Evangelical Review of Theology

A Global Forum

Volume 42 · Number 1 · January 2018

See back cover for Table of Contents

WEA

WORLD EVANGELICAL ALLIANCE

Theological Commission

Published by

Paternoster:
thinking faith

ERT (2018) 42:1, 4-20

Missions and Money: Revisiting Pauline Practice and Principles

Craig Ott

Few topics raise the temperature of a conversation among missionaries and mission leaders as quickly as money. The question of how to best allocate funds for the missionary enterprise is widely debated. Moreover, positions on many other theological and practical questions such as ecclesial unity, Christian generosity, stewardship, and understandings of wealth and poverty are often expressed most concretely in the use of money and how it is deployed in Christian mission and international ecumenical relations.

In global missions, the complexity of money management rises exponentially as money moves from one location to another—crossing oceans and cultures, often distributed by foreign agents with foreign agendas, and impacting local ministry in a host of beneficial and detrimental ways. The practical questions that emerge as a result are almost endless.

The answers to these questions will depend on local circumstances and conditions. But are there biblical-theological guidelines that can provide general guidance? More specifically, what can we learn from the practice and teachings of the apostle Paul regarding such matters?

The literature on these issues has presented a wide range of divergent and often contradictory proposals. Considerable empirical and historical research has been conducted on the use of foreign funds for advancing mission-related ministries. But relatively few New Testament scholars or missiologists have attempted a comprehensive discussion of Paul's views regarding the use of money in his missionary undertakings.[1]

The present essay summarizes the most salient features of Paul's practice and teaching regarding money and the missionary task. It identifies broad principles but does not attempt to generate specific implementation strategies.

It is difficult to draw direct parallels between Pauline practices in the first century and missionary practice today

1 Noteworthy examples include Christopher R. Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005); Verlyn D. Verbrugge and Keith R. Krell, *Paul and Money: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Apostle's Teachings and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015); and David E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy* (New York: Bloomsberry T&T Clark, 2013).

Craig Ott (MDiv, PhD, Trinity Evangelical) is professor of mission and intercultural studies and director of the PhD program in intercultural studies at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, USA. He has authored and edited numerous books, including most recently The Mission of the Church: Five Views in Conversation *(reviewed elsewhere in this issue).*

regarding the use of money, for several reasons. First, the gap between rich and poor nations is much greater today than it was in the first century. This inequality complicates international financial relations between wealthier and poorer churches.

Furthermore, Paul's example does not neatly fit the categories or practices of typical mission work today. For example, Paul received financial support from the church that he had founded in Philippi (Phil 4:14–19), but he also worked at times to support himself, and most leaders of the early mission churches were not paid. Moreover, the churches met in private homes. Therefore, they had minimal need to pay salaries and building costs, and most church-giving was devoted to charitable causes.

Today's mission activity also includes a host of ministries not reflected in Paul's pioneer mission work, such as theological education and medical work.

Finally, missions in the twenty-first century are 'from everywhere to everywhere', making distinctions between sending and receiving churches ambiguous. Ironically, the only clear New Testament example of funds moving from one church to another was not from a sending church to a mission church but in the reverse direction: the Gentile churches of Macedonia and Achaia contributing relief funds to the Jerusalem church (hereafter 'the Jerusalem collection').

In view of all these gaps between the early church's situation and ours, we need to approach the discussion of Pauline mission and money in a principled manner in terms of underlying motivations and goals, rather than merely attempting to imitate Pauline practice as it appears on the surface.

I will approach the topic first by considering money as a means of demonstrating compassion, followed by an examination of the extent to which such giving should lead to financial equality among all Christians. I will then discuss the responsibility of financial self-sustenance in relation to giving, and I will close by examining various aspects of financial support for itinerant missionaries in light of Paul's example.

I. Money as a Means of Demonstrating Compassion

Both the Old and New Testaments repeatedly call for compassion regarding the needs of the less fortunate. As Bruce W. Longenecker has amply demonstrated, the concern for the poor so evident in the Old Testament was also practised in the New Testament church.[2] In Titus 3:14, Paul calls believers 'to provide for urgent needs', and in Romans 12:13 he exhorts; 'Share with the Lord's people who are in need'. He gladly remembered the poor in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10) and practised the giving of alms (Acts 24:17). New Testament churches provided financial support for orphans and widows locally (Acts 6:1; 1 Tim 5:3–16; Jas 1:27). A virtue of hard work is that one 'may have something to share with those in need' (Eph 4:28).

The collection of funds in Gentile churches to assist the poor in Jerusa-

2 Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2010).

lem is the only New Testament example of one church giving to meet the needs of the poor in another church. There were at least two such collections: one in Antioch, in response to the prophecy of an impending famine in Jerusalem (Acts 11:27–30), and a larger collection among the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (Rom 15:26–28; 1 Cor 16:1–4; 2 Cor 8–9).

The Jerusalem collection had several unique features, indicating that charity was not the only and perhaps not even the primary purpose of the offering.[3] The Antiochene and Macedonian churches were probably experiencing the same famine and similar persecution as the Jerusalem church. Thus they gave 'in the midst of a very severe trial … and their extreme poverty' (2 Cor 8:2).[4] The Gentile churches were no doubt stretched in providing for their own poor. Although some members of the churches were better off, generally Christians 'shared fully in the bleak material existence that was the lot of the non-elite inhabitants of the Empire'.[5] This may explain why, apart from the Jerusalem collection, we do not read in the New Testament of churches taking collections to assist other churches. It also reinforces the view that the Jerusalem collection had reasons beyond charity.

One reason explicitly mentioned in Romans 15:27 is the material payment of a spiritual debt that the Gentiles owed to the Jews. The collection also indicated unity between Gentile and Jewish Christians. Bengt Holmberg writes; 'The real significance of the Collection is not the money as such or the amount of help it will bring, but the demonstration of unity between Jews and Gentiles within the Church.' He concludes, 'The Collection for the Jerusalem church is thus to be understood as a sign that Gentile Christians have been converted to the same faith as the Jewish Christians and are incorporated into the same new covenant.'[6]

Whatever other reasons there may have been for the Jerusalem collection, it was still also an expression of compassion with the goals of alleviating the needs of the 'poor' in Jerusalem (Rom 15:26, Gal 2:10) and 'supplying the needs of the Lord's people' (2 Cor 9:12).

Despite the unique features of the Jerusalem collection and the lack of other New Testament examples of inter-church financial aid, we cannot conclude that churches today should never send financial aid to another church. Paul's lengthy exhortation encouraging the Corinthian believers to participate in the Jerusalem collection demonstrates that such giving is a work of sincere love (2 Cor 8:8, 24), an expression of worship and thanksgiving (8:5; 9:11–13), a reflection of the grace of Christ (8:6, 9; 9:14), and a sign of Christian unity (8:13–14).

Exhortations such as 1 John 3:17–

3 See Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, 130–46, for a summary of the suggested purposes of the collection.

4 See Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1966), 138–39.

5 Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 153.

6 Bengt Holmberg, *Paul and Power: The Structure of Authority in the Primitive Church as Reflected in the Pauline Epistles* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 38, 40. See also Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money,* 141.

18 cannot be limited to caring only for local needs: 'If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.' Similarly, Galatians 6:10 exhorts, 'Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to *all people*, especially to those who belong to the family of believers'. The terminology of 'doing good' (*to kalon poiountes*) carried in the ancient world the sense of bestowing material benefit.[7]

Once we have established the moral obligation to assist the poor and disadvantaged, there remains the practical question of what *kind* of giving actually helps those in need and does not actually disempower or victimize them, thus further aggravating their situation.[8] We might make further distinctions between immediate emergency relief and longer-term reconstruction or economic development efforts. But the New Testament does not explicitly address these questions.

Notably, financial assistance or charitable aid was nowhere used in the New Testament for the purposes of persuading unbelievers to become followers of Christ. In the case of the Jerusalem collection, the recipients were already Christians. Of course, numerous biblical texts commend giving alms and caring for those in need, even to those who might be considered enemies (e.g. Lk 10:25–37; Rom 12:19–21). But there is no direct linkage between such acts of compassion and evangelism. In any case, charitable giving without the expectation of receiving something in return was virtually unknown in the Greco-Roman world,[9] so any Christian charity would have been a powerful testimony to the grace of God in Jesus Christ.

II. Sharing Money with the Goal of Equality

In 2 Corinthians 8:13–15, Paul appeals to the Corinthian believers to contribute to the Jerusalem collection:

> Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality, as it is written: 'The one who gathered much did not have too much, and the one who gathered little did not have too little'.

Attempts to overly spiritualize this passage ignore the obvious context of financial giving, supplying material need in the face of hardship.[10] It would

7 Longenecker, *Remember the Poor,* 142.

8 Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *Helping Hurts: How To Alleviate Poverty Without Hurting the Poor—and Yourself* (Chicago: Moody, 2009); Robert D. Lupton, *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How To Reverse It)* (New York: HarperOne, 2011).

9 John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster John Knox, 1986), 64.

10 For example, Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1965), 87–88, argues that the two Greek terms translated 'equality' in verses 13–14 carry primarily a sense of juridical equality between Jew and Gentile, not financial equality.

seem inconsistent with the principle of compassion for one church to live in abundance while ignoring the needs of another church facing poverty or hunger.

But how far does this call for equality among Christians reach? Does the call to share apply only to cases of severe poverty, emergency or crisis? Or should wealthier churches always send money to poorer churches to equalize any economic imbalance, whatever the specific nature or cause of the need may be?

Before addressing Paul's call for 'equality' directly, let us consider the pooling of wealth and possessions that occurred in the communal life of the early Jerusalem church. This indeed led to at least some equalizing of rich and poor, so that 'there were no needy persons among them', as wealthy Christians sold their possessions and distributed money 'to anyone who had need'. All this was a sign of God's grace at work among them (Acts 2:44–45; 4:32–37).

This somewhat idealized depiction of the Jerusalem church may reflect a fulfilment of the Old Testament's Promised Land promise that there would be no poor among the people of God (e.g. Deut 15:4),[11] or it could mirror a Greek ideal of friendship.[12] At least some Christians in Jerusalem did continue to possess private property (Acts 5:1; 12:12).

Although, as noted above, other churches in the New Testament cared for financial needs of the disadvantaged, they do not appear to have engaged in communal sharing to the same extent as that described in the Jerusalem church. Acts 11:29 indicates that giving in Antioch for the Jerusalem church was 'as each one was able', indicating the existence of private property and, apparently, no common fund. Believers were expected to work to provide for their own families.

Since the process of collecting funds from the Gentile churches for Jerusalem continued over several years, the need was probably ongoing, though not devastatingly acute. Greater urgency would surely have been evident in Paul's call for offerings had the Jerusalem Christians been facing starvation. Thus, the call for equality in 2 Corinthians 8 does not seem to apply only to dire emergency situations. The context speaks also of a reciprocity, in that the recipient would in some way also supply the donor's need (v. 14).

In this text and others, the focus of financial sharing in the New Testament is consistently on meeting the need of those unable to provide for themselves. The poverty in the Jerusalem church was attributable in part to famine (Acts 11:28) and in part to persecution, both causes largely beyond their control.

As radical as this Christian charity was, the New Testament contains no call for a general redistribution of wealth. However, it does clearly presume a moral obligation to alleviate suffering through sharing by those who have abundance. 'Mutual interdependence' may be a better way than 'equality' of framing the financial relationship

11 David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 205–6.

12 Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sharing Possessions* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 111–22.

between Christian communities.[13]

Were these offerings for Jerusalem isolated, temporary acts of charity to meet a specific need or part of an ongoing effort to support the poor in Jerusalem? The collection described in Acts 11:27–29 was clearly in response to the prediction of a famine, which may also have been the case for the later Jerusalem collection. David J. Downs writes:

> There is reason to believe, in fact, that the Pauline collection for Jerusalem was a one-time caritative project. In his discussion of his plans to deliver the fund in Rom 15:25–32, Paul does not indicate that he plans to continue his fundraising efforts after this journey to Jerusalem, nor does he encourage the church in Rome to begin gathering a follow-up offering for Jerusalem.[14]

Yet Longenecker argues that the Jerusalem collection was not an isolated case but a typical example of charitable giving in the early church.[15] Second Corinthians 9:13 speaks of 'generosity in sharing with them and *with everyone else*', which may indicate a sharing with churches other than the Jerusalem church. In either case, the Jerusalem collection had the purpose of alleviating the suffering of others, which should not be confused with a general redistribution of wealth between rich and poor churches.

We can conclude from the example of the Jerusalem collection that churches can be expected to share their abundance with others who have need. The situation need not be severely acute to warrant assistance, but neither does it necessarily entail an ongoing subsidy or wealth redistribution. The next principle to be discussed, that believers should generally provide for their own needs, places the principle of equality in a larger perspective.

III. The Responsibility of Financial Self-Sustenance

The Jerusalem collection was intended to alleviate suffering and poverty that was not the church's own fault. By contrast, we read stern exhortations under threat of church discipline that individuals must work to provide for their own families (2 Thes 3:6–15; 1 Tim 5:8). Even widows were expected to provide for themselves. Only older widows without family members able to provide for them were eligible to receive financial support from the church (1 Tim 5:3–16).

Thus, financial assistance, even when motivated by compassion, should not undermine individual willingness to work and provide for one's own needs. Christian charity should be marked by voluntary generosity (2 Cor 9:5–6, 11), especially among the wealthy (1 Tim 6:17–18). But this generosity should be directed towards those genuinely in need and unable to provide for themselves.

Paul presents his own example of self-support as evidence that one should not look to others for sustenance (2 Thes 3:7–10; cf. 1 Thes 2:9). Working with one's hands has the

13 Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival,* 157–64.

14 David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, WUNT 2:248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008), 25.

15 Longenecker, *Remember the Poor,* 141–56.

added benefit 'that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders' (1 Thes 4:11–12). Thus, hard work and self-sustenance commend the gospel.

Verbrugge and Krell comment; 'The upper classes of Rome and Greece despised manual labour. That is why they owned so many slaves. They hated to work with their hands. But Christianity brought in a new ethic-based on personal responsibility and hard work. Jesus was a carpenter and Paul himself was a tentmaker/leatherworker.'[16]

This view reflects the teaching of the Old Testament. The Proverbs continually praise hard work, diligence and planning while condemning sloth and wastefulness (e.g. Prov 10:4; 14:23; 19:15; 21:5). In addition, the prophets decried practices that enslaved the vulnerable and called for reforming systemic injustice or corruption that creates poverty and exploits the poor.

Sloth and wastefulness are not the only sources of poverty. The Old Testament unequivocally condemns corrupt leaders and those who exploit workers and keep them in poverty (e.g. Prov 14:31; 22:22–23; Is 10:1–2; Amos 5:10–12). The way towards equality of material wealth is not through redistribution, but rather by creating equal opportunity for honest work at a fair wage.

It would seem consistent to apply this principle of self-sustenance not only to individuals, but also to churches. This means that each church should provide for its own ongoing needs, including providing for its own poor. Only exceptional circumstances, such as an emergency or ongoing crisis, justify outside assistance. But in such cases, the goal would always be to alleviate immediate need and then to help the church (or believers in the church) soon to become financially self-sufficient again.

In the world of mission funding, giving to crisis relief is consistent with the principle of compassion; giving to economic development (seed funding, micro-loans, development projects, job training, etc.) aimed at helping people to become financially self-sustaining would be in keeping with this principle of self-support. Facilitating self-help empowers and does not create ongoing dependency.

As I will discuss below, ministers of the gospel are worthy of financial remuneration for their service. Most itinerant missionaries would need financial assistance due to their mobile lifestyle. In Paul's case, the necessary tools for his trade of leatherworking were easily portable, allowing him to take his trade with him and support himself during his missionary travels.[17] But those formerly employed in fishing (like the apostle Peter) or farming would not have this option available and would have depended on others for support.[18]

Accordingly, it is acceptable for local church leaders either to be self-supporting or to receive support from

16 Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money,* 209.

17 Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 25.

18 See Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 37–38; J. Andrew Kirk, 'Did Officials in the New Testament Church Receive a Salary?' *Expository Times* 84, no. 4 (1973): 108.

their congregations. Whatever remuneration they receive should come from those who are served by their ministry (Gal 6:6; 1 Tim 5:17–18). This also keeps leaders locally accountable.

In pioneer mission work, there is not yet a local constituency of believers who could support their leaders through their offerings. Such a setting might warrant outside support for the initial establishment of a church. However, once a ministry has been started by outside funding, making the transfer to self-support can be difficult. Local believers must be taught and motivated to sacrificially take up the responsibility of supporting their own ministries. That is why many have suggested that it is better not to provide any outside financial support for indigenous ministries (imitating Paul's practice), but instead to grow the ministry solely on the basis of the resources available locally.[19]

The ideal of self-support, as part of the three-self goal for mission churches—self-propagation, self-support, and self-governance—has been critiqued as rooted in the Western value of independence rather than in biblical teaching.[20] But the biblical instructions cited here caution against rejecting the self-support goal too cavalierly as a Western invention.

The principle of self-sufficiency admittedly stands in tension with the goal of financial equality. It is not always easy to discern when sharing of resources is justified and when restraint for the purpose of promoting self-sufficiency is the more expedient and loving response. This tension fuels the fires of many debates about missions and money. Based on the biblical evidence, we should differentiate between inter-church aid to alleviate poverty (for which there is precedent in the Jerusalem collection) and mission giving to support local leaders (for which there is no clear biblical precedent).

But as indicated above, rigidly imitating Paul's practice from the first century will not always contribute towards accomplishing biblical purposes under the radically different conditions prevailing today. These tensions will not always be easily resolved, and we must seek the Lord's guidance and wisdom to discover the best means to accomplish biblical ends.

IV. Money to Send Missionaries and Support Spiritual Leaders

I turn now to the use of funds in supporting cross-cultural missionaries and Christian workers, with a focus on pioneering situations. Although Paul doubtless lived modestly, the cost of his travels, correspondence and books would have been considerable.[21] 'Paul's expenses may have been modest by today's standards, but compared with the financial requirements of the original

19 For example, Roland Allen, *Missionary Methods: St. Paul's or Ours?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962 [1912]), 52; Little, *Mission in the Way of Paul*, 46.

20 For a brief history and critique of the three-self formula, see Peter Beyerhaus, 'Three Selves Formula: Is It Built on Biblical Foundations?' *International Review of Mission* 53, no. 212 (1964): 393–407.

21 See Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, 100-102.

mission in Palestine, his missionary activity was expensive indeed.'[22] What can we learn about missionary funding from Paul's example? Several underlying principles can be observed.

1. Missionaries and ministers are worthy of financial support

Paul made a strong case to the Corinthian church that he had the right to receive financial support from them (1 Cor 9:1–14). He declared; 'The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel' (v. 14). Galatians 6:6 also seems to affirm the appropriateness of spiritual leaders in a local church receiving remuneration from the beneficiaries of their teaching.

1 Timothy 5:17–18 makes the strongest argument: 'The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." ' Verse 18a quotes Deuteronomy 25:4, which Paul also quotes in 1 Corinthians 9:9 with reference to financial remuneration. Verse 18b speaks of a worker deserving wages, a proverb also quoted in Luke 10:7 with the clear meaning of material provision.

These considerations suggest strongly that the 'double honour' does not refer simply to high respect. Andrew Kirk has argued, however, that full support was given only to itinerant missionaries who would have had limited capacity for self-support.[23] Local resident elders would not have received regular salaries, but only something like honoraria for specific services.

Paul received financial support from the Philippian church while in Thessalonica (Phil 4:16), although it was apparently not enough to fully support him, since he also laboured there to support himself (1 Thes 1:9). Paul initially supported himself while in Corinth, but 'When Silas and Timothy came from Macedonia, Paul devoted himself exclusively to preaching, testifying to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah' (Acts 18:3–5). The reason was that, as Paul states, 'the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed' (2 Cor 11:9a).

By implication, Paul preferred to devote his energy full-time to gospel ministry. However, he did so only when support was available *not* from the Corinthians or Thessalonians themselves, but from other churches (a curiosity that we will address below).

The concept of *koinōnia* and related terms describes the Philippian church's partnership with Paul in the gospel, which included financial assistance and was unlike that of any other church (Phil 1:7; 4:14–15). This language of partnership or fellowship was used also to describe the 'contribution' (*koinōnian*) of the Gentle churches to the Jerusalem collection (Rom 15:26), and of the grace of giving towards the collection as 'the privilege of sharing [*koinōnian*] in this service to the Lord's people' in 2 Corinthians 8:4.

22 Jouette M. Bassler, *God's Mammon: Asking for Money in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1991), 64.

23 Kirk, 'Did Officials?'

Several authors have suggested that the somewhat technical, business terminology used in Philippians 4 points to a formal financial partnership between Paul and the Philippian church.[24] This view probably overstates the evidence.[25] We have no details as to the amount or frequency of funds sent. Paul's reluctance to presume upon the generosity of the Philippians would speak against such a business-type partnership. Their partnership included the financial gift, but it was more than the gift alone.[26]

More importantly, the partnership was not merely between Paul and the Philippians, but a partnership (or fellowship) in the gospel (Phil 1:5; 4:15). Gerald W. Peterman compares the language of Philippians 1 and 4 and concludes from the similarity of terminology, 'This similarity demonstrates the importance of *koinōnia humōn eis to euangelion* as that which is primary in the apostle's evaluation of the meaning and significance of the gift.'[27] As we shall see below, the progress of the gospel is the foremost consideration in Paul's mind, regarding his acceptance or refusal of financial assistance from the churches.

Paul sought support also from churches to assist with travel expenses for himself and others. He appealed to the church in Rome to send him onward to Spain (Rom 15:24). In fact, many commentators believe that this was a primary purpose for writing the letter to the Romans.[28] Paul also expressed the expectation that during a passing visit the Corinthian church would help him further on his journey to the next location (1 Cor 16:6; 2 Cor 1:16) and possibly do the same for Timothy (1 Cor 16:10–11).

A similar request is made for other itinerant ministers in Titus 3:13: 'Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need.' Indeed, the verb *propempō* ('accompany' or 'send off') in these and similar passages may have become a technical term in the early church for providing funds for missionaries on their continuing journeys.[29]

Clearly, Paul solicited funds for himself and others, at least to help with their travel expenses. In this regard, Paul did not strictly follow Jesus' instruction in Mt 10:9–10 that the disciples should not take money with them on their preaching tour. 'This confirms that the dominical saying in Mt 10:9–10 had limited significance in a specific historical setting.'[30]

Thus we have in Pauline practice both a rationale for financially supporting minsters of the gospel and a precedent for supporting itinerant missionaries, including ones who did not originate from the donor church. A

24 Bassler, *God's Mammon*, 77; J. Paul Sampley, *Pauline Partnership in Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), 52–53.

25 Gerald W. Peterman, *Paul's Gift from Philippi* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65, 123–27.

26 Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 99–103.

27 Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 92.

28 Ann L. Jervis, *The Purpose of Romans* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 19–20; Robert Jewett, *Romans: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007), xv, 3.

29 Holmberg, *Paul and Power,* 86–87.

30 Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Paul and the Early Church,* vol. 2 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 1149.

pioneer missionary typically does not have enough local believers to support the work financially. That missionary will thus need either to be self-supporting through some form of employment or to receive outside support from other churches or believers. We see that Paul did both, working at times as a tentmaker (or more accurately a leatherworker)[31] and at times receiving financial gifts from other churches.

Paul, however, refused financial support from those whom he was attempting to reach; in those situations, he generally supported himself. He argued in 1 Corinthians 9 that he had the right to receive support (vv. 4–6), and in fact 'other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas' received it (v. 5). But Paul voluntarily chose to surrender that right (vv. 15–18). He supported himself in Corinth as a tentmaker (Acts 18:3; 1 Cor 4:12); in Thessalonica by hard work, labouring and toiling, day and night (1 Thes 2:9; 2 Thes 3:7-8); and in Ephesus by his own hands, even providing also for his co-workers (Acts 20:34). This was most likely also his practice during his first missionary journey with Barnabas (1 Cor 9:6).

Why did Paul accept support in some situations and refuse it in others? A partial answer is that Paul refused financial aid when *present* in a pioneer church-planting situation (as in Corinth), whereas he accepted it while *absent* from the church (as with the Philippian gift) or when soliciting funds for *onward travel* (as in the requests of churches in Corinth and Rome). These are qualitatively different types of support.[32] Holmberg explains; 'Only when Paul has left a church he has founded does he accept any money from it, in order to stress the fact that it has the character of support in his continued missionary work.'[33]

But what was the logic behind refusing support from those he was presently serving? This leads to my next points.

2. Pioneer missionaries should not be a burden

In pioneer mission settings, missionaries should not be a financial burden to those being reached. Paul repeatedly mentioned that he did not want to be a burden to those whom he was serving (2 Cor 11:9; 12:13, 16; 1 Thes 2:9). Although Paul was bold in asking churches to give sacrificially to the Jerusalem collection, he was reluctant to solicit funds for himself. Even as he gave thanks to the Philippian church for the support that it had sent him, he was quick to relieve them of any pressure to continue sending funds. He clarified that he had learned to be satisfied in abundance and in want (Phil 4:11–13, 17), and that God would supply their needs (4:19).

The place of an artisan in the Greco-Roman world was one of particularly low social status, near that of a slave, with low pay for long hours. These workers were also viewed as incapable of virtue and uneducated.[34] However,

31 See Hock, *Social Context*, 21–22.

32 Peterman, *Paul's Gift,* 163–67.

33 Holmberg, *Paul and Power*, 91; see also Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy,* 101.

34 Hock, *Social Context*, 31–37. Joel N. Lohr has argued that one reason why Paul worked as a tradesman was to identify with the poor

among Jews manual labour was esteemed and considered normal.[35] F. F. Bruce notes; 'Many rabbis practised a trade so as to be able to impart their teaching without charge.'[36]

Indeed, Paul's practice of self-support was consistent with the rabbinic teaching that one should not profit from teaching the Torah. One such teaching stated; 'Whosoever derives a profit for himself from the words of the Torah is helping on his own destruction' (*Pirḳe Avot* 1:13:7).[37] The tradition that some rabbis received payment for teaching may have developed after the time of Paul.[38] Some Greek philosophers were also known to support themselves through manual labour.[39]

Paul's willingness to surrender his rights and not be a financial burden to those whom he was evangelizing thus came at a high personal cost. Working long hours in a social context that looked down upon artisans would have been difficult for him and was a remarkable sign of humility.[40] Ronald F. Hock's summary is worth quoting at length:

> The position of Paul that has emerged thus far is hardly enviable. … Traveling and plying a trade were always exhausting and were frequently painful; … Paul's travels, like those of other itinerant artisans and teachers, were often punctuated by delays, difficulties, and dangers. Once he was in a city there were days, perhaps weeks, of staying in inns before Paul found lodging in a household; and instead of simply becoming its resident intellectual, as was his apostolic right, he refused to be a financial burden. … Making tents meant rising before dawn, toiling until sunset with leather, knives, and awls, and accepting the various social stigmas and humiliations that were part of the artisans' lot, not to mention the poverty—being cold, hungry and poorly clothed.[41]

Justin J. Meggitt describes Paul as 'a man who shared fully in the destitute life of the non-elite in the Roman Empire, an existence dominated by work and the struggle to subsist'.[42]

The appropriate missionary standard of living has long been a difficult question.[43] Unfortunately, many popular preachers today have profited financially from their ministry in ways that burden others and blemish their

and lowly of the church. But this was at best a secondary consideration. Lohr, 'He Identified with the Lowly and Became a Slave to All: Paul's Tentmaking as a Strategy for Mission', *Currents in Theology and Mission* 34, no. 3 (2007): 179–87.

35 Derek Tidball, *The Social Context of the New Testament* (Carlisle and Cumbria, UK: Paternoster, 1997), 94.

36 F. F. Bruce, *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1977), 220.

37 See also F. F. Bruce, *The Acts of the Apostles: The Greek Text with Introduction and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 391; A. E. Harvey, ' "The Workman Is Worthy of His Hire": Fortunes of a Proverb in the Early Church', *Novum Testamentum* 24, no. 3 (1982): 213–14.

38 Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy*, 11; Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, 38.

39 Hock, *Social Context,* 39–41, 56–58; Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy,* 11–12.

40 Hock, *Social Context*, 35–36.

41 Hock, *Social Context*, 37.

42 Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty and Survival,* 96.

43 Jonathan J. Bonk, *Missions and Money: Affluence as a Western Missionary Problem*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006).

motivation for ministry. They live in opulence at the expense of sincere believers of humble means who give sacrificially to their ministry. Such behaviour is contrary to the Pauline example and that of Jesus, who came to serve and not to be served (Mk 10:45). This observation leads to the next lesson from Paul.

3. Refuse financial support that might compromise one's character

Paul's concern for his reputation as a representative of Christ and the gospel outweighed in importance his concern not to burden local believers. Paul's ultimate reason for refusing remuneration from the Corinthians is that he did not want to 'hinder the gospel of Christ' (1 Cor 9:12b).

Receiving local funds for ministry could have compromised Paul's reputation and credibility in two primary ways. First, he would have opened himself up to accusations of greed and of personally profiting from the gospel. In the early Mediterranean world, travelling teachers or philosophers would solicit funds from local patrons, charge fees, or even beg, although there was also a tradition that the truly wise would not accept remuneration for teaching.[44] Paul wanted to avoid any accusation of peddling the gospel for personal profit (2 Cor 2:17), of coveting the wealth of those whom he was evangelizing or serving (Acts 20:33), or of being greedy (1 Thes 2:5). Thus he preached the gospel 'free of charge' (1 Cor 9:18; 2 Cor 11:7).

Even in the administration of the Jerusalem collection, Paul went to great effort to be above reproach: 'We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man' (2 Cor 8:20–21).

The second potentially compromising feature of receiving local funds was the possibility of entanglement in social obligations to benefactors. Even after a church was formed, Paul resisted receiving remuneration from local believers as long as he was with them.

Some have argued that soliciting support from local patrons, especially unbelievers, could have placed Paul under obligation to them in a social system of benefaction based on reciprocity, which was common in that time.[45] According to this interpretation, Paul would have desired to preach the gospel without having to cater to the interests of wealthy benefactors.[46] Others, however, question whether this was one of Paul's motivations. David Briones argues; 'Paul refused monetary support, not because he detected the Corinthians' motive to patronise him,

44 Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 208–15; Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy,* 164–67.

45 Peterman, *Paul's Gift*, 3–7; Richard P. Saller, *Personal Patronage under the Early Empire* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 1.

46 Phoebe, mentioned in Romans 1:1–2, is called a 'benefactor' (NIV) of many, including Paul. The term here, *prostatis*, could possibly be translated 'patroness' (ESV), but might also mean merely 'helper'. Lydia in Philippi (Acts 16:14–15, 40) was probably wealthy and might also have been a patroness of Paul. But these cases seem inconclusive. In any event, both were already believers when Paul received gifts from them; see Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money*, 81–103.

as many assume, but because he evaded any associations with the monetary practices of itinerant Sophists and philosophers, who avariciously capitalised on their initial visits into cities.'[47]

Although Paul was entitled to financial support in principle, if receiving such support jeopardized his credibility in any way, he would surrender that right. Indeed, by some accounts, in the Greco-Roman world it could enhance the credibility of a philosopher to work for his own living, not depending on others or receiving remuneration for teaching, and demonstrating through his labour the lessons of philosophy.[48]

In some settings today, as in the first century, the source of financial support of missionaries or local Christian workers can raise questions regarding their motives. Is a missionary or evangelist preaching the gospel out of personal conviction or for personal gain? Are they missionaries or mercenaries? Some foreign Christian workers have been accused of being instruments of foreign imperialism. On the other hand, ministers of the gospel who maintain secular employment sometimes have greater credibility than full-time paid ministers.

Paul's resistance to receiving funds from wealthy patrons also raises the matter of money and power in the missionary enterprise and in international partnerships. Whether funding is provided locally or from afar, a recipient of funds becomes accountable to the donor. Both itinerant missionaries and resident spiritual leaders must weigh wisely to whom they are willing to be accountable and how that accountability may influence their ministry, for good or ill. Each situation must be prayerfully and honestly assessed as to what will best advance the gospel.

4. The progress of the gospel as foremost consideration

We have seen that Paul considered the financial gift of the Philippian church a fellowship or partnership in the gospel. It was not merely a personal favour or kindness to Paul, but was about advancing the gospel through Paul's mission. We have also seen that Paul refused to receive support from the Corinthians because doing so might compromise his character and potentially constrain his ministry. Thus, the message and credibility of the gospel were again foremost in his mind.

Paul concluded his argument in 1 Corinthians 9 for refusing support by stating that he wanted to be an example of surrendering his rights (vv. 12, 15); 'to win as many as possible' (v. 19). He declared, 'I do all this for the sake of the gospel' (v. 23). On the other hand, Paul *requested* financial assistance from the Roman church to travel onward to Spain (Rom 15:24) and 'to preach the gospel where Christ was not known' (15:20).

Thus one key factor (perhaps the crucial factor) in understanding why Paul accepted gifts in one situation but not in another is the impact that his action would have on the progress of the gospel into unreached regions and winning others for Christ. Bassler summarizes:

47 Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy*, 177. Briones argues at length in chapter 2 that not all giving and receiving of gifts in the ancient world can be subsumed under the patron-client rubric.

48 See Theissen, *Social Setting*, 37–39.

> [Paul] did not ask for or accept money from a community in which he was actively working to establish a church. The basic reason he gives for this is his concern about hindering the forward movement of the gospel, whether by giving offence or by burdening fledging churches. Once a church was established, however, he expected it to finance his travel to the next town. Clearly the concern for the gospel is paramount in Paul's expectations here as well.[49]

V. Worship Offerings as the Source of Ministry Funding

Today, many creative ideas have been proposed to raise funds for mission work and to provide economic resources for emerging churches in the context of poverty. Does Pauline missionary practice offer us any guidelines in discerning the wisdom of such proposals?

The Old Testament teaches that the tithes of God's people were to support the priests and Levites who had no land as a source of income, as well as to aid the foreigner, the fatherless and widows (Deut 14:28–29). It was an act of worship by both rich and poor, given in addition to various other forms of providing for the disadvantaged, such as leaving the harvest gleanings for the poor (Lev 19:9). Although the New Testament does not speak of a tithe *per se*,[50] the principle still applies: God's work should be supported by the gifts and offerings of God's people.

These gifts are not merely financial arrangements to pay bills, but acts of worship and thanksgiving (Is 19:21). Paul described the financial gifts of the Jerusalem collection as literally 'a service of worship' that overflowed in thanksgiving to God, causing others to praise God (2 Cor 9:12–13). He called the Philippian church's gift for him 'a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God' (Phil 4:18b).

Paul, along with Priscilla and Aquila, had a tentmaking 'business' (Acts 18:1–3), but this was in no way comparable to the church-owned businesses sometimes undertaken in modern times. Some churches or mission projects have attempted to fund their ministries through church-operated business endeavours. This approach is not only fraught with practical difficulties, distracting energy and turning the church into a business undertaking, but violates the spiritual dynamic of ministry. When churches or mission agencies become directly responsible for business undertakings, the danger of compromise and conflict of interest grows.

Much as Paul avoided any form of funding that would cast doubt on his character and motives, so too churches that become entangled in running businesses are in danger of compromising their character and reputation. The church enters a minefield of potential accusations—greed, nepotism, profiteering, paying unfair wages, etc.—all of which could potentially impair the progress of the gospel. Furthermore, a business can quickly become a financial or legal liability, actually costing money and jeopardizing the church's viability altogether.

49 Bassler, *God's Mammon,* 85.

50 For a discussion of Paul's silence regarding tithing, see Verbrugge and Krell, *Paul and Money,* 269–72.

The better way to assist resource-poor churches or missions in financing their ministries is to enable local believers to increase their earning power and thus be able to contribute offerings to support the work. Job training can provide modern 'tentmaker' missionaries with a livelihood. Economic development projects, micro-loans, job training, and 'business as mission' efforts can contribute to a community's financial health by providing individuals with employment and an honourable means of earning a living. These individuals are then in a position to support church and mission ministries through their offerings.

Ministry should be sustained and advanced by its members' acts of worship, which include financial offerings. Mission churches need to teach new believers the joy of giving as an act of worship, which is much more than a pragmatic necessity to pay church bills.

VI. Conclusion

This survey of the biblical material has yielded a somewhat complex picture of how finances were employed in the apostle Paul's mission work and in inter-church relations during the first century. Throughout history, Christians have given generously to advance the gospel, to assist emerging churches, and to alleviate poverty. Such acts are surely a sign of God's gracious work in the hearts of those who give.

Clearly, Christians are to provide relief and financial assistance to fellow believers in emergency or crisis situations and to those unable to provide for themselves. Helping others to obtain sustainable and profitable employment and attain a worthy standard of living is empowering. Corruption, racism, and economic systems that exploit, discriminate or enslave people in poverty must be reformed. Such efforts are evidence of compassion, signs of solidarity, and acts of worship.

At the same time, charitable giving must not undermine local initiative and responsibility. The expectation that individuals should provide for their own families and not become dependent upon others applies logically to churches as well. This conclusion is consistent with the fact that apart from charitable relief, Paul never brought financial aid from one church to another. It would also align with the view that church ministries should be supported by the offerings of believers served by that church, including any financial support provided for local church leaders.

Paul's teaching and example regarding financial support of missionaries present a diverse picture. In some situations, Paul chose to be self-supporting so as to not burden others, to remain above reproach, and to be free of encumbrances. This was especially the case in pioneer situations where a local church had not yet come into existence. In other situations, he received financial support and expected churches to assist his further missionary travel.

Paul commended the support of itinerant ministers as well as local leaders who are locally accountable to those whom they serve. Yet in every situation, any appearance of impropriety must be avoided, even if that means surrendering one's personal rights. Ultimately, the progress of the gospel remained foremost in Paul's decision as

to whether to accept financial support.

Discerning the best practices for any given setting today is more than a merely pragmatic decision. We cannot simply imitate Paul's example rigidly, as we live in a very different world and must remain sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit who may guide us in fresh directions. But we ignore Paul's example at our own peril. The principled wisdom inherent in his practices can provide guidance that may at times seem counterintuitive, but will ultimately advance the cause of the gospel.