

EQUALITY FOR THE WOMEN OF ASIA:
A NEGLECTED BIBLICAL TEXT
(2 CORINTHIANS 8:13-15)

Steven S. H. Chang*

Many biblical texts teach the equality of all people, especially as a benefit of the gospel. The apostle Paul in particular formulated a well-developed concept of equality in the light of the Christian gospel. In his Epistle to the Romans, for example, Paul develops a message of equality in the midst of division and perceived privilege; the Jewish Christians believed that they had one up on their Gentile counterparts.¹ Paul would have none of that as a Jew himself, teaching instead the equality of Jews and Gentiles² throughout Romans: “There is no difference between Jew and Gentile” (Rom 3:22; 10:12).³

Concerning equality between male and female, another Pauline text is better known, namely Galatians 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (TNIV).⁴ While addressing primarily the Jew-Gentile divide,⁵ Paul mentions two other divisions: slave/free and

*Steven S. H. Chang, Ph.D., is Associate Professor of New Testament at Torch Trinity Graduate School of Theology. He is currently visiting scholar at Princeton Theological Seminary.

¹As to the exact nature of the one-upmanship, the theories vary depending on whether or not one holds the New Perspective to be correct. It seems to me that Romans itself evidences that at least some Jewish believers incorporated “works of the Law” as a means to righteousness.

²The equality of Jews and Gentiles as Paul’s soteriological argument in Romans is the central thesis of Daniel Jong-Sang Chae, *Paul as Apostle to the Gentiles: His Apostolic Self-Awareness and Its Influence on the Soteriological Argument in Romans* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

³The theme of equality permeates Romans: Jews and Gentiles are equal in sin and slavery (Rom 1-3, 6-7), equal in their access to grace and righteousness through faith (Rom 3-5), equal in their confession and salvation (Rom 10), and equal in their reception of the fulfilled promises (Rom 15).

⁴All Scripture quotations in this article are from TNIV unless stated otherwise.

⁵Galatians as a whole, it seems to me, addresses the Jewish Christian perspective of privilege in the created and redeemed order at the expense of Gentile Christians who were misled into Jewish law observance in addition to faith.

male/female. Because of this interesting addition, Galatians 3:28 has had its share of attention from feminist biblical scholars and theologians. For example, Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, in her influential *In Memory of Her*, considers Galatians 3:28 to be a baptismal declaration of unequivocal equality both in the church and in the marriage relationship. Schüssler Fiorenza argues on the strength of this verse:

Women as well as men are prophets and leaders of worship in the community. Women as well as men have the call to a marriage-free life. Women as well as men have mutual rights and obligations within the sexual relationships of marriage.⁶

More recently, Lienemann-Perrin considers Galatians 3:28 a “hermeneutical starting point for a feminist and participatory theology of mission.”⁷ She suggests four benefits of using Galatians 3:28 as a hermeneutical key: 1) gender stereotypes are invalidated; 2) religious/cultural and social/legal hierarchies are treated together with gender inequality; 3) participation rather than exclusion is the goal; 4) women are motivated to join the Christian congregation. Thus, Galatians 3:28 has been a pivotal egalitarian text for women, especially in the West. But does Galatians 3:28 speak appropriately to the women of Asia and the inequalities they face?⁸

What is missing in the equality readings of Galatians 3:28 and other “equality” texts is the economic dimension. Typically, socio-

⁶E. Schüssler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), 235.

⁷C. Lienemann-Perin, “The Biblical Foundations for a Feminist and Participatory Theology of Mission,” *International Review of Mission* 93 no. 368 (2004): 22.

⁸The use of Galatians 3:28 as an egalitarian text remains controversial and objections have been raised. See for example Richard Hove, *Equality in Christ? Galatians 3:28 and the Gender Dispute* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1999); idem., “Does Galatians 3:28 Negate Gender-Specific Roles?” in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. W. Grudem (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2002), 105-144, who argues against another evangelical, Rebecca Merrill Groothuis, *Good News for Women: A Biblical Picture of Gender Equality* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997), over what he perceives to be confusion in readings of Galatians 3:28 that blur all distinction (and roles) between male and female. See also Ed L. Miller, “Is Galatians 3:28 the Great Egalitarian Text?” *Exp Tim* 114 no. 1 (2002): 9-11, who argues that this text is “almost universally misunderstood and misappropriated” (p. 9).

cultural and institutional status (church or marriage/family) inequalities are addressed but not the economic. In fact, another Pauline text that forcibly addresses inequality is generally left out in the discussions.⁹ That text is 2 Corinthians 8:13-15.¹⁰

For this issue of the *Torch Trinity Journal* focusing on “Women in Asia and Missions,” this article reflects on the message of equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 and how it appropriately speaks to the inequality experienced by the women of Asia. In these three verses, Paul articulates a theology of equality that is not only neglected but also scarcely found in such potent form elsewhere in Scripture. It would be worthwhile to study carefully the context and message of these three verses and to draw out a contemporary theology of equality for the women of Asia. But first let us soberly consider the plight of women in Asia.

WOMEN AND INEQUALITY IN THE ASIAN CENTURY

The 21st century is heralded as the Asian (or Pacific) century, much like the 20th and 19th centuries were termed the American and European/British centuries, respectively. As the 21st century unfolds, Asian powers are taking notable leaps in economic and cultural influence. In the cultural sphere, Asia has always been rich, but now Asian cultures have global influence. One thinks of Bollywood, the Korean Wave, Hong Kong films, and other popular phenomena as well as the increasing reach of Asian religions and ideologies. With over half the population of the world residing in Asia,¹¹ the influence will

⁹Jacob Cherian, “Toward a Commonwealth of Grace: A Plutocritical Reading of Grace and Equality in Second Corinthians 8:1-15,” Ph.D. diss. (Princeton Theological Seminary, 2007), 3-6, conducting an informal survey, concludes that there is “widespread ignorance” about 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 as an “equality” text. I am indebted to Paul Oslington for alerting me to Cherian’s dissertation.

¹⁰2 Cor 8:13-15 is typically overlooked in discussions of gender equality and at times even in discussions of Christian equality in general. For example, Grootius, *Good News for Women*, op. cit., never refers to 2 Cor 8:13-15. Similarly, Bob Holman, *Toward Equality: A Christian Manifesto* (London: SPCK, 1997) does not cite 2 Cor 8:13-15 in a book on the Christian principle of primarily economic equality, even in a section entitled, “The Bible and Equality.”

¹¹China and India have the two largest populations and account for over a third of the world’s total population. Add to these Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Japan, and the percentage quickly rises to nearly half of the world’s population in just those

continue to grow. In the economic sphere, the miracle of Asian economic growth was deemed a bubble that burst during the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s. But Asian economies have bounced back with a vengeance.¹² Kishore Mahbubani, dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore, estimates that by 2050, China will have the largest economy in the world followed by the USA, India, and Japan.¹³ That puts three of the top four economies in Asia. Mahbubani emphatically states, “The Asian century is not coming. The Asian century is here. It has begun. And it has begun primarily because of a huge rebirth of cultural confidence among Asian societies.”¹⁴

However, while the wealth of Asian nations explodes, the growth is uneven. For example, East Asian nations (China, Taiwan, Japan, and Korea) are on the whole wealthier than their Southeast Asian counterparts (Indonesia, Thailand, the Philippines, etc.). In this Asian setting, the gap between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is widening. More disturbing is that the gulf between the rich and the poor is in some respects a gender divide.

Nicola Piper, a researcher at the Australian National University, has studied Asian labor migration and states:

Asia has a long history of international labor migration expanding across the globe, but more recently there have been distinctive trends: first, cross-border migration flows within the Asian region have become more significant; and second, in addition to these increasing intra-Asian migratory movements, the feminization of migration has been widely recognized as another new trend.¹⁵

six Asian countries. The population data used for these rough calculations are from the CIA World Factbook website (www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/).

¹²Even with prolonged economic stagnancy in the last decade, Japan remains the number two economy in the world, well ahead of number three Germany. As of 2006, China has overtaken the United Kingdom and France and taken the number four slot. India is climbing fast and has overtaken Asian rival, South Korea, for the number twelfth spot. This information is from the World Bank website (www.worldbank.org).

¹³S. Windybank, “The West in an *Asian Century*,” *Policy* 21 no. 4 (Summer 2005/2006): 46. The article records Windybank’s interview with Mahbubani.

¹⁴Windybank, “The West in an *Asian Century*,” 46.

¹⁵N. Piper, “Global Norms, Transnational Advocacy Networks and Female Migrant Labor in Asia,” in *Globalization, Culture and Inequality in Asia*, ed. T. J. Scrase, T. J. M. Holden, and S. Baum (Melbourne: Trans Pacific, 2003), 48.

Inequality at various levels, particularly regional economic inequality in Asia, causes the increase in “intra-Asian” migration, which is primarily feminine. Women from poorer Asian countries are drawn to the more affluent Asian countries because of poverty and discrimination at home. But often the lives of female migrant laborers are even more vulnerable to exploitation in their host countries, where little or no support is offered them.¹⁶ Piper continues,

Current experiences of female migration – particularly from Asia, the biggest exporter of female labor – is characterized by the overwhelming presence of women migrants in the category of unskilled labor (which is more often a reflection on the demand side and availability of a limited type of visa rather than a reflection upon these women’s actual educational backgrounds). The kinds of jobs open to women are typically in the domestic sphere, the service industry (including entertainment) and to a lesser extent also in factories. In their dual role as women and migrant workers, they are often subject to exploitative or abusive practices in a variety of ways.¹⁷

Such assessments expose the trend. The women of Asia are increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and dehumanization.

So how ought the church of Asia respond to the current inequality suffered by the women of Asia? Responsibility rests on churches and Christians to respond in accordance with biblical teaching. Even as Christians affirm that a fundamental tenet of the gospel is equality, how does 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 address the situation of Asian women from the poorer countries?

EQUALITY IN 2 CORINTHIANS 8:13-15

Paul’s apostolic ministry during the 50s included a large, wide-scale economic project—the collection for the poor believers in Jerusalem. By A.D. 57, Paul reports from Corinth that the churches of two Roman provinces, Macedonia and Achaia, had contributed to his project (Rom 15:25-28). No doubt all of the well-known churches in those provinces—Philippian, Thessalonian, Berean, Corinthian, and

¹⁶See the interesting article on Filipina migrant laborers by Gemma Tulud Cruz, “Faith on the Edge: Religion and Women in the Context of Migration,” *Feminist Theology* 15 (2006): 9-25.

¹⁷Piper, “Global Norms,” 48.

Cenchrean—participated.¹⁸ After penning the report, he made his way back to Jerusalem to deliver the funds (Acts 20:2-3). A later description of that journey reads, “After an absence of several years, I came to Jerusalem to bring my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings” (Acts 24:11). Paul had completed his project, but not without difficulty.

Earlier in A.D. 56, Paul’s rocky relationship with the Corinthian church had led to the demise of his project.¹⁹ Thus, in 2 Corinthians 8-9,²⁰ he challenges the Corinthians to revive the collection and give generously now that his relationship with them was restored with Titus’s help (2 Cor 7). Paul does not hold back in these two chapters. His discourse is intricate, articulating a dense theology of giving.

In his most focused appeal in 2 Corinthians 8:1-15,²¹ Paul begins by drawing attention to the Macedonian collection effort, the quality of which he could vouch for firsthand.²² Their effort is a model of exemplary giving because of the “grace God gave them” (2 Cor 8:1). They were liberal in their giving, and thus truly acting as those who were wealthy. Paul then turns his attention to the second mission of Titus (2 Cor 8:6; cf. 8:16-19) and the Corinthians’ own desire for excellence (2 Cor 8:7). They were excellent in other manifestations, but not in grace-filled giving, falling behind their competitors in quality and sacrifice. He then powerfully points to the sacrificial giving of Christ (2 Cor 8:8-9) as an implicit model to follow. As Christ’s followers, the Corinthians would have to experience generous giving as

¹⁸Moreover, the churches of Galatia gave a contribution (1 Cor 16:1). We have no record of the churches of Asia Minor, in particular Ephesus, contributing, although we cannot rule out their participation at some point.

¹⁹Paul’s relationship with the Corinthian church was marred by personal attacks (2 Cor 2:5, 10), questions of his apostolic authority (2 Cor 3-5), suspicions of extortion (2 Cor 12:18) and perhaps even embezzlement (2 Cor 8:20), all of which give ample reasons for the collection’s demise in Corinth. Further, it is likely, given the other “social problems” in Corinth (1 Cor 1-7, esp.) that the collection was mistakenly seen by some wealthy Corinthians as a chance to be recognized for a benefaction or to make clients out of Paul or the Jerusalem congregation within a patronage relationship.

²⁰2 Cor 8-9 are sometimes separated from 2 Cor 1-7 and 10-13.

²¹V.P. Furnish, *II Corinthians* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1984), 409, states that the “appeal itself is most sharply focused in 8:1-15.”

²²“I testify” in 2 Cor 8:3.

sacrificial as Christ's incarnation and ultimately death. Tempering the potency of his appeal to this point, Paul sets out three principles. First, willingness must be matched by action (2 Cor 8:10-11). The Corinthian church had pledged their gift even before the Macedonians (2 Cor 8:10; 9:2) but they needed to follow through. Second, giving is always according to means (2 Cor 8:12). The gift must not impoverish the giver so that they themselves are in need of help.

Finally, Paul rounds out his argument by drawing attention to the principle of equality.²³ He writes,

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." (2 Cor 8:13-15)

Verses 13 and 14 set the aim/basis and result of giving as equality (*isotēs*). The quotation of Exodus 16:18 illustrates how God applied this principle to Israel in the wilderness but it also suggests much more.

There are, however, several exegetical issues in the interpretation of 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. Why does Paul introduce his teaching on equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15? What does *isotēs* mean? Is equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13 the ground or the purpose of giving? Why does Paul cite Exodus 16:18 and seemingly without any warning or explanation? All of these questions are tackled in the hope of fleshing out Paul's vision of equality.

Why Equality Here?

Why does Paul introduce his teaching on equality here? This is an important question for understanding 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. There are four possible answers. First, Paul realizes as he was writing that his earlier statements were too extreme. Recall, for example, that Paul had drawn attention to the poverty of the Macedonians (2 Cor 8:1-5) and of Christ (2 Cor 8:9), and following their example could (and perhaps should) lead to self-poverty. Therefore, having overstated his case, Paul is tempering his appeal with two principles: giving from what one has

²³P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 414 n62, suggests equality a "parallel principle" to that of giving according to means.

(2 Cor 8:12) and giving to realize equality (2 Cor 8:13-15).²⁴ However, there is nothing inherently contradictory between self-sacrifice and equality.²⁵ Paul may appeal for self-sacrifice, in which he merely appears to be overstating his case and still without contradiction. While Paul is certainly trying to avoid misunderstanding in his reference to equality, he would be in danger of self-contradiction if he were indeed speaking out of both sides of his mouth.

Second, Paul may be anticipating a complaint by the Corinthians that if the roles were reversed, the Jerusalem church would not help. There is plenty of evidence (e.g., Gal) that suggests that the relationship between Paul's Gentile churches and the Jerusalem church was shaky. However, most commentators consider the possibility of role-reversal remote.²⁶ Further, this view is hardly compatible with the idea that God rewards those who are generous with the poor (2 Cor 9:6, 8, 11).

Third, the Corinthians may fear that they themselves would become poor in the process of helping the Jerusalem church. This objection seems likely given what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 8:13: "...not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed." Whether or not this is a legitimate concern in Paul's mind, the Corinthians must not

²⁴R. Bultmann, *The Second Letter to the Corinthians*, trans. R. A. Harrisville (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 255, suggests that Paul is treating equality because of "the misunderstanding that one must give beyond one's means." See also J. Héring, *The Second Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (London: Epworth, 1967), 61.

²⁵We should note that the example of self-sacrifice (Macedonians and Christ) is given to the wealthier party (the Corinthians) for the purpose of equality. It would not be appropriate to preach self-sacrifice to those who already had the lesser share in the economy of equality.

²⁶Several commentators find the suggestion that the roles could be reversed very unlikely. See K. F. Nickle, *The Collection: A Study of Paul's Strategy* (Naperville: Allenson, 1966), 121 n. 179; P. E. Hughes, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 306; F. W. Danker, *II Corinthians* (ACNT; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 128; E. Best, *Second Corinthians* (Int.; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 80; Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 419. On the contrary, H. D. Betz, *2 Corinthians 8 and 9: Commentary on Two Administrative Letters of the Apostle Paul* (Herm; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 68 and M. J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (NIGNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 592; J. Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians* (SacPag; Collegeville: Liturgical, 1999), 141.

give so lavishly that they would require assistance themselves.²⁷ Paul then avoids misunderstanding by appealing to equality.

Finally, the issue with the collection may be social in nature such that Paul's emphasis on equality corrects elitist perceptions of status inequality between the Corinthian and Jerusalem churches. Garland suggests, "Paul stresses equality because he does not want the Corinthians to think they are one up on the Jerusalem church."²⁸ Further, Sze-kar Wan suggests that "Paul's desire [was] to decouple the Corinthians' contribution from their patronal expectation" which would place the Jerusalem church under obligation.²⁹ These social reasons explain why Paul never mentions Jerusalem or the poor in 2 Corinthians 8-9, but they also highlight the desire for equality as proper motivation for giving.

Perhaps option three has the most merit from the text itself, but it does not address the question of motivation. Why should the Corinthians fear poverty in the process of giving? They do not understand, it seems, the model of Christ who became poor in the process of making others rich (2 Cor 8:9). Unlike the Macedonians (2 Cor 8:1-5), the Corinthians had used the excuse of poverty to renege on their pledge because they could not imagine a good return on their benefaction.³⁰

²⁷This is precisely what Christ had done, namely to become poor in the process of making others rich (2 Cor 8:9), but Christ was also able to bear the burden of "poverty" without assistance from those whom he made rich.

²⁸D. Garland, *2 Corinthians* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 384.

²⁹S.-k. Wan, "Collection for the Saints as Anticolonial Act: Implications of Paul's Ethnic Reconstruction," in *Paul and Politics: Ecclesia, Israel, Imperium, Interpretation: Essays in Honor of Krister Stendahl*, ed. R. A. Horsley (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2000), 210-211. He considers the appeal to be an "anti-patronal."

³⁰Benefactors always considered the ability of the beneficiaries to return a gift, if not in material form, in the form of honor or thanksgiving. Further, there was neither wisdom nor honor in becoming poor in the process of giving. For a detailed introduction to patronage and benefaction, see S. Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor* (WUNT 2.124; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2000), 17-72.

isotēs

Paul's teaching of equality takes shape around *isotēs*, which has the sense of either "equality" or "fairness."³¹ *isotēs* is only found in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 (twice) and Colossians 4:1 in the New Testament. In secular Greek, the word is used in philosophy, law, politics, mathematics, geography, and social relations.³² In the Septuagint (LXX), the Greek translation of the Old Testament and apocryphal writings, *isotēs* occurs in Job 36:29 and Zechariah 4:7, which have nothing to do with material or relational equality, and in Psalm of Solomon 17:41,³³ an interesting occurrence that appears to denote justice when the Messianic King reigns.³⁴

In Colossians 4:1, Paul uses *isotēs* to advise masters in their treatment of slaves. He writes, "Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and *fair*, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven" (NIV).³⁵ Most major translations render *isotēs* as "fair" with few variations (KJ²¹ "equitable"; KJV; ASV "equal"). The context excludes any notion of social or material equality. Rather, what is meant is fairness and equitability without equality of materials or statuses. The occurrences in Colossians 4:1 and in Psalm of Solomon 17:41 suggest that *isotēs* is closely connected to justice (*dikaïos*) and thus should be rendered "equity" without suggesting material equality.³⁶

³¹BDAG 481; L&N 58:32: "the state of being equal – 'equality' (in the sense of having equal features or characteristics)." See also *TDNT* 3:345-348; *NIDNTT* 2:497; *EDNT* 2:202; *TLNT* 2:230-231.

³²LSJ 840 gives examples from various Greek sources with the following meanings: equality (philosophical), equality of ratios (mathematics), political equality or justice, fair dealing or impartiality (social relations), and equiformity (geography). See also G. Stählin, "*isos, isotēs*," *TDNT* 3:345-348.

³³The Psalms of Solomon are Jewish compositions, originally in Hebrew but only extant in Greek and Syriac translations, from the mid-1st century BC. It is a part of the *antilegomena* ("disputed writings"), secondary to the OT Apocrypha, and an important text to the study of Jewish Messianism and the "Kingdom of God." See M. Lattke, "Psalms of Solomon," *DNTB*.

³⁴Ps. Sol. 17:41 reads: "In fairness (*isotēti*), he will lead them all."

³⁵Greek: *to dikaion kai tēn isotēta* - "just and fair."

³⁶See Stählin, *TDNT* 3:354-355. *isos kai dikaïos* is the usual combination with the use of *isotēs* being rare.

Coming to 2 Corinthians 8:13-14, the question is whether or not *isotēs* has primarily the idea of fairness or material equality. Most major translations of 2 Corinthians 8:13-14 translate *isotēs* as “equality” with few exceptions (“fairness,” ESV; “fair balance,” NRSV). The upshot of this minor difference in meaning rests in how we understand equality as practiced in the early church. Did Paul have in mind material equality as a measure or equity as an issue of fair distribution without necessarily implying material equality? Did equality mean an equal distribution of material possessions or a fair distribution *relative* to each need or status?

The precise sense of *isotēs* in this passage depends on the understanding of Paul’s Exodus 16:18 quotation in 2 Corinthians 8:15 as well as a closer look at Paul’s argument in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14.

isotēs: Ground or Purpose?

Paul’s first use of *isotēs* is rather extraordinary. 2 Corinthians 8:13 reads, “Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality” (*all’ ex isotētos*).³⁷ Most commentators suggest that Paul clarifies his intentions by setting out the purpose or aim of the collection. For example, Thrall comments, “In all this, Paul’s *purpose* is not that relief for others should cause hardship for the Corinthians, but that there should be a state of equality.”³⁸ However, Garland conversely argues, “Paul is not talking about the purpose for their giving—to create equality—but the ground of their giving—from equality.”³⁹ Paul is operating by the principle of “giving on the basis of equity so that each has enough.”⁴⁰ Garland follows Georgi’s interesting proposal that *all’ ex isotētos* (literally “but

³⁷NIV/TNIV rendering. Consider the other English translations -- KJV: “but by an equality”; NASB: but by way of equality; ESV: but that as a matter of fairness; NAB: but that as a matter of equality; NET: but as a matter of equality; HCSB: but it is a question of equality; NRSV: but it is a question of a fair balance; REB: it is a question of equality; NCV: but we want everything to be equal; CEV: but it is only fair; NJB: but there should be a fair balance; NLT: that there should be some equality.

³⁸Thrall, *II Corinthians*, vol. 2 (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000), 539 (emphasis added). Harris, *Second Epistle*, 589, suggests that the *ou...hina* clause could express purpose and to the structure of “not the purpose, but the purpose.”

³⁹Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 382.

⁴⁰Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 382.

out of equality”) here cannot mean “but that there might be equality” (TNIV) to suggest the purpose of giving.⁴¹

Georgi’s reading is based on an understanding of *isotēs* as a Hellenistic-Jewish concept (from Philo) of a divine force, “paraphrasing even God himself.”⁴² In this tradition, from which Paul presumably draws, *isotēs* is inexorably linked to *dikaiosunē* (righteousness) and *charis* (grace). This interpretation of *isotēs* fits well with the importance of divine *charis* in 2 Corinthians 8-9, particularly 8:1-9. Georgi summarizes, “The main point Paul clearly wishes to make is that the constant and all-encompassing movement of grace, which is and makes both righteous and equal, dwells permanently within its divine origin.”⁴³ Thus, *isotēs* ought to be rendered as equity or fairness and as the ground of giving.

While nearly compelling, there are significant objections to this proposal. C. K. Barrett suggests that Paul did not “personify” *isotēs* and that equality is primarily a moral concept.⁴⁴ Margaret Thrall argues that Philo has been misread and that Georgi’s interpretation leads to an unnatural split between the meanings of *isotēs* in verses 13 and 14.⁴⁵ Caution is prudent, since Paul did not indiscriminately borrow concepts from his contemporaries. Further, “at the present time” (2 Cor 8:14) does not necessarily suggest that Paul has in mind an eschatological future.⁴⁶ Rather, it may simply contrast some past time,⁴⁷ some future

⁴¹D. Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 87; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 382.

⁴²Georgi, *Remembering*, 88. He suggests that *ex isotētos* is “practically interchangeable” with *ek theou*. Parallel uses, it is argued, is adequately found in Philo, *Who Is the Heir* 141-206. See Georgi, *Remembering*, 86-87; Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 382 n64.

⁴³Georgi, *Remembering*, 89.

⁴⁴C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London: Black, 1973), 227, objects to Georgi’s suggestion: “Equality was, as it remains, a fundamentally moral concept. Thinkers such as Philo were apt to personify it in cosmic and mystical directions; but Paul was not such a thinker, and in these verses is concerned with fair dealing.”

⁴⁵Thrall, *Second Epistle*, 2:540, suggests that Philo has been misread, and that the required split in meaning of *isotēs* in vv. 13 and 14 is exegetically unlikely.

⁴⁶Barnett, *Second Epistle*, 414-416; R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians* (WBC 40; Waco: Word, 1986), 267.

⁴⁷Some past time for Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 408.

time,⁴⁸ or indicate an “official period of crisis.”⁴⁹ Even if we accept Garland’s reading in 2 Corinthians 8:13, equality as the purpose of the collection is seemingly implied by “so that there might be equality” (*hopōs genētai isotēs* – as result) in 2 Corinthians 8:14. In addition, a closer look at the Exodus quotation will illumine our exegesis of *isotēs*.

isotēs and Exodus 16:18

A puzzling dimension of this passage is the short and pithy quotation⁵⁰ of Exodus 16:18, a well-known Jewish text describing the provision of the manna in the wilderness: “The one who *gathered* much did not have too much, and the one who *gathered* little did not have too little” (TNIV).⁵¹ The verb “gathered” must be supplied from the context of Exodus 16, but understanding “had” (*echōn*) is preferred in the context of 2 Corinthians 8-9. As Murray Harris notes, “to have” (*echein*) is used three times in 2 Corinthians 8:11-12 and the Corinthians are entreated to “scatter” more than gather in 2 Corinthians 9:9.⁵² Paul’s citation, then, is an implicit description of the Corinthian church verses the Jerusalem church.⁵³

Of note are the specific conditions given with the manna provision in Exodus 16 that are significant for deciphering “equality” in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14.⁵⁴ First, the manna was to be collected before it disappeared in the heat of the day. Second, each person was to collect

⁴⁸Lambrecht, *Second Corinthians*, 138, suggest some unappointed future, even “one day” later. See also Harris, *Second Epistle*, 592.

⁴⁹Danker, *II Corinthians*, 129.

⁵⁰*kathōs gegrapται* “as it is written” is a standard Pauline formula for OT citations (cf. 1 Cor 1:31; 2:9; 2 Cor 9:9; Rom 1:17; 2:24; 3:4, 10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:15; 11:8, 26; 15:3, 9, 21).

⁵¹LXX: *ouk epleonasen ho to poly kai ho to elatton ouk elattonēsen* and NA27: *ho to poly ouk epleonasen, kai ho to oligon ouk elattonēsen*. The LXX citation differs slightly in that *ho to poly* is moved to the front and *elatton* is replaced by *oligon* to emphasize the “deep poverty” of the Jerusalem poor, according to Harris, *Second Epistle*, 593. Interestingly, Philo (*Who is the Heir* 191) cites this same biblical text in a discourse on equality.

⁵²Harris, *Second Epistle*, 593-594.

⁵³The two aorists, *epleonasen* and *elattonēsen*, and the articular neuter nouns, *to poly* and *to oligon*, are descriptive of the Corinthian and Jerusalem churches, respectively.

⁵⁴Garland, 385, contends that Exodus 16:18 is “a divine pattern.”

an *omer*⁵⁵ of manna, regardless of age, gender, status, size, or any other distinction. This is very significant, especially when we consider that it was miraculously enforced. Third, the Israelites were to eat the day's provision on a single day and not save any for the following day. Some disobeyed and found their leftovers filled with worms. Fourth, as a provision for the Sabbath, each Israelite was to gather twice the normal amount on the 6th day, and miraculously, those provisions would not rot even though it was kept till the morning of the Sabbath. Divine miracle is evident in three ways: provision, equalization, and preservation. The main point of Paul's citation is clear; equal sharing of God's provision is what God wants.⁵⁶

But as Richard Hays argues, more is meant by the citation where "little is said, much suggested."⁵⁷ At least four connections are possible. First, a crucial difference is that the enforcement of equality in Exodus 16 is miraculous and mandatory while in 2 Corinthians 8, Paul insists, it is human-achieved and voluntary.⁵⁸ However, the difference may not be the point. Paul is rather suggesting that divine initiative lies behind both provisions of equality. This is how the Macedonians were enabled to give (2 Cor 8:1). Like Exodus 16, the provision that allows the Corinthians to have more than they needed, enabling them to give in the first place, is only possible because God had been generous to them. Elsewhere in the Corinthian correspondence, Paul chides the Corinthians, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?" (1 Cor 4:7).

Second, like Exodus 16, the preservation of the Corinthian bounty was entirely a matter of God's grace for a specific purpose (like the Sabbath manna).⁵⁹ By grace, the Corinthians have excess for the purpose of meeting the needs of the poor in Jerusalem. In 2 Corinthians

⁵⁵1 omer = about 2.3 liters.

⁵⁶This is Paul's main interest, certainly, but not his "sole interest" *contra* Furnish, *II Corinthians*, 420.

⁵⁷R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 91.

⁵⁸Harris, *Second Epistle*, 594.

⁵⁹The significance of one of the main teachings of Exod 16, i.e. Sabbath observance, is unclear, except perhaps that Paul is pointing out the extra grace (in the Corinthian case) shown them through Christ in the new covenant.

9:8, Paul writes, “And God is able to make all grace (*pasan charin*) abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work” (NIV; cf. 2 Cor 9:11).

Third, according to Hays, a significant thought is that “God provides for those who rely on him for their daily bread, taking no thought for the morrow.”⁶⁰ The Corinthians must not grumble that they will be relegated to poverty in the process of the giving to the Jerusalem poor (2 Cor 8:13). Rather they must themselves trust in God’s daily provision (cf. Matt 6:25).

Fourth, the Corinthians must heed the warning that hoarding is an offense, contrary to trusting in God’s provision (cf. the warning of Deut 8:11-12).⁶¹ The Israelites who gathered more than an omer found themselves at a disadvantage. Not only did their extra manna become inedible but they also incited the anger of God by their hoarding.⁶² If the Corinthians did not act to bring about equality, God had at his disposal power to institute equality forcibly as he did in the Exodus community.⁶³ This must be seen as a warning of judgment not to turn a blind eye to the suffering of the poor.

At the end, the suggestive reference to the manna provision highlights the equality of provision that God desires. The omer limitation suggests that Paul has in mind equal distribution of God’s provision. God meets the needs of each person equally by his grace. Thus, *isotēs* is more than fair treatment according to one’s needs, but also tends toward the equal distribution of abundance. The point cannot be pressed, but it also poignantly speaks against greed and hoarding.

⁶⁰Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 90. This interpretation comes through the explanation of Exodus 16 in Deuteronomy 8.

⁶¹Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 90.

⁶²Interestingly, John Chrysostom (*Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 17.2) suggests, “This happened in the case of the manna, when those who gathered more and those who gathered less were found to have the same quantity. *God did this in order to punish greed*, and Paul recalls it both to alarm them by what happened then and to persuade them never to desire more than they already have or to be anxious because they have less.” Cited from G. Bray, *1-2 Corinthians* (ACCS; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1999), 275.

⁶³F. Matera, *II Corinthians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 193.

Paul's Vision of Equality

So what does Paul's vision of equality look like? Stephen Joubert suggests that Paul's vision of equality is essentially a reciprocal relationship between the Corinthian and Jerusalem churches.⁶⁴ Equality means that by giving to the Jerusalem poor, they are put under obligation of repayment as debtors (cf. the reverse in Rom 15:27). As benefactors, the Corinthians have a certain obligation in a "long-term balanced reciprocal relationship."⁶⁵ For Joubert, reciprocity is the point of the manna Scripture quotation and the return awaiting the Corinthians is a spiritual benefit,⁶⁶ which is in fact something they need (2 Cor 8:14). Thus, the Corinthians in giving to the collection would at the same time repay an old debt (for spiritual blessings, Rom 15:27)⁶⁷ and "be promoted to benefactors of Jerusalem," in turn putting them under obligation to reciprocate.

But this is precisely what Paul is trying to avoid. It is significant that nowhere in 2 Corinthians 8-9 does he even hint at an obligation to the Jerusalem church. What is more, the reciprocal relationship between benefactor and beneficiary is complicated and in fact nullified with the insertion of a third party, namely God. If there was a sense of debt in 2 Corinthians 8-9, it is a debt to God (cf. the parable of the unmerciful servant in Matt 18) and not to Paul, the Jerusalem church, or anyone else. Further, the response that Paul expects from the Jerusalem church is directed toward God: "your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God" (2 Cor 9:11). In addition, Paul's quotation of Exodus 16:18 suggests he is thinking about material provision, not primarily spiritual debt or the return of thanks.

⁶⁴Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 140-144.

⁶⁵Joubert, *Paul as Benefactor*, 141.

⁶⁶It seems that ancient commentators regularly suggested some form of non-economic exchange. For example, Ambrosiaster (*Commentary on Paul's Epistles*): "The equality Paul is speaking of consists in the fact that because they are ministering to the saints this time they will be repaid by them in the future, for they are making the saints their debtors." Chrysostom (*Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians* 17.2): "Paul points out that sharing is mutual. Indeed, the Corinthians would be reaping spiritual rewards in abundance. How can they be compared with what is merely carnal?" Cited from Bray, *1-2 Corinthians*, 274-275.

⁶⁷Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 384, suggests, "The collection becomes a way of paying off a spiritual debt to those in Jerusalem."

Paul's vision of equality, then, is that all believers enjoy an equal share of God's provision, especially on occasions of life-threatening need.⁶⁸ This means that when it comes to basic needs (e.g., food), equal share of provisions is a mandate when some have more than enough and others not enough. Two contrasts in 2 Corinthians 8:14 bear this notion out. The your/their (*hymōn/ekeinōn*) and the abundance/need (*perisseuma/hysterēma*) pairs are repeated twice in the sequence, "your abundance...their need...their abundance...your need."⁶⁹ The point is that the equality is a matter of giving from abundance, not from need. In other words, the basic needs (i.e., food, esp.) of the Jerusalem poor were to be filled by the excess of the Corinthian, not from their own basic requirements (2 Cor 8:12). Conversely, the Corinthians could not in good conscience live in luxury without helping the poor from their excess.

Further, however, the equality that Paul has in mind in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 goes beyond provision of food in times of shortage. Rather, it suggests an equal share of possessions as a permanent goal within the Christian church. Paul's vision of equality, whole-heartedly applied, challenges excessive gaps between the rich and the poor, and embarrasses those who would hoard in the midst of those in need. If God shows grace equally to all and dispenses judgment equally to all, then in the end, God intends that material distribution reflect such equality.

IMPLICATIONS OF 2 CORINTHIANS 8:13-15

So what are the implications of equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15? In an influential study, Gerd Theissen argues that in early Christianity a "new pattern for directing and shaping social relationships" emerged in which "equality of status was extended to all—to women, foreigners, and slaves."⁷⁰ He called it "love-patriarchalism." While love-patriarchalism had some significance for society as a whole, equality

⁶⁸Best, *Second Corinthians*, 79, points out that the equality is in poverty, not in wealth.

⁶⁹Barnett, *Second Epistle*, 414, considers this be a *chiasmus* rounded out by equality on both ends.

⁷⁰G. Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, trans. J. H. Schütz (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1992), 108-109.

was primarily internalized “in Christ” according to Theissen. Critical of Theissen, Petros Vassiliadis seeks to go one step further.⁷¹ From the perspective of equality, he reviews the development of the idea of equality in the Greeks and suggests that it took a leap forward with the emergence of Christianity. He writes, “Equality in the new era of the Kingdom has a completely different meaning from the Greek philosophical notion.”⁷² In Vassiliadis’s judgment, equality is primarily a “divine act of grace that distributes equality to all, first and last” (referring to parable of the laborers in Matt 20:1-16).⁷³ In other words, it must be externalized as well as internalized.

For Vassiliadis, the externalization is principally an ecclesial expression in the permanent sharing of wealth within and among churches. He argues that in Paul’s mind, equality is not only the purpose of the collection but it also “becomes the goal of social behavior on a *permanent basis*...to realize the social ideal of *the equal distribution and permanent sharing of material wealth*.”⁷⁴ Thus, Vassiliadis understands Paul’s collection as a bone fide attempt at social transformation, but not directly. He concludes, “Paul’s emphasis was not upon social *transformation* as such, but upon the *formation* of an ecclesial (eucharistic) reality that inevitably became the decisive element in creating a new social reality of justice and equality.”⁷⁵

Thus, the social implications of the Pauline collection reach beyond material equality among the churches. Indeed, considering a neglected aspect of the Jerusalem recipients and placing the collection in the larger geo-political landscape of his day demonstrate that Paul’s notion of equality implicitly addresses two inequalities, gender and regional, similar to those faced by many Asian women today.

⁷¹P. Vassiliadis, “Equality and Justice in Classical Antiquity and in Paul: The Social Implications of the Pauline Collection,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 36 (1992): 51-59.

⁷²Vassiliadis, “Equality and Justice,” 54.

⁷³Vassiliadis, “Equality and Justice,” 54.

⁷⁴Vassiliadis, “Equality and Justice,” 57. Emphasis his.

⁷⁵Vassiliadis, “Equality and Justice,” 59. Emphasis his.

Economic Equality as a Gender Issue

In 2 Corinthians 8-9, Paul mentions the recipients of the collection only in passing⁷⁶ and only in general references: “saints” three times—twice as part of a technical name for the collection, “the service for the saints” (2 Cor 8:4; 9:1)⁷⁷ and once without elaboration (2 Cor 9:12; cf. 1 Cor 16:1)—, “others” (2 Cor 8:13), third person pronouns⁷⁸ (2 Cor 8:14; 9:13, 14), and “the whole” (2 Cor 9:13). So who exactly were the recipients of the Pauline collection?

It is clear from Paul’s references elsewhere that the recipients were Jewish Christians in the city of Jerusalem. In 1 Corinthians 16:3, Paul refers to the collection as “your gift to Jerusalem” and in Romans 15:26, Paul names the recipients as “the poor among the saints at Jerusalem.” This latter description suggests that the recipients were destitute Jewish believers, Jewish but not all Jews (only the saints), and believers but not all believers (only the poor).⁷⁹ Thus, the recipients were a very specific socio-economic group in Jerusalem.

As a socio-economic description, “the poor”⁸⁰ in the Roman world is notoriously equivocal. For example, MacMullen speculates, “No large percentage of the people in the Roman empire can have lived their lives through without at least once wondering where the next meal was to come from.”⁸¹ MacMullen’s statement was based on brief

⁷⁶Indeed, he does not mention “poor” (except in reference to Christ in 2 Cor 8:9 and in a quotation in 2 Cor 9:9) or “Jerusalem” at all in those chapters.

⁷⁷*tēs diakonias tēs eis tous hagiōus* in 2 Cor 8:4 and 9:1 are identical.

⁷⁸Variations of *autoi*.

⁷⁹It is clear that Paul intended the aid for Christian first and foremost and not all Jews who were in need.

⁸⁰Some have contended that “the poor” (*hoi ptōchoi*) in Gal 2:10, especially, is primarily a religious designation, virtually equal to “the saints.” See E. Bammel, “*ptōchos*,” in *TDNT*, 6:896-899; R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC 41; Dallas: Word, 1990), 59. But under this theory, Rom 15:26 —“the poor among the saints”— must be interpreted as “the poor *who are* the saints.” In Greek, this expegetic use of the genitive case is doubtful here. See BDF §164; Moule, *Idiom Book*, 43. So, most English translations render “the poor among the saints” (cf. RSV; ESV; NIV; JB; NEB; NRSV). See also Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 114.

⁸¹R. MacMullen, *Enemies of the Roman Order: Treason, Unrest, and Alienation in the Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 249. Appendix A in MacMullen’s volume attempts to fill some of the gap in famine scholarship.

comment in Rostovtzeff's earlier social history.⁸² More recently, Justin Meggitt paints a similar generalized picture.⁸³ But surely a more precise description of the poor is possible.

A more detailed portrait of "the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" is possible using Acts.⁸⁴ From its infancy, the Jerusalem church practiced a form of equality because there were believers in need from the very beginning. Acts 2:44-45 tells that the new believers had "everything in common" and they "sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need."⁸⁵ This pattern was carried over into Acts 4:32-35 where more details of the church practice are given. The wealthy sold "land or houses" and brought the funds to the apostles who distributed the funds (or food?) so that "there were no needy persons among them." Barnabas is held up as a model of such giving in the following verses. It is not altogether clear from these two passages as to who were the ones in need, except that they were needy members of the church.⁸⁶

However, Acts 6 shows that the needy in the church were primarily women. The infant church faced an internal dispute. Verse 1 reads, "the Hellenistic Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food."⁸⁷ The problem was not so much an ethnic dispute as it was a labor shortage problem (for daily distribution!), which the Twelve promptly remedied by asking the disciples to choose seven leaders. Luke's account describes those in need of food as "widows" (*chēria*),

⁸²M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 600.

⁸³J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival* (SNTW; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998).

⁸⁴Many critical scholars doubt the credibility of the Acts accounts. However, I. H. Marshall, *Luke: Historian and Theologian* (Third Edition; Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1988), 75: "There is in our judgment sufficient evidence in [Luke's] favour to demand a more positive evaluation of his historical ability."

⁸⁵Clearly, the "property and possessions" were converted to food since in the next verse Luke tells us that they "received their food with glad and generous hearts" (ESV). The contrast is between bread (Acts 2:42, 46: *artos*) and food (Acts 2:46: *trophē*).

⁸⁶This is deduced from the context, i.e. "those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47) and "all the believers were one in heart and mind" (Acts 4:32), but it is possible that they gave to those outside the church, i.e. "anyone as he had need" (Acts 2:45; 4:34).

⁸⁷"Hellenistic Jews" probably refer to Diaspora Jews rather than Greek-speaking Jews since many Palestinian Jews will have spoken Greek as well as Aramaic.

particularly vulnerable without the security of family. The church very early on took on the responsibility of looking after such vulnerable women when the help of family was unavailable (cf. 1 Tim 5:3-8; Jas 1:27). Thus, the “poor among the saints in Jerusalem” were mainly vulnerable women.⁸⁸

The context of the first-century Jerusalem church suggests that relieving the poverty of vulnerable women is a valid application of 2 Corinthians 8:13-15. Economic inequality cannot be neatly separated from gender inequality, especially when so much of modern-day exploitation of women has an economic motive. Poverty cannot be viewed as gender neutral and in the realities of Paul’s world, his vision of economic equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 addresses the gender issue as well. For the women of Asia, 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 has special significance since researchers have shown that much of the economic inequalities in Asia are gender oriented. The church especially must consider the inequalities of rich and poor together with the inequalities of male and female, and seek to alleviate poverty with sensitivity to gender inequality.⁸⁹

Economic Equality as a Regional Issue

Regional inequality was integral to the success of the Roman Empire. The imperial landscape may be divided into three categories:

⁸⁸A major factor contributing to poverty in the Jerusalem church was no doubt religious persecution. From the very beginning (Acts 4) culminating with deaths of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60) and James (Acts 12:2), there was widespread persecution in Jerusalem that likely contributed to the economic hardships of the Jerusalem church. Women were not excluded from such persecution. For example, Saul’s ravaging of the church touched *both men and women* who were thrown into prison (Acts 8:3; 9:2; 22:4). Luke is probably highlighting the severity of persecution by pointing out that even women were not immune to imprisonment. Furthermore, it is possible that many women were abandoned by their unbelieving husbands (1 Cor 7:12-16), essentially widowed and left economically vulnerable.

⁸⁹A good example of poverty programs especially sensitive to gender inequality is the internationally recognized micro-credit scheme of Grameen Bank. Recently, Muhammad Yunus, the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate and founder of Grameen Bank, received an honorary doctorate from Ewha Womans University in Korea. ([http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/search “Yunus”](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/search/Yunus); accessed September 11, 2007). According to the *Korea Times* article, about 97 percent of the loans given by Yunus’s bank are to women and his policies have led to dramatic economic and social impact.

Rome (the center), the interior regions (Italy, Greece, Asia Minor), and the frontier regions (Syria, Judea, Egypt). Regional inequality was evident in that taxes and spoils (valuables/money, grain, etc.) flowed westward (toward Rome) while political and cultural influence (administration, military, etc.) flowed eastward (away from Rome). From an economic perspective, this created a situation where the burden of production rested on the frontier regions primarily and Rome enjoyed most of the benefits. Interior regions were also heavily taxed but cities like Corinth also enjoyed prosperity due to strategic location between Rome and the frontiers. Thus, interior provinces were better off than the frontiers, but not as well off as Rome itself.⁹⁰

To be sure, food shortage was a common problem in the Roman world. Roman colonies like Corinth even instituted a political position known as the *curator annonae* (curator of the grain supply), filled by a wealthy member of the city council. In times of shortage, the prestige of this position rivaled the top positions in the socio-political order.⁹¹ Rome itself faced severe shortages of food that led to riots. Suetonius tells of one incident during Claudius's reign (AD 41-54):

Once, after a series of droughts had caused a scarcity of grain, a mob stopped Claudius in the Forum and pelted him so hard with curses and stale crusts that he had difficulty in regaining the Palace by a side-door; as a result he took all possible steps to import grain, even during the winter months – insuring merchants against the loss of their ships in stormy weather (which guaranteed them a good return on their ventures), and offering a large bounty for every new grain-transport built, proportionate to its tonnage.⁹²

The flow of goods (and Roman control over them) was intensified during times of food shortage since the supply of food from the outer limits of the empire was critical to the very survival of Rome. Claudius's actions had the side effect of building up the commercial

⁹⁰Roman peace (*Pax Romana*) was such that the battles were being fought on the frontiers while the interior provinces were relatively subdued. Thus, the Roman military were fortified in the frontiers, but less of a presence in the interior.

⁹¹B. Winter, "Secular and Christian Responses to Corinthian Famines," *Tyndale Bulletin* 40 (1989): 86-106.

⁹²Suetonius, *Claudius* 18. Tacitus, *Annals* 6.15, records a similar incident under Tiberius. A theatre crowd in AD 32 abused Tiberius for allowing the grain prices to rise. The emperor resorted to the traditional Republican response of asking the senate and the magistrates to use their authority to suppress the verbal insolence.

capacity of a city like Roman Corinth, which was positioned strategically on the route that facilitated the flow of goods. It is significant then that while much of the stocks of food were making their way into the interior provinces and to Rome, the collection directed funds and aid to the frontiers, i.e. from Greece to Judea.⁹³

Moreover, the political and administrative landscape of the allied kingdom of Judea as a frontier region was probably very different from Roman Greece. In the first place, the military presence in the frontier regions was greater. Judea especially was known to be a region of constant unrest.⁹⁴ The resident Roman army kept the peace and guarded against external threat, but also had needs, which at times were staggering.⁹⁵ Their impact on the local economy of Jerusalem probably had the overall effect of straining the supply of food even more, especially in times of shortage.⁹⁶

In the imperial landscape, Paul's vision of equality opposed directly the regional inequality of his day. He has taken the wealth of the interior provinces,⁹⁷ and given it to the poor in the frontiers. The implications for modern economics in Asia are rather remarkable. Trade relationships and economic exchange between developing and developed Asian nations must strive for equality, guarding against exploitation of the poor. The rich nations of Asia must be more willing to redistribute their wealth to poorer nations so that all live above the poverty level. Within nations, the gap between the rich and poor must not be gigantic, especially when segments of the population live below the poverty level. In Paul's vision of equality, there is an implied responsibility on the wealthy not to hoard but to redistribute their excesses to meet the basic needs of their fellow human beings. Paul is

⁹³The Imperial administration similarly raised taxes in the interior provinces and spent the revenue in either Rome or the frontiers.

⁹⁴The most well known were the Judean revolts from AD 66-70, which eventually led to the destruction of the Temple in AD 70.

⁹⁵See H. Elton, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1996), 67. A legion of 5000 infantry and 100 cavalry had a monthly requirement of 225 tons of grain and 13.5 tons of forage. See also C. R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Ancient Society and History; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

⁹⁶Elton, *Frontiers*, 77.

⁹⁷He probably intended for the churches of Rome to participate as well. Cf. Rom 15:25-30.

not content with the status quo of the Roman Empire and strives to balance out the inequalities of his day.

Specifically for churches, the Pauline collection is more directly a model. The churches of wealthier nations must help the poor and especially the poor among believers in the poorer regions. Churches ought to be channels through which life-saving resources are distributed from those who have more than enough to those who do not have enough. In the setting of the local church, equality must leave a mark on how the wealthy members use their excess and care for the basic needs of poor members.

CONCLUSION

Paul's teaching of equality in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 is useful for understanding and promoting equality for the women of Asia in today's world. As a social issue, discussions of equality for the women of Asia cannot be limited to the gender divide or to a single country or people. Rather it must be broadened to include economic inequality between regions and the problem of poverty among vulnerable women in Asia. In line with Paul's vision of equality, wealthy members of the local church must care for the poorer members, all with a particular focus on vulnerable women. Wealthy churches must meet the needs of the poorer churches, particularly in the poorer regions, populated primarily by women. Christians and the church must influence wealthy Asian nations to make conscious efforts to stop the exploitation of female labor from poorer countries. At all levels, inequitable treatment of women in the context of Asia detrimentally ignores Paul's vision of equality: *he* who had much did not have too much, and *she* who had little did not have too little.

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