully gospel-altered life. Believers need to understand that the gospel is not simply a "get-out-of-hell card" but instead one has been born again and is given new life. This new life results in new behavior. The gospel should change everything about how a person acts and carries themselves. The apostle James is well-known for his teaching on faith without works (James 2). Oftentimes James is placed in an adversarial position against Paul in this regard, but the reality is that they are in lockstep together on the principle. To facilitate the process of believers living out the gospel message of life change, Bible teachers and interpreters should distance themselves from easy-believism and instead teach the ideals of the gospel. In doing so, believers would be encouraged to the ideas espoused by Paul regarding economics: the importance of work, the true purpose of possessions, contentment in Christ, and the need for charity.

Bibliography

Anders, Max and Knute Larson. Holman New Testament Commentary - *1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon.* Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000.

Barclay, John M. G.. *Paul and the Gift*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2015.

Beale, G. K. *Colossians and Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019.

Betz, Hans Dieter. *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: a Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016.

Betz, Hans Dieter. *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016.

Blanton, Thomas R., and Raymond Pickett. *Paul and Economics: A Handbook*, edited by Thomas R. Blanton, Raymond Pickett. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2017.

Blomberg, Craig L. *1 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994.

Blomberg, Craig L., and Mariam J. Kamell. *James*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008.

Bock, Darrell L. *Ephesians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Vol. 10. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2019.

Boer, Roland and Christina Petterson. *Time of Troubles: A New Economic Framework for Early Christianity*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.

Bruce, F. F. *The Epistle to the Galatians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1982.

Cohick, Lynn H. *The Letter to the Ephesians*. Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2020.

Conzelmann, Hans. *1 Corinthians: A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2016.

Davids, Peter H., Robert W. Yarbrough, and Douglas J. Moo. *1 & 2 Peter, 1, 2, & 3 John, Jude*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016.

Davids, Peter H. *A Theology of James, Peter, and Jude*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

Davies, John K. "Linear and Nonlinear Flow Models for Ancient Economies," *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005.

DeMaris, Richard E. and Dietmar Neufeld. *Understanding the Social World of the New Testament*. New York: Routledge, 2010.

DeSilva, David Arthur. *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity Unlocking New Testament Culture*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2022.

Dibelius, Martin, and Hans Conzelmann. *The Pastoral Epistles; a Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972.

Downs, David J. *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016, 15–17.

Dunn, James D. G. *Romans 9-16*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018.

Dunn, James D. G. and John W. Rogerson. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible: Romans*. Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2021.

Esler, Philip Francis. *2 Corinthians: A Social Identity Commentary*. New York: T&T Clark, 2021.

Esler, Philip F. *The Early Christian World*, edited by Esler, Philip F. Second; 2; ed. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Esler, Philip F. *The First Christians in their Social Worlds: Social-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation.* Taylor and Francis, 2002.

Fee, Gordon D. Paul's *Letter to the Philippians*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 1995.

Fiensy, David A. *Christian Origins and the Ancient Economy*. Cambridge, UK: James Clarke, 2014.

Finley, M. I. and American Council of Learned Societies. *The Ancient Economy*. Updated. Vol. 48; Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999.

Friesen, S. J. "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament*, 26(3). (2004). 323–361.

Gotsis, George, and Sarah Drakopoulou Dodd. "Economic Ideas in the Pauline Epistles of the New Testament." *History of Economics Review* 35, no. 1 (2002): 13–34.

Green, Joel B., and McDonald, Lee Martin, eds. *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013.

Hafemann, Scott J. *2 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text -- to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Harris, Murray J. *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2005.

Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin, and Glenn W. Barker. *Philippians*. Nashville: Nelson, 2004.

Hays, Christopher M. "The Early Church, the Roman State and Ancient Civil Society: Whose Responsibility Are the Poor?." *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*. London: T&T Clark, 2019.

Hazlitt, Henry. The Conquest of Poverty. Irvington-on-Hudson, N.Y: Foundation for Economic Education, 1996.

Hock, Ronald. *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry Tentmaking and Apostleship*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1980.

Hollander, David B., Thomas R. Blanton IV, and John T. Fitzgerald. *The Extramercantile Economies of Greek and Roman Cities: New Perspectives on the Economic History of Classical Antiquity*. Milton, UK: Taylor and Francis, 2019.

Holloway, Paul A. *Philippians: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2017.

Holmes, Michael William. *1 and 2 Thessalonians: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text-- to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998.

Jewett, Robert, Roy David Kotansky, and Eldon Jay. Romans: A Commentary. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007.

Jobes, Karen H. *1, 2, and 3 John*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014.

Keener, Craig S. *Galatians: A Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2019.

Keener, Craig S. *Romans: A New Covenant Commentary*. Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2009

Keener, Craig S. *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014.

Keown, Mark J. *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to its Background, Theology, and Themes (Volume II: The Pauline Letters)*. Ashland, OH: Lexham Press, 2022.

Knight, George W. *The Pastoral Epistles: a Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1992.

Knoppers, Gary N., Ehud Ben Zvi, and Marvin Lloyd Miller. *The Economy of Ancient Judah in its Historical Context*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015.

Kruse, Colin G. *The Letters of John*. Second Edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020.

Lenski, G., Nolan, P. and Lenski, J. *Human Societies: An Introduction into Macro Sociology*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1995.

Liefeld, Walter L. *1 and 2 Timothy/Titus: The NIV Application Commentary from Biblical Text--to Contemporary Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1999.

Longenecker, B. W. "Exposing the Economic Middle: A Revised Economy Scale for the Study of Early Urban Christianity." *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 31, no. 3 (2009): 243–78.

Longenecker, Bruce W. and Kelly D. Liebengood. *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*. Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Pub, 2009.

Longenecker, Bruce W. *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub, 2010.

Longenecker, Richard N. *Galatians*. Dallas: Word Books, 1990.

Longenecker, Richard N. *The Epistle to the Romans: a Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.

Martin, Ralph P., Nancy L. deClaisse-Walford, and Lynn Allan Losie. *2 Corinthians*. Grand Rapids, MI: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2014.

McKnight, Scot. *The Letter to Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017.

Meeks, Douglas M. "Economics in the Christian Scriptures," *Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics*. pp. 3-21 Oxford, UK: Oxford University Publishers, 2014.

Meeks, Wayne A. *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul*. Second Edition. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003.

Meggitt, Justin. *Paul, Poverty and Survival*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998.

Moo, Douglas J., and Andreas J. Köstenberger. *A Theology of Paul and His Letters: the Gift of the New Realm in Christ*. Edited by Andreas J. Köstenberger. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021.

Moo, Douglas J. *James an Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Letters to the Colossians and to Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2008.

Moo, Douglas J. *The Letter to the Romans*. Second edition. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018.

Morgan, Christopher W., and Peterson, Robert A. *The Glory of God and Paul*. Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2022.

Mounce, William D., Glenn W. Barker, David A. Hubbard, and Bruce M. Metzger. *Pastoral Epistles*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000.

Oakman, Douglas. *Jesus and the Peasants*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2008.

Oakes, Peter. *Empire, Economics, and the New Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020.

Oakes, Peter. *Galatians*. Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Publishing Group, 2015.

Oslington, Paul, The Oxford Handbook of Christianity and Economics. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Porter, Stanley E. The Apostle Paul His Life, Thought, and Letters. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.

Posner, Raphael. "Charity." *Encyclopaedia Judaica*. 2nd ed., vol. 4, New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007, 569-575.

Robinson, Thomas A. *Who were the First Christians?: Dismantling the Urban Thesis*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Rosner, Brian. 2003. “Paul’s Ethics.” *The Cambridge Companion to St Paul*, edited by James D. G. Dunn, 212–24. Cambridge Companions to Religion. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Saller, Richard P. *Personal Patronage Under the Early Empire*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Satlow, Michael L. *Judaism and the Economy: A Sourcebook*. Boca Raton, FL: Routledge, 2019

Satlow, Michael L. *The Gift in Antiquity*. West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013.

Scheffler, Eben. “Caring for the Needy in the Acts of the Apostles.” Neotestamentica 50, no. 3 (2016): 131–66.

Schellenberg, Ryan S. "Subsistence, Swapping, and Paul's Rhetoric of Generosity." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 137, no. 1 (2018): 215-34

Schreiner, Thomas R. Paul, Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ a Pauline Theology. Second edition. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2020.

Schwartz, Seth. *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society?: Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009.

Stansell, Gary. "The Gift in Ancient Israel." *Semeia*, no. 87 (1999): 65-74

Still, Todd and David Horrell, *After the First Urban Christians: The Socio-Historical Study of Pauline Christianity Twenty-Five Years Later.* New York, NY: Continuum, 36-59, 2009.

Taylor, Mark Edward. *1 Corinthians*. Vol. 28. Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2014.

Theissen, Gerd. *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982.

Thiselton, Anthony C. *The First Epistle to the Corinthians: a Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2000.

Thompson, James and Bruce W. Longenecker. *Philippians and Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016.

Walton, Steve and Hannah Swithinbank. *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019.

Walton, Steve, Paul Trebilco, and David W. J. Gill. *The Urban World and the First Christians*. Chicago: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2017.

Witherington, Ben, III. *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006.

Witherington, Ben, III and Cindy Kiple. *Letters and Homilies for Hellenized Christians: Volume 1, A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on Titus, 1-2 Timothy, and 1-3 John*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006.

Witherington, Ben, III. *The Letters to Philemon, the Colossians, and the Ephesians: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on the Captivity Epistles*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2007.

Wright, N. T. *Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2015.

Wright, Paul H. *Holman Illustrated Guide to Biblical Geography Reading the Land*. Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2020.