

# Justice Endures Forever: Paul's Grammar of Generosity<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

For centuries before and after Paul, Jewish sages taught that charitable deeds are among the supreme acts of fidelity to God. Paul himself taught what might be called a traditional Jewish theology of charitable giving. He describes generosity to humans as an act of service for God that will bring happy returns in the future. He uses the cultic and financial metaphors that are common in other Jewish discussions of charity, and he also cites biblical texts that speak of God's protection of the generous. The paper concludes by noting the implications of this largely unrecognized point of continuity between Paul, Jesus, and the prior biblical tradition for situating the collection on the larger landscape of Paul's theology and for understanding how Paul creatively develops his understanding of charity in light of the Christ-gift.

Key words: the collection, almsgiving, charity, benefaction, euergetism, Judaism, Philippians, 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Paul

For centuries before and after Paul, Jewish sages taught that charitable deeds are among the supreme acts of fidelity to God and the best hedge against the uncertainty of the future.<sup>2</sup> Jewish texts frequently promise that those who help the poor will in turn receive help from God (e.g., Ps 41:1-3). The Torah treats the tithe for widows, orphans, and aliens as if it were temple sacrifice (Deut 14:28-29; 26:12-15), and the link between generosity and sacrifice becomes widespread in the Second Temple period. First-century Christians were no less enthusiastic about charity as service for God. The Letter to the Hebrews calls beneficence a sacrifice pleasing to God (13:16), and the book of James claims that "worship that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress" (1:27).<sup>3</sup> In Acts, the first Gentile to receive the Holy Spirit is singled out for this gift because his alms and prayers

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Bradley C. Gregory and David J. Downs for their comments on this essay.

<sup>2</sup> "Charitable deeds" and "charity" refer here to any act of generosity for those in need.

<sup>3</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.

ascended to heaven as a memorial offering (10:4, 31). Matthew's Gospel adapts the idea of charity as service for God to claim that aid given to the hungry, thirsty, naked, sick, and incarcerated is done for the Son of Man (25:31-46).

Paul's letters never provide anything like a general all-purpose explanation of his views on charitable giving. When he does discuss the poor it is always to address a particular, contingent situation such as his collection for Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> Yet, Paul's letters betray a traditional Jewish grammar of charity.<sup>5</sup> In a variety of contexts Paul teaches that generosity to humans is an act of service for God that will bring happy returns in the future. Paul uses the cultic and financial metaphors that are common in other Jewish discussions of charity, and he also cites biblical texts that speak of God's protection of the generous. After a brief description of charity

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<sup>4</sup> Previous attempts to show that Paul was committed to helping the poor have tended either to appeal to the collection as evidence of a general ethic of generosity or to construct theologies of wealth redistribution with tenuous relationships to Paul's own concerns. For the former see, e.g., Dieter Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992); Sondra Ely Wheeler, *Wealth as Peril and Obligation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 73-89; Keith F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study in Paul's Strategy* (Naperville: Alec R. Allenson, 1996), 102. For the latter, see, e.g., Neil Elliot, *Liberating Paul: The Justice of God and the Politics of the Apostle* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994). Bruce W. Longenecker (*Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010]), provides a more promising point of departure by challenging the long-held assumption that the charge of the Jerusalem apostles to "remember the poor" (Gal 2:10) is a reference to the collection. See also Verlyn Verbrugge and Keith R. Krell's *Paul and Money: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Apostle's Teachings and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), which appeared after the completion of this essay.

<sup>5</sup> By "grammar" I mean the basic rules governing the way words are used. OED 6.a: "The fundamental principles or rules of an art or science" extended in philosophy, chiefly with reference to Wittgenstein, to refer to how a word is used as the best way of ascertaining what it is. Cf. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe et al.; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 116.

in ancient Judaism I discuss three texts in Paul's undisputed letters. I conclude by noting the implications for situating the collection on the larger landscape of Paul's theology and for understanding how Paul creatively develops his understanding of charity in light of the Christ-gift.

#### GENEROSITY AS FIDELITY TO GOD

To speak of a traditional Jewish grammar of charity is not to imply that there was a single Jewish response to poverty or that generosity was the exclusive domain of the Jewish people. Nevertheless, there are distinctive emphases in ancient Jewish texts which have emerged with increasing clarity in recent scholarship.<sup>6</sup> Though idiosyncratic in certain respects, the *Tosefta*'s depiction of King Munbaz of Adiabene, the first-century C.E. convert to Judaism, serves as a convenient introduction to some of the main emphases. According to *Tosefta Peah*, King Munbaz gave away his possessions during a time of famine. Understandably alarmed, the king's brothers charge him with squandering the family fortune: "Your ancestors stored up treasures and added to those of their ancestors. But you went and squandered all your treasures and those

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<sup>6</sup> E.g., Gary Anderson, *Charity: The Place of the Poor in the Biblical Tradition* (Yale University Press, 2013); Bradley C. Gregory, *Like an Everlasting Signet Ring: Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, DCLS 2 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010); Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel*, BZNW 196 (Berlin/Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2013); Yael Wilfand, *Poverty, Charity and the Image of the Poor in Rabbinic Texts from the Land of Israel*, SWBA Second Series 9 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2014); Tzvi Novick, "Charity and Reciprocity: Structures of Benevolence in Rabbinic Literature," *HTR* 105 (2012): 33-52; Alyssa M. Gray, "Redemptive Almsgiving and the Rabbis of Late Antiquity," *JSQ* 18 (2011): 144-84; Gregg Gardner, *The Origins of Organized Charity in Rabbinic Judaism* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). See also H. Bolkestein, *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege im vorchristlichen Altertum* (Utrecht: A. Oosthoek, 1939).

of your ancestors!” (4:18). In response to this accusation, Munbaz quotes a series of biblical texts to show he has actually exceeded the financial wisdom of his predecessors. They acquired earthly treasures, mere money and grain, but he has stored up treasure in heaven with God. This treasure, Munbaz boasts, is safe from human hands and will continue to benefit him in the world-to-come. This argument between a convert to Judaism and his brothers illustrates from the perspective of the *Tosefta* the characteristic differences between Israel – for whom charity and deeds of mercy are “a great peace-maker and a great intercessor” between them and God (*t. Peah* 4:21) – and the nations, who foolishly store their treasures on earth. Munbaz shows his brothers a new and better way to handle money: they are to give it away in order to be rich with God, as the Hebrew Scriptures taught.<sup>7</sup>

This episode illustrates three distinctive features which are common in biblical and post-biblical texts: (1) God is the unseen recipient of aid for the needy. (2) God, rather than the human recipient, reciprocates charitable deeds. (3) Possessions given away to those in need last longer and provide more security than possessions retained. I briefly discuss each of these three before turning to Paul.

Though Munbaz gave his treasures to people, he believes that his treasure is stored up in heaven around God’s throne where it collects interest.<sup>8</sup> The idea that charity is given to God or stored in heaven is well-attested in earlier centuries. This is described as a “loan” to God (Prov 19:17), or simply as treasure with God that will come to one’s aid in times of need. The eponymous protagonist of the book of Tobit teaches his son that by giving money away to the

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, famine relief was not uncommon among non-Jewish elites. Gregg Gardner (“Giving to the Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism” [Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 2009], 163-99) argues that the *Tosefta* reinterprets the civic benefactions of Munbaz’s family as charity for God.

<sup>8</sup> The *Tosefta* cites Ps 89:15, with צדק interpreted as charity, as evidence that Munbaz has treasure in heaven.

needy he will “store up a good treasure for the day of necessity” and be delivered from death (4:9-10). Near the end of the story the angel Raphael says that “It is better to give alms than to lay up gold” (12:8). Sirach also describes alms funding a treasury that profits more than ordinary possessions: “Lay up your treasure according to the commandments of the Most High, and it will profit you more than gold. Store up almsgiving in your treasury, and it will rescue you from every disaster” (29:11-12 NRSV). In the Synoptic Gospels Jesus teaches how to receive a wage “with your Father in heaven” (Matt 6:1), counseling his followers to give their possessions away in order to be “rich with God” (Luke 12:21).<sup>9</sup>

In addition to the financial language of treasure in heaven or loans to God, charitable deeds are also frequently described as sacrifice. Tobit says that almsgiving is a “good offering (δῶρον) in the presence of the Most High” (4:11). Sirach claims that “The one who does an act of charity offers fine flour and the one who gives alms sacrifices an offering of thanksgiving” (35:3-4) and that alms given to one’s father take the place of a purification offering (3:14).<sup>10</sup> Under the influence of Hosea 6:6 (“I desire חסד and not sacrifice”), charity is sometimes said to be greater than sacrifice. In the Second Temple period the meaning of חסד shifted from covenant faithfulness to mercy.<sup>11</sup> As a result, Hos 6:6 and other biblical texts which once proclaimed the

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<sup>9</sup> On Matt 6 see Nathan Eubank, “Storing Up Treasure with God in the Heavens: Celestial Investments in Matthew 6:1-21,” *CBQ* 76 (2014): 77-92. See also Mark 10:17-31 and pars. In an agrarian economy financial language cannot be easily separated from agricultural. The words θησαυρός and אוצר can describe both treasuries of money, grain, or other goods. See Anderson, *Charity*, 53-66.

<sup>10</sup> Translation from Gregory, *Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, 238.

<sup>11</sup> Jan Joosten, “חסד ‘bienveillance’ et ἔλεος ‘pitié’: réflexions sur une équivalence lexicale dans la Septante,” in « Car c'est l'amour qui me plaît, non le sacrifice... »: recherches sur Osée 6:6 et son interprétation juive et chrétienne, ed. Eberhard Bons; SJSJ 88 (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2004), 25-42.

importance of covenant faithfulness were read as declarations of God's desire for mercy above all else. A Hellenistic-Jewish addition to book two of the *Sibylline Oracles* illustrates this shift well:

To beggars freely give, nor put them off.  
To the needy give with hands dripping with grain.  
The one who gives alms knows how to make a loan to God [Prov 19:17]  
Mercy delivers from death [Prov 10:2/11:4] when judgment comes.  
Not sacrifice, but mercy (ἐλεος) God desires in place of sacrifice [Hos 6:6]<sup>12</sup>

This passage is a convenient summary of our survey up to this point. By giving food to the needy one makes a loan to God and offers the worship that God desires.

The second distinguishing characteristic of charity in Jewish texts follows logically from the first. According to the Tosefta, Munbaz was not hoping for returns of money or honor from the human recipients of his generosity. Instead, he expected repayment in the world to come. Because God is the ultimate recipient of charity, the poor are not obligated to respond with counter-gifts. Rather, God is the chief – and, in most cases, the *only* – expected reciprocator, with the needy acting as a conduit in the exchange. These divine returns are described variously as “repayment” (Prov 19:17; Matt 6:4; Luke 14:12-14), deliverance from death or disaster (Ps

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<sup>12</sup> 2.78-82. Text and translation, slightly altered, from J. L. Lightfoot, *The Sibylline Oracles: With Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on the First and Second Books* (New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press: 2007), 315. On Hos 6:6 in rabbinic literature see Matthias Millard, “Osée 6:6 dans l’histoire de l’interprétation juive,” in *Recherches sur Osée 6:6 et son interprétation juive et chrétienne*, 119-46. See also William Adler, “The Heartless Rich Man and the Precious Stone: A New Translation and Introduction” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, Richard Bauckham and James R. Davila, eds., vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013), 360-66. This unfortunately titled short story is a parabolic illustration of God's fidelity to the promise of Prov 19:17. Adler sees the interest in heavenly rewards in exchange for charity as evidence that the story comes from eastern monastic circles, but these beliefs are well-attested in Jewish texts before the Common Era as well as later Jewish and Christian texts.

41:1-3; Isa 58:10-11), forgiveness of sins (Prov 15:27 LXX; Dan 4:24; Tob 12:9; *Did.* 4:5-7; *Mek. Nez.* on Exod 21:28–30), the basis of a favorable verdict in a final judgment (Matt 25:31-46), or as peace between Israel and God (*t. Peah* 4:21). Alms are sometime described as a means of gaining God’s attention (Tob 4:7; 12:12; Acts 10:1-4), or simply as the impetus for God to provide unspecified help (e.g., Prov 22:8-9; *Mek. Amalek* on Exod 18:13-27). Occasionally it is said that God will recompense generosity both in this life and in the life to come (Mark 10:29-30; Luke 18:29-30; *m. Peah* 1:1).<sup>13</sup>

The third distinguishing feature of Jewish alms-piety is the paradoxical claim that possessions given away to those in need last longer and provide more security than possessions retained. Treasure “with God” is more reliable than fleeting earthly possessions.<sup>14</sup> This is the main point of Munbaz’s response to his brothers: his ancestors stored up fleeting wealth whereas he secured treasure that will help him long into the future. Sirach 40:11-17 describes the ephemerality of economic wickedness in contrast to the permanence of generosity: bribes and injustice will be blotted out (40:12) and riches gained from injustice will disappear (40:13-14), but mercy (יְרֻמָּה / χάρις) is like eternity and almsgiving (הִקְדִּישׁ / ἐλεημοσύνη) will endure forever (40:17).<sup>15</sup> Matthew contrasts treasure in heaven, which is earned by alms, prayer, and fasting, with earthly treasure which decays and is stolen (6:19-21). The Lukan parallel to this saying follows the parable of the Rich Fool (12:13-24). Storehouses of grain are useless after death,

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<sup>13</sup> On this idea in the Synoptic Gospels see Eubank, “Celestial Investments in Matthew 6:1-21,” 77-92.

<sup>14</sup> Anderson (*Charity*, 146-48) refers to this as the “durative character” of charity.

<sup>15</sup> Translation adapted from Gregory, *Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, 180. Gregory (*Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, 180-81) notes that Ben Sira’s description of הִקְדִּישׁ enduring forever is reminiscent of Ps 112:9, which describes the generous person who scatters his possessions for the poor. See also *b. B. Bat. 10b* and the discussion of 2 Cor 9:9 below.

whereas those who sell their possessions and give alms have “money-bags that do not wear out, an unfailing treasure in the heavens” (12:33).<sup>16</sup>

Is this Jewish (and Christian) emphasis on charity as service for God distinctive in the ancient world? One does find similar ideas outside of Judaism, such as the belief that “all strangers and beggars are from Zeus” and should be treated with corresponding kindness.<sup>17</sup> Yet, the idiosyncratic emphases of Jewish alms-piety remain unmistakable. For non-Jews, the main purpose of generosity was to create and strengthen friendship, obligation, and dependence between people. The point of gift-giving between equals and in asymmetrical relationships was to create an ongoing back and forth of exchanges. Patrons gave assistance in exchange for honor. Wealthy citizens who gave to their cities were reciprocated with public displays of gratitude. Friends gave gifts in hopes of a return. Paul’s contemporary, Seneca, condemns those who give benefits only because they expect to get something back, yet for him one of the main goals of *beneficia* is to create a circle of giving and receiving “from which friendship springs.”<sup>18</sup> According to Seneca, successful gift-giving is like a game of catch.<sup>19</sup> A skilled player knows how to throw the ball in a way that makes it more likely that it will be caught and returned. Similarly, benefits should be given in a way that induces gratitude and, eventually, reciprocation. Because of this on-going bond Seneca warns that one “must be far more careful in selecting a

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<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Pss. Sol.* 9:4-5; *1 En.* 38:1-2; 61:1-8; *2 En.* 44:4-5; *2 Bar.* 14:12-13; *4 Ezra* 7:77; 8:31-36.

<sup>17</sup> *Od.* 6.207-8; 14.57-58. See Anneliese Parkin, “‘You do Him no Service’: An Exploration of Pagan Almsgiving” in *Poverty in the Roman World*, Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne eds. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 60-82.

<sup>18</sup> *Ben.* 2.18.5. cf. 3.15.4: “[H]e who gives benefits (*beneficia*) imitates the gods, he who seeks a return, money-lenders” (Basore, LCL).

<sup>19</sup> *Ben.* 2.17.3-4. Cf. 2.1.2-3.



creditor for a benefit than a creditor for a loan.”<sup>20</sup> When a loan is repaid the relationship between creditor and debtor is dissolved. With benefits, however, “even after I have paid my debt of gratitude, the bond between us still holds; for, just when I have finished paying it, I am obliged to begin again, and friendship endures.”<sup>21</sup> In contrast, in many biblical and post-biblical texts the recipients of gifts are hardly mentioned at all. The reciprocation comes from God, with the human recipient acting as intermediary. To adapt Seneca’s ball-game analogy, the generous person tosses a ball to a fellow human, but the ball comes soaring back from the hands of God.<sup>22</sup>

#### PAUL’S GRAMMAR OF GENEROSITY

In a variety of contexts Paul describes generosity to humans as a means of serving God. His language varies in each case, describing charity as a sacrifice, payment, or as sowing which will produce harvest, but he consistently makes God the unseen recipient and reciprocator of the gifts. Paul also repeatedly emphasizes that possessions given away will bring happy returns in the future.

##### *Philippians 4:10-20*

In his letter to the Philippians Paul recounts warmly how they sent him money when he fell on hard times (2:25-30). At the end of the letter, after recalling this assistance once again, he claims that he is less interested in the gift itself than in the “fruit which increases in your account” (4:17), and goes on to describe their gifts as a sacrifice to God. The secondary literature on this passage abounds with attempts to explain the sudden proliferation of technical financial terminology, the cultic language, and especially Paul’s apparent failure to thank the Philippians.

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<sup>20</sup> *Ben.* 2.18.5. (Basore, LCL, slightly altered).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Luke 14:12-14 where Jesus forbids dinner invitations to those who have the means to reciprocate, commanding instead that “the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind” be invited so that God will reciprocate.

Instead of expressing gratitude, Paul seems to claim that it is the Philippians – not him – who will profit from this exchange. Some commentators find the passage hopelessly awkward and propose various reasons why Paul was ill-at-ease.<sup>23</sup> Others have sought to exculpate Paul from charges of ingratitude by appealing to conventions of friendship or patron-client relationships.<sup>24</sup> Still others have read this passage as an attempt at humor<sup>25</sup> or as a straightforward description of a business arrangement.<sup>26</sup>

Gerald Peterman has noted that Paul’s description of their exchange resembles the promise of Prov 19:17 (“Whoever is generous to the poor lends to God, and God will repay him according to his gift [τὸ δόμα]”).<sup>27</sup> Paul acknowledges receipt of the gift (τὸ δόμα v.17) in his time of need and promises that God will in turn see to the Philippians’ needs (v.19). Peterman’s

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<sup>23</sup> E.g., C. H. Dodd, *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1953), 72; F.W. Beare, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Philippians*, BNTC (London: A&C Black, 1959), 151–52; R.P. Martin, *Philippians*, NCB (London: Routledge, 1976), 161; Douglas Campbell, *Framing Paul: An Epistolary Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 149–52.

<sup>24</sup> G. W. Peterman, “‘Thankless Thanks’: The Epistolary Social Conventions in Philippians 4:10–20,” *TynBul* 42.2 [1991]: 261–70; David Briones, “Paul’s Intentional ‘Thankless Thanks’ in Philippians 4.10–20,” *JSNT* 34 [2011]: 47–69; idem, *Paul’s Financial Policy: A Socio-Theological Approach*, LNTS (London: T&T Clark, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 540; Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Second Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*, ICC (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1915), 103.

<sup>26</sup> Most recently, Julien M. Ogereau, *Paul’s Koinonia with the Philippians: A Socio-Historical Investigation of a Pauline Economic Partnership*, WUNT II 377 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014); idem, “Paul’s Κοινωνία with the Philippians: *Societas* as a Missionary Funding Strategy,” *NTS* 60.3 (2014): 360–78. See John Reumann (*Philippians*, AB 33B [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008], 685–87) for a thorough list of proposals.

<sup>27</sup> *Paul’s Gift from Philippi: Conventions of Gift Exchange and Christian Giving*, SNTSMS 92 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 50.

suggestion remains more convincing than its many competitors. Indeed, one might go further and note that this passage also resembles Tobit or Sirach because of the way it combines cultic and financial metaphors.<sup>28</sup> Paul teaches the Philippians that when they sent him money they were making a sacrifice to God and a payment that God will return.<sup>29</sup>

It is not uncommon for Paul to use sacrificial language to describe human behavior, including Phil 2:17 where he describes himself as a libation poured out on the sacrifice of the Philippians' faith. In 4:18, however, it is the money for Paul that becomes "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (4:18):

...δεξάμενος παρὰ Ἐπαφροδίτου τὰ παρ' ὑμῶν, ὁσμὴν εὐωδίας, θυσίαν δεκτὴν, εὐάρεστον τῷ θεῷ

The "fragrant aroma, acceptable sacrifice" is in apposition to "the things from you," indicating that God looks at the money sent to care for Paul as an offering.<sup>30</sup>

The financial language running throughout 4:14-19 requires a closer look. Paul commends the Philippians for sharing with him in "an account of giving and receiving (εἰς λόγον δόσεως καὶ λήμψεως)" (4:14-15). He also describes "the fruit that accumulates to your account (εἰς λόγον)."<sup>31</sup> In 4:18 Paul says that he receives all things (ἀπέχω ... πάντα)" from the Philippians. As many have noted, ἀπέχω is a technical term ubiquitous in papyri and inscriptions

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<sup>28</sup> Gregory, *Generosity in the Book of Sirach*, 210-11.

<sup>29</sup> One might object that the Philippians sent a gift in support of the Gospel, not in support of a person in need. Paul, however, explicitly describes it as both. See esp. 4:14-16.

<sup>30</sup> Pace, O'Brien, *Philippians*, 542.

<sup>31</sup> The phrase εἰς λόγον is very common in documentary papyri meaning "to the account." MM 379. The first definition of λόγος in LSJ is "account of money handled." See, e.g., Matt 18:23; 25:19; Luke 16:2. For "fruit" which increases in an account with God, see *t. Peah* 4:18; פרי Jastrow.

designating the formal acknowledgement of payment.<sup>32</sup> When someone who was owed money received full payment, he or she would formally acknowledge this fact on a receipt (i.e., an ἀποχή) with the words “I receive (ἀπέχω) payment, etc.”<sup>33</sup> Numerous inscriptions recording the sale and manumission of slaves formally recognize receipt of payment with the phrase “I receive the entire price” (τὰν τειμὰν [sic] ἀπέχω πᾶσαν).<sup>34</sup>

Less often noted is the fact that that πληρώω, which Paul uses twice in 4:18-19, is used to mean “pay in full” in papyri and inscriptions. As Moulton and Milligan noted, πληρώω as “pay” is “very common” in the papyri.<sup>35</sup> For instance, in the second century C.E. a certain Taeis informed her son that, “I have paid (πεπλήρωκα) all the public dues by your gift (τῇ σῇ χάριτι).”<sup>36</sup> A loan contract from 13 B.C.E. stipulates the methods of repayment “until the loan is repaid (τοῦ πληρωθῆναι).”<sup>37</sup> Receipt of payment is often acknowledged with the formula πεπληρωῖσθαι παρὰ σοῦ.<sup>38</sup> Though πληρώω could be used in non-financial senses, it is used here

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<sup>32</sup> Noted already by Deissmann, *Bible Studies: Contributions Chiefly from Papyri and Inscriptions to the History of the Language, the Literature, and the Religion of Hellenistic Judaism and Primitive Christianity*, trans. Alexander Grieve (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1903), 229. See Ogereau (*Paul’s Koinonia with the Philippians*, 115-23) for a review of ἀπέχω in documentary sources.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., P.Mich. V 249.4; P.Oxy. XXXVIII 2834.2-3.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., FD III 3:283; FD III 3:303; FD III 6:11.

<sup>35</sup> See also LSJ III.5; BDAG. Ogereau supports and greatly expands this observation. *Paul’s Koinonia with the Philippians*, 123-29. The cognates ἀναπληρώω, ἀνταναπληρώω, and προσαναπληρώω could be used synonymously. E.g., P.Mich.18.774 (193-194 C.E.). The phrase ἐκ πλήρους commonly denotes full payment in the papyri and inscriptions. E.g., out of many, *BGU* II 584.6; *BGU* III 806.6; *BGU* XI 2112.4; *AGRW* 303.

<sup>36</sup> P.Mich. VIII 510.21-22.

<sup>37</sup> *BGU* IV 1055.23-24. 13 B.C.E.

<sup>38</sup> E.g., from 153 C.E., O.Claud. III 595.3-4.

in conjunction with a cluster of other economic terms to describe the receipt of money. Thus, the translation “fully pay” in 4:18-19 is preferable to renderings which obscure the economic valence of πληρόω, such as the NRSV’s “I am fully satisfied” (4:18).

A translation of 4:17-19 helps to show how this collocation of financial *technici termini* fits into the flow of thought of the passage as a whole. After commending them for sharing with him in his times of trial, Paul adds:

It is not that I look for the gift. Rather, I look for the fruit which is increasing in your account. I have received everything that was due and I abound. I have been fully paid, receiving from Epaphroditus the things from you, a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God. And my God will fully pay for every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

In v.17 Paul is emphatic that he desires not his own relief but the growing “account” which somehow redounds to the benefit of the Philippians. Then in v.18-19 he acknowledges their payment using familiar contractual language (ἀπέχω; πεπλήρωμαι) and claims that it is God who will return payment (πληρώσει) from his “riches in glory in Christ Jesus” (4:18-19), giving the Philippians what they need (πᾶσαν χρείαν ὑμῶν), just as they had for Paul (εἰς τὴν χρείαν μοι ἐπέμψατε). Paul accepts the gift but assures them that the more significant thing is the payment they have made to God. This theological description of their exchange is exactly what one would expect if a passage such as Tob 4:5-11 were rewritten from the perspective of the person in need. Cyprian (c. 200-258) summarized Paul’s point well when he cited 4:18 and explained, “For when one has pity on the poor, he lends to God [Prov 19:17]; and he who gives to the least [Matt 25:31-46], gives to God; spiritually he sacrifices to God the odor of sweetness.”<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *Dom. or.* 33. Similarly, Augustine *De serm. Dom. in mont.* 2.1.3. The word ἀπέχω may indicate that Paul thought the Philippians were obliged to help him (Cf. 2:30). The mixture of gift and contractual language is common in ancient literature. Cf. the debt language in Seneca, *Ben.* passim.

Paul's description of divine reciprocity in Phil 4:10-20 is a pristine example of Jewish alms-piety. Paul commends the Philippians for sending him money but redirects their attention from him to God. When they gave Paul money, they were making a payment to God that God will repay. At the same time they were worshipping God, making a sacrifice with a pleasing odor.

### *2 Corinthians 9:6-15*

The second example is from Paul's attempt to convince the Corinthians to contribute to the collection.<sup>40</sup> In 2 Corinthians 9:6-10 he makes three main points: (1) those who give will receive much in return from God; (2) God will give the gifts that make it possible for the Corinthians to give; (3) by giving to the collection – and by giving in general – one offers thanksgiving and glory to God. In verses 6-10 Paul relies heavily on images of sowing and

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<sup>40</sup> It is presumed here that the "service for the saints" of 2 Cor 9:1 is the collection for Jerusalem mentioned in 1 Cor 16:1-3 and that "Achaia" (2 Cor 9:2) includes the Corinthian congregation, though the argument does not rest on these presumptions. Among the numerous studies on the collection and in addition to those already cited see Byung-Mo Kim, *Die paulinische Kollekte*, Texte und Arbeiten zum neutestamentlichen Zeitalter 38 (Tübingen; Basel: Francke, 2002); David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural, and Cultic Contexts*, WUNT II 248 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Julien M. Ogereau, "The Jerusalem Collection as Κοινωνία: Paul's Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity," *NTS* 58 (2012): 360-78; Ze'ev Safrai and Peter J. Tomson, "Paul's 'Collection for the Saints' (2 Cor 8-9) and Financial Support of Leaders in Early Christianity and Judaism," in *Second Corinthians in the Perspective of Late Second Temple Judaism*, ed. Reimund Bieringer et al., vol 14 of *Compendia Rerum Iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum*, ed. Friedrich Avemarie et al. (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2014), 132-220.

reaping drawn from the Scriptures.<sup>41</sup> This imagery is apt for obvious reasons: seed is seemingly thrown away but it yields valuable results in the future, and this is precisely what Paul wants to say about the collection. Paul begins by promising a bountiful harvest to those who give generously and freely: those who sow blessings will also reap blessings (9:6). Variations on the idea that one reaps what one sows were common in ancient literature.<sup>42</sup> For Paul, however, the point is not simply that consequences are proportionate to actions, but something more paradoxical: those who want to receive many blessings must cheerfully give their money away. If they send money to the Jerusalem saints the Corinthians will receive blessings in return from God, who “loves a cheerful giver” (Prov 22:8) and who will ensure bountiful reaping (9:6-7).<sup>43</sup>

In 9:8-10 Paul continues with the image of sowing and reaping, adding that God supplies the “seed” and makes it grow. In other words, God will both give the Corinthians the ability to give away their money and ensure that it will result in a bountiful harvest:

And God is able to make every gift abound for you, so that in all things always having all self-sufficiency, you may abound in every good work. As it is written, “He scattered, he gave to the poor; his justice endures forever.” He who supplies “seed to the sower and bread for food” will supply and multiply your seed and will increase the yield of your justice. (9:8-10)

Humans sow, but God provides the seed and gives the growth. God will give the Corinthians the gift (χάρις) of all that they need to abound in every good work. This gift includes the self-sufficiency (αὐτάρκεια) which makes it possible to live with few possessions and may also imply

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<sup>41</sup> Hans Windisch (*Der zweite Korintherbrief* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 276) referred to this section as “gut israelitische Spruchweisheit.” Ps 112:9 [111:9 LXX] is cited explicitly. Isa 55:10, Prov 22:8-9, and, possibly, Hos 10:12 are alluded to.

<sup>42</sup> E.g., Seneca, *Ben.* 1.1.2.

<sup>43</sup> Paul does not specify here as he does in Gal 6:7-10 whether the “reaping” is eschatological or this-worldly. It is clear only that God will ensure that the Corinthians receive blessings for what they have given.

the gift of material possessions as well.<sup>44</sup> In addition to supplying this “seed,” God will also make the seed grow, increasing “the yield of your justice,” thereby ensuring the bountiful reaping promised in v.6.<sup>45</sup>

Commentators are divided regarding the meaning of Paul’s citation of Ps 112:9: is it a human who “scatters and gives to the poor” or God? In what sense does this δικαιοσύνη “endure forever”? The Psalm itself describes a generous human, but some modern commentators read Paul’s quotation as a description of God.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, ancient commentators frequently cited both 2 Cor 9:9 and Ps 112:9 to describe the enduring efficacy of human almsgiving.<sup>47</sup> Bracketing out the disputed citation of the Psalm, one notes that the sower in 9:6-11 is always the human gift-giver, whereas God is always the one who provides the seed and who makes it grow (i.e.,

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<sup>44</sup> 2 Cor 8:1-2 says the churches of Macedonia received the gift of God which made their great poverty overflow into riches of generosity. The gift in this case would seem to be the ability to go without rather than the gift of material riches. Cf. Phil 4:10-13; 1 Tim 6:6-10. See also John M. G. Barclay, “Security and Self-Sufficiency: A Comparison of Paul and Epictetus,” *Ex Auditu* 24 (2008): 60-72.

<sup>45</sup> cf. God causing growth in 1 Cor 3:6-7.

<sup>46</sup> E.g., Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 440; Hans Dieter Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: A Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul*, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 111-114. Most commentators take the citation to refer to a human almsgiver. See the recent discussion of David I. Starling, “Meditations on a Slippery Citation: Paul’s Use of Psalm 112:9 in 2 Corinthians 9:9,” *JTI* 6.2 (2012): 241–256.

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Sir 40:17 (likely allusion; cf. *m. ’Avot* 2:2); *b. B. Bat.* 10b; Clement of Alexandria, *Paed.* 3.5.5; Cyprian, *Ad Quirinium* 3.1; *Apos. Con.* 2.35; Eusebius, *Commentaria in Psalmos*, 23.597; John Chrysostom, *Hom. 2 Cor.* 61.533; Gregory of Nyssa, *Orationes viii de beatitudinibus* 44.1208; Basil the Great, *Destruam horrea mea* 3.30; Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 8.12, 40.34; Jerome *Epist.* 75.4; Ambrose, *Exc.* 1.60; Augustine, *Sermon* 11.3, 38.12. I have found no instances to the contrary.



God makes generosity possible and God makes it redound in happy effects). God is never portrayed as a sower of seed:

Humans sow blessings and reap blessings.

Humans sow sparingly and reap sparingly (9:6)

Humans sow bountifully by giving monetary blessings and reap bountifully (9:6).

Humans receive the “yield” that God causes to grow (9:10).

God gives humans what is necessary to sow and also makes these seeds grow.

God makes χάρις abound so that humans can be generous (9:8).

God “supplies seed to the sower” (9:10).

God will “supply and increase your seed” (9:10).

God will make the fruit of justice grow (9:10).

God enriches people so they can be generous (9:11).

In its original context Ps 112:9 describes a generous human as a sower of seed who will be sustained in the future (cf. also verses 1-7). Paul’s attempt to persuade the Corinthians to give in 9:6-10 uses this very image: the collection is an opportunity to sow seed that will bear fruit in the future, if they “scatter” rather than giving sparingly.<sup>48</sup> Psalm 112:9 is, therefore, a perfect text to demonstrate Paul’s point. Those who suggest that the implied subject of the Psalm is God have missed Paul’s oft-repeated point: God is the one who supplies the seed and gives the growth, but the Corinthians – Paul hopes! – are to sow and enjoy a harvest that endures forever.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Kim, *Kollekte*, 78-79.

<sup>49</sup> Some have objected that God is the natural subject of the verb in 9:9 since God is the subject in 9:8a and 9:10. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, 440; Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, 141. If this were truly the natural subject of the verb one would expect ancient Greek interpreters of 2 Corinthians to read it this way, which they did not. The Corinthians are the subject of the ἵνα-clause immediately preceding the quotation. Moreover, the

In 9:11-14 Paul turns from the bountiful harvest of charity to explain that generosity brings thanksgiving to God. He begins by claiming that every gift produces “thanksgiving to God (εὐχαριστίαν τῷ θεῷ)” (9:11). The next verse elaborates on this claim: “For the service of this ministry is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but also is overflowing through many thanksgivings to God” (9:12). In Greco-Roman antiquity one would normally expect donors to be told that their generosity will result in thanksgiving to them.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, εὐχαριστία is found in many inscriptions honoring benefactors who receive “thanksgiving” for their gifts.<sup>51</sup> Instead, Paul argues that when the Corinthians share from their abundance God receives the thanks. This apparent oddity offers a close parallel to Paul’s infamous failure to thank the Philippians for their gifts. In both cases the human donors receive no thanks because the gifts are directed to God.

The following lines argue that the Corinthians will bring glory to God if they give, with an extended prepositional phrase explaining how this happens: “Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by (ἐπὶ) your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them *and with all others*” (9:13 NRSV emphasis added).<sup>52</sup> This line demonstrates that Paul’s concern for the collection arose at least in part from a more general concern to instill an ethic of liberality, a fact which is not surprising given the formal

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psalm’s description of a human almsgiver perfectly illustrates the point running throughout 9:6-10: God will ensure that the harvest of charity will endure.

<sup>50</sup> Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles*, 143.

<sup>51</sup> A search of the PHI (Packard Humanities Institute) database reveals many examples. Cf. the use of εὐχαριστία in Acts 24:3.

<sup>52</sup> The subject of δοξάζοντες (glorifying) is debated. Either the Corinthians glorify God directly or they trigger the glorification of the recipients. On the meaning of ὁμολογία see Hans Klein, “Vereinbarung hinsichtlich der Mission? ὁμολογία εἰς τὸ εὐαγγέλιον in 2Kor 9,13,” *ZNW* 103 (2012): 146-51.

theological similarities between 2 Cor 9, Phil 4:10-20, and texts such as Proverbs, Sirach, and the Synoptic Gospels. The theological arguments of 2 Corinthians 9 are not simply an attempt to convince the Corinthians to give to the collection. They are, like Phil 4:10-20, catechesis on the theological significance of generosity in general. Indeed, though 9:13 is the most explicit declaration of the general applicability of Paul's argument, this chapter is replete with hints that the urgency of charity is never-ending. God gives them grace to give "always" (πάντοτε) and to abound in "every good work" (εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν) (9:8). They will be enriched "for all generosity" (εἰς πᾶσαν ἀπλότητα)" (9:11). Paul gives every appearance of hoping to convince the Corinthians to glorify God through a life of generosity and not simply by giving to the collection. Given the importance of the collection for Paul, it is striking that he generalizes his appeals in this way. If Paul did not teach the necessity of charity to all who are in need – that is, if his teaching on charity was restricted to the collection – this language would be inexplicable. The generality of the appeal in 2 Cor 9 is less surprising in light of our main thesis: Paul taught a conventional biblical-Jewish theology of charity. In 9:6-15 he argues that (1) God will ensure that money given to the poor lasts longer than money retained and (2) charity for the poor "overflows" into an act of service to God. The argument has an unmistakable Pauline flavor, particularly in the emphasis on the prior gift of God which enables generosity, but in every other way it is a conventional appeal to worship God and enjoy the fruits of justice.<sup>53</sup>

Money for a friend in trouble is a sacrifice and loan to God (Phil 4:10-20). Money for the poor of Jerusalem – and for all others – will endure forever as the harvest of justice, bringing

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<sup>53</sup> The promise of the prayers of the recipients of the collection in v.14 is also suggestive. God's attention to the cries of the poor is a recurring biblical trope. In later centuries Jews and Christians make the prayers of the poor a regular part of the exchange of charity. See, e.g., *Herm. Sim.* 1.4-7; *Lev. Rab.* 34:8.

thanksgiving and glory God (2 Cor 9:6-14). These two texts show that Paul believed and taught that money for the needy is service for God that God will reciprocate. We turn now to a third example from the undisputed letters.

#### *Galatians 6:7-10*

Following his argument against justification by works of the Law, Paul turns in Galatians 5-6 to a series of exhortations, arguing that freedom in Christ consists of Spirit-enabled “faith working through love” (5:6).<sup>54</sup> A good summary of this portion of the letter appears in 6:7-10, the final lines that Paul dictated before he picked up the pen and wrote the closing admonition in his own hand. He begins by warning that “God is not mocked” because “whatever a person sows, this also he will reap” (6:7). Paul then switches from the question of seed to soil: “For the one who sows in his own flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows in the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing the good, for we will reap in the due time (καὶρῷ...ἰδίῳ), if we do not give up” (6:8-9). In other words, to reap eternal life it is necessary to remain steadfast in planting in the Spirit, which is here equated with doing the good (τὸ...καλὸν ποιοῦντες). The concluding sentence reiterates this point and makes it explicit that Paul is concerned with doing the good for all, not just for teachers in the church, as v.6 might suggest: “So then (Ἄρα οὖν), while we have time (ὥς καιρὸν ἔχομεν) – that is, until the time when all will reap what they have sown – let us do the good (ἐργαζώμεθα τὸ ἀγαθόν) for all, especially for the household of faith.”<sup>55</sup> Those who plant in the Spirit by “doing the good” will reap eternal life in the future if they do not give up.

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<sup>54</sup> See also 5:13-14, 22-23; 6:2.

<sup>55</sup> Larry W. Hurtado (“The Jerusalem Collection and the Book of Galatians,” *JSNT* 5 [1979]: 46-62) understands 6:6-10 to refer to the collection. See the response of John M. G. Barclay, *Obeying the Truth: Paul’s Ethics in Galatians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1988), 163, 166.

What does “doing the good” (τὸ...καλὸν ποιοῦντες / ἐργαζώμεθα τὸ ἀγαθόν) mean here? The language of “doing the good” has a complex history of overlapping uses in philosophy and in the socio-political realm where it could refer to military prowess or civic benefactions of various kinds.<sup>56</sup> Here it is good *for others* (πρὸς πάντας), so it must refer to action taken on behalf of other people. In context one might think of sharing good things with teachers (6:6), bearing the burdens of others (6:2), loving one’s neighbor (5:14) and fruits of the Spirit such as love, patience, and kindness (5:22). Inscriptional evidence indicates that benefactors who distinguished themselves by their gifts to a city were routinely honored with stereotyped phrases such as “he does what good he can” (ποιῶν ὅτι δύναται ἀγαθόν and the like). In addition to the substantive use of ἀγαθός and καλός as benefaction, both words are frequently used as adjectives in the Hellenistic and Roman periods to describe those who give generously. The benefactor is called the “noble and good man” (ἀνὴρ καλὸς καὶ ἀγαθός), descriptions which appear often together with εὐεργέτης (benefactor).<sup>57</sup> Both ἀγαθός and καλός also describe the deeds themselves (i.e., “good works”). Similar usage is found in literary sources.<sup>58</sup> Paul himself uses ἀγαθοί to describe the things the Galatians should share with teachers in the immediately preceding verse and in 2 Cor 9:8 “every good work (εἰς πᾶν ἔργον ἀγαθόν),” refers to charitable

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<sup>56</sup> The most thorough discussion of good works language to date is Travis B. Williams, *Good Works in 1 Peter: Negotiating Social Conflict and Christian Identity in the Greco-Roman World*, WUNT 337 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

<sup>57</sup> E.g., one Hegemoneus Kallisthenes is lauded as a man noble and good and a benefactor (ἀνδρα καλὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν καὶ εὐεργέ[τη]ν). IG XII,6 (1st cen. C.E.).

<sup>58</sup> E.g., Dio Chrysostom, *Or.* 31,8; 31,14; 31,27; 31,65; 46,2-3. Plutarch, *Moralia* 218A; 851D.

giving.<sup>59</sup> In short, “doing the good for all” is not limited to financial gifts; it would include any action taken for the good of others, though it is likely that the Galatians would have thought first of material generosity, as in fact ancient commentators on Galatians often did. Jerome, for instance, glosses “the good” in 6:10 as “alms.”<sup>60</sup>

Galatians 6:7-10 is very different from the evidence adduced thus far. Philippians 4 and 2 Corinthians 9 are conventional Jewish descriptions of charity, using Scripture and biblical-sounding language to describe assistance to the needy as worship. In this passage, however, Paul uses language most commonly associated with euergetism. The neologism “euergetism” denotes a form of civic benefaction practiced around the Mediterranean world well into the Roman era in which wealthy members of the city provided the capital needed for building projects and public events. All of this was recorded for posterity on inscriptions which praise the donors as εὐεργέται (those who “do the good”) and encourage others to join them in a pursuit of public adulation.<sup>61</sup> Travis Williams has recently demonstrated the tendency of Jewish and Christian texts to invest

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<sup>59</sup> See Andrew D. Clarke on Rom 5:7, “The Good and the Just in Romans 5:7,” *TynBul* 41.1 (1990): 128-42. Cf. also 1 Tim 5-6; Eph 4:28; Matt 20:15; Luke 6:35; Acts 9:36; *t. Peah* 2:13; 3:1. On the synagogue dedicatory inscriptions containing the phrase “remembered for good” see Susan Sorek, *A Jewish Benefaction System in Ancient Palestine*, SWBA 5 (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> *apostolus faciendam quidem docet ad omnes eleemosynam, sed maxime ad domesticos fidei* (*Contra Vigilantium* 14.366; see also *Comm. Gal.* 3.461). John Chrysostom frequently cites Gal 6:9-10 in homilies to urge listeners to generosity. On one occasion he cites it to show the error of giving alms only to monks: one must do the good (i.e., give alms) *for all* (*Hom. Heb.* 63:88; see also *Hom. Gal.* 61.677; *Hom. Eph.* 62.168). See also Cyril of Alexandria, *Epistulae paschales*, 77.552; Cyprian of Carthage, *Pat.* 13.257, *Eleem.* 24.502; Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* On Ps 111; Caesarius of Arles, *Sermones* 27.3.

<sup>61</sup> The description “euergetism” owes its popularity to P. Veyne, *Bread and Circuses*, trans. B. Pearce (London: Penguin, 1990).

“good works” language with a new, vertical dimension.<sup>62</sup> Instead of serving the city and burnishing one’s reputation, “doing the good” became for many a way of serving God.<sup>63</sup> To understand the meaning of “doing the good” in Galatians, therefore, it is necessary not only to attend to the connotations of these words in Greek-speaking cities but to the larger interpretative framework or grammar in which they are placed. Though Paul uses vocabulary associated with euergetism, he transposes it into a typically Jewish framework by making God the reciprocator of generosity. Those who do the good sow seed in the Spirit, and instead of receiving public honors they receive eternal life. Acts of beneficence are directed toward God and it is God – not the recipients – who will reciprocate.

A question that remains is whether Gal 6:7-10 is a call to serve God through generosity to all or, as Longenecker and many church fathers would have it, a call to serve God specifically through the poor.<sup>64</sup> As Bolkestein noted almost eighty years ago, many Hellenistic Greek texts did come to use the language of benefaction to describe alms.<sup>65</sup> The question of whether this is the case here hinges partly on the identity of “the poor” in 2:10, a dilemma beyond the scope of this essay. What is certain, however, is that Galatians makes generosity for others a means of investing in the Spirit and reaping eternal life.

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<sup>62</sup> *Good Works in 1 Peter*, 105-62.

<sup>63</sup> In the later Pauline tradition, 1 Timothy offers a clear example of “good works” as a description of charitable deeds: widows are to be known for their good works (ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς) and to devote themselves to good works (εἰ παντὶ ἔργῳ ἀγαθῷ), which is defined as nourishing children, practicing hospitality, washing feet, and helping the afflicted (5:10). The rich are to “do good (ἀγαθοεργεῖν) and be rich in good works (πλουτεῖν ἐν ἔργοις καλοῖς), generous and sharing” (6:18), thereby taking hold of true life.

<sup>64</sup> *Remember the Poor*, 141-42.

<sup>65</sup> *Wohltätigkeit und Armenpflege*, 433-35.

## CONCLUSION

We cannot count on Paul's letters to repeat all the key aspects of his teaching, but occasionally a small detail or comment made in passing offers a peek into a larger reality about which we would not have known.<sup>66</sup> When we see Paul repeating in different contexts the idea that generosity is ordered to God we may infer that this was a point of continuity between Paul, Jesus, and many other ancient Jews. Money for Paul in distress was "a fragrant aroma, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God" (Phil 4:18). Money given to the collection (and "to all") produces thanksgiving and glory to God (2 Cor 9:11-13). Charity funds a growing account with God which God will fully repay by providing for the givers' needs (Phil 4:17, 19). It is God who ensures that the "seed" of generosity will grow and lead to a bountiful harvest lasting "forever" (2 Cor 9:6-10). Though it lacks cultic and sacrificial language, Galatians 6 makes actions taken on behalf of others a means of reaping eternal life. Thus, for all of Paul's idiosyncrasies, he could only have agreed with Ben Sira's claim that charitable deeds are gifts for God or with the Jesus tradition that it is not the parsimonious but the generous who will have what they need in the future (Luke 12:13-33; Matt 6:19-24).

Scholarship has been largely oblivious to Paul's indebtedness to the biblical tradition on this issue, which has led to a number of exegetical dead-ends. Philippians 4:10-20 has vexed interpreters because of the cultic and financial language and because Paul says that the Philippians' growing account with God is more important than the money he received. Yet, this is precisely what one would expect if Paul wanted to teach the Philippians to view their generosity as a loan or offering to God which will lead God to attend to the Philippians' own needs in the future. The evidence adduced here also sheds new light on the significance of the

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<sup>66</sup> E.g., 1 Cor 11:17-34.



collection. In 2 Cor 9:6-14 Paul explains that by giving to the collection the Corinthians will receive blessings from God, a rich harvest which will endure “forever.” He also claims that giving to them and “to all” brings thanksgiving and glory to God. We know that Paul taught similar things on other occasions. Thus, while the motivations for the collection were various, it was at least in part an instance of Paul’s general concern to teach his congregations to worship God through the needy.<sup>67</sup>

Finally, it should be noted that attention to Paul’s traditional grammar of generosity throws his idiosyncratic concerns into sharp relief. In Galatians, generosity is sowing to the Spirit to reap eternal life, but it is also empowered by the Spirit (5:22). The self-giving love that fulfills the law of Christ is not self-generated but is itself the result of a prior movement of the God. Similarly, in 2 Corinthians 9 God supplies the seed that makes it possible for the justice to endure forever. In 2 Corinthians 8 Paul describes how God gave the churches of Macedonia the gift (χάρις) which made it possible from them to give the gift (χάρις) to the saints. They “give themselves” (8:5) just as Jesus gave himself and became poor so they would become rich (8:9). As in Galatians, Christ’s gift of himself conforms those who are in Christ to the pattern of his self-giving. Though it is not explicit in Phil 4:10-20, it is clear in the letter as a whole that the Philippians’ gifts for Paul are the result of the good work (ἔργον ἀγαθόν) which God is completing in them (1:5-6). Thus, while Paul could only agree with his Jewish and Christian

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<sup>67</sup> Downs (*Offering of the Gentiles*, 120-60) has argued that Paul’s descriptions of the collection consistently use the language of worship. If Downs is correct, this would provide further evidence that Paul saw the collection as an act of charity.

contemporaries who taught that charity is a gift for God that God will return, he grounds this celestial trading in the prior gift of Christ who by his Spirit creates cruciform generosity.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> On the role of human agency in Paul, see the recent work of John M.G. Barclay, e.g., "Believers and the "Last Judgment" in Paul: Rethinking Grace and Recompense," in *Eschatologie - Eschatology: The Sixth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Eschatology in Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (Tübingen, September, 2009) eds. H.-J Eckstein et al.; WUNT 272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 195-208.