



# PAUL'S Stewardship Principles

BY JOSEPH R. CATHEY

Paul's admonitions moved beyond the legalities of tithing, of giving 10 percent. He encouraged believers to give liberally and cheerfully.





**T**HE STEWARDSHIP PRINCIPLES of the apostle Paul are evident throughout his letters as well as the Book of Acts. For us to understand the principles behind Paul's "collection for the saints," we should first set the context of the "tithe" from the Old Testament. This will help us better understand Paul's motivations and actions.

### The Tithe

The Hebrew word for tithe, *maaser*, literally means "a tenth part."<sup>1</sup> Fundamental to the Old Testament concept of the "tithe" was the understanding that Yahweh had made everything; and, therefore, Israel was to give back a portion of their labors. Israelites tithed gold, silver, animals (donkeys, cattle, sheep), clothes, foodstuffs, and even weapons. Deuteronomy 26:10-15 explains that by giving back to Yahweh a tenth of their produce (in whatever capacity), the Israelites were acknowledging that Yahweh had prospered and showered them with blessings. This same passage is central to the understanding of Paul's "collection for the saints," because it clarifies the apostle's theological framework.

### The Collection

In Galatians 2:9-10, Paul clearly states that the apostles (James, Peter, and John) encouraged him and Barnabas to continue to remember the poor. In order to fulfill this request to help those Christians in need, Paul began to campaign for funds during his second missionary journey. During the course of this journey, Paul did not speak so much about the "tithe" (although the theology of the tithe is clearly underlying Paul's plea for the churches) as he did his collection for the

**Above: Dated from the Hellenistic period, 332–37 B.C., terra-**

**cotta statuettes found in houses at Pella. The pieces represent persons**

**of limited means as well as those who were more affluent.**

poor in Jerusalem. Indeed, Paul did not ask for a tithe in any of his letters. He encouraged churches, however, to share their material possessions to help the poor and needy (1 Cor. 16:1-3; 2 Cor. 8-9; Eph. 4:28). Likewise, Paul stressed generosity and loyalty among those who called themselves Christians (2 Cor. 9:6-7; 8:1-5).<sup>2</sup>

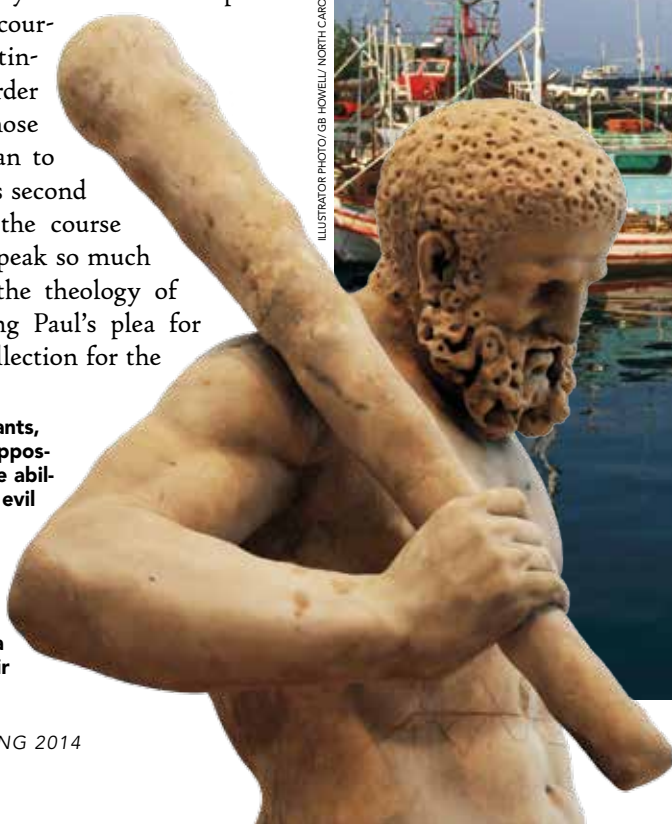
### Three Pillars

The Second Letter to the Corinthians contains significant theological discourses concerning Paul's stewardship principles. Sacrificial generosity is the first pillar of Paul's theology of stewardship and is the heart of his

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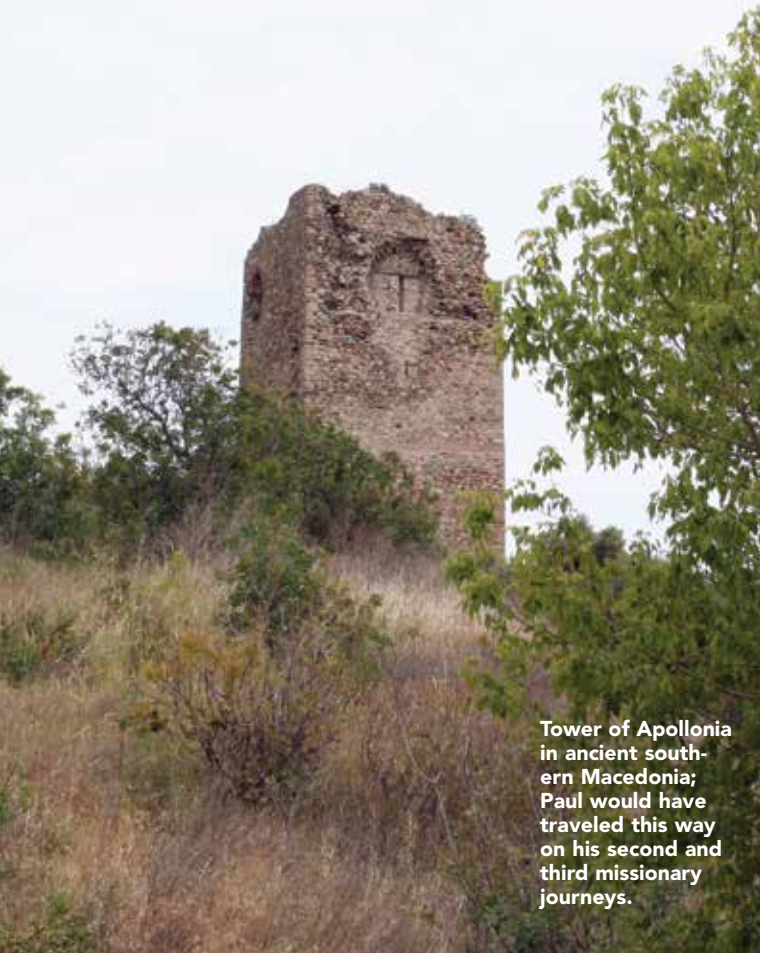
**Right: Marble statue of Hercules; from 2nd cent. A.D. Hercules was the first foreign cult to be accepted in Rome. His temple, the Ara Maxima, was at the marketplace in the Palatine settlement. Popular**

**with merchants, Hercules supposedly had the ability to avert evil of all kinds. Because of this protection, merchants paid his temple a tithe of their profits.**



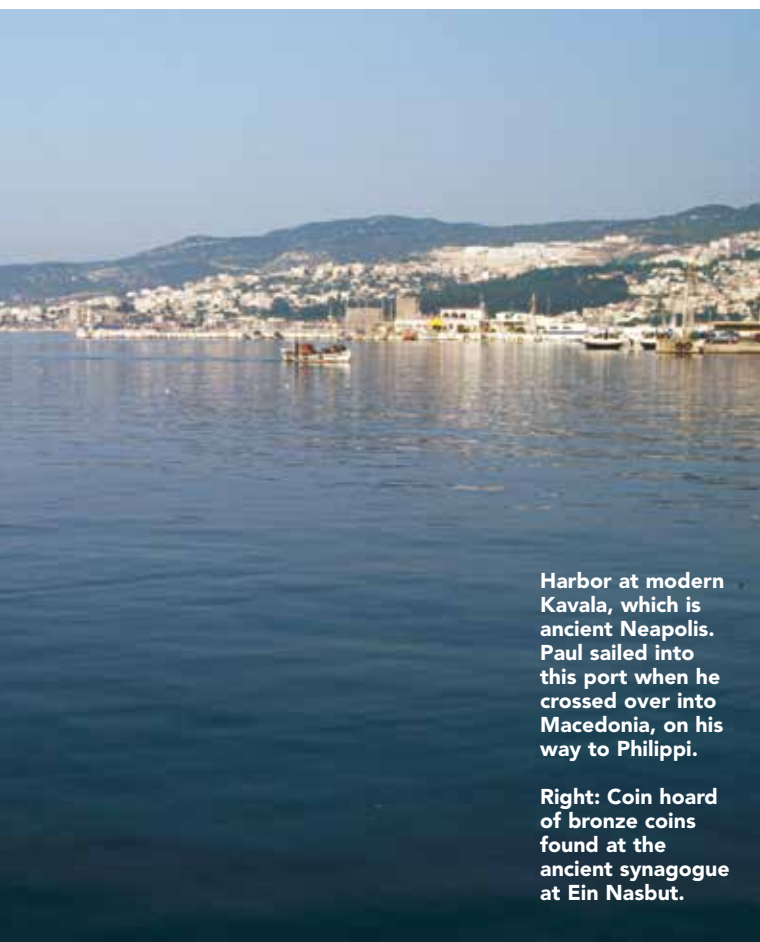
ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ GB HOVELL/ NORTH CAROLINA MUSEUM OF ART/ RALEIGH (6/0/01)

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTOS/ BOB SCHATZ/ ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM AT PELLA (11/23/7)



Tower of Apollonia in ancient southern Macedonia; Paul would have traveled this way on his second and third missionary journeys.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO / GB HOWELL (3533/23)



Harbor at modern Kavala, which is ancient Neapolis. Paul sailed into this port when he crossed over into Macedonia, on his way to Philippi.

Right: Coin hoard of bronze coins found at the ancient synagogue at Ein Nasbut.

*“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”*

Speaking to leaders of the church at Ephesus, Paul said, “In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:35, NIV). Two issues are paramount in this verse as it relates to Paul’s theology. First, like the churches in Corinth and Galatia, Paul challenged the elders of the Ephesian church to care for the needs of God’s people without regard to any type of material reward. He emphasized giving and not receiving. In doing so, Paul challenged the believers to put sacrificial generosity into practice. His basis for this theological injunction was his own ministry (see Phil. 3:17) as well as the Lord’s own words.

Upon occasion in his writings, Paul alluded to the words of Jesus (see Rom. 12–14; 1 Thess. 4:1–12). The phrase “It is more blessed to give than to receive” does not appear, however, in any of the Gospels. Evidently these were some of Jesus’ words circulated among the early churches that had been preserved until this point in an oral or maybe in some written form.<sup>1</sup> Although Paul’s exact quote does not appear verbatim in the Gospels, the spirit behind these words does permeate the New Testament.

The second issue in this verse that relates to Paul’s theology comes from the phrase, “In everything I did, *I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak*” (italics added). Paul was reminding the Ephesian leaders that believers were to share the result of their hard work, that is, their income, in order to “help the weak.” This reflects another pillar of Paul’s stewardship principles: believers are to share what they have, as an overflow of their compassion for the needy. 6

1. Richard N. Longenecker, “The Acts of the Apostles” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), 514.



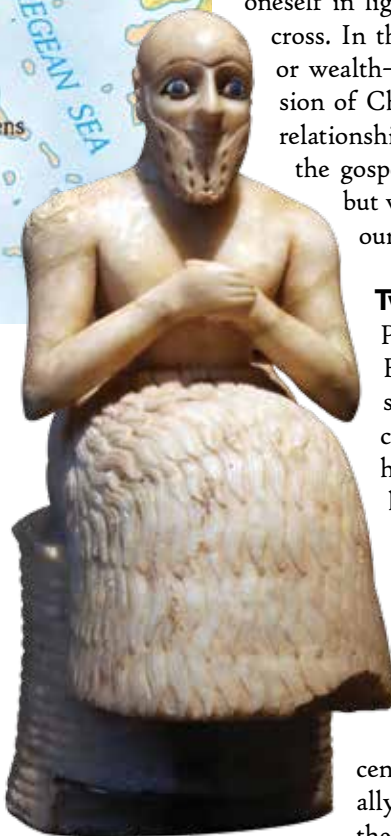
ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO / JAMES MCLEMORE (1329/19)





**Right: A steward was one who supervised someone else's property. Dated to about 2400 B.C., figurine**

**of Ebih II, a steward in the Temple of Ishtar in the ancient Sumerian city of Mari, in modern southeast Syria.**



collection for the saints. When Paul wrote 2 Corinthians, he was staying in the region of Macedonia and took time to point out the enormous generosity of the local churches despite their extreme poverty. Churches in the region of Macedonia included those at Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, and possibly others. The issue for Paul was not the actual size of the Macedonian contributions but the open-hearted and open-handed attitude that they showed in their sacrificial giving.<sup>3</sup>

A second pillar of Paul's theology concerning stewardship involves grace. In the Greek text of 2 Corinthians 8–9, Paul mentioned grace 10 times. As a Jewish scholar, Paul would have naturally spoken of Yahweh's grace being extended to the people of Israel (see Deut. 26:13). In these chapters, however, Paul highlighted how the Gentile Christians throughout Macedonia had given sacrificially to help the Christians in Jerusalem. He argued that God, through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ, had bestowed grace (unconditional benevolence) on all believers, both Jews and Gentiles. As a demonstration of the overflow of God's grace, Paul encouraged the believers at Corinth likewise to give generously to help the poor in Jerusalem. Taking

care of the needy through sacrificial generosity serves as an outward demonstration of God's grace (2 Cor. 9:12–15).

A third pillar of Paul's theology concerning stewardship emphasized showing compassion for persons in need. The early church had a tendency to separate themselves into Jewish or Gentile Christians. In 2 Corinthians, however, Paul put such divisiveness to rest by appealing to the compassion of Christ. Simply giving monetary contributions to the saints was not a solution for Paul. Rather, he proclaimed that sacrificial giving embraces the giving of oneself in light of the sacrifice that Christ made on the cross. In this light, one can give out of either poverty or wealth—so long as it is a reflection of the compassion of Christ. Compassionate giving stems from the relationship the believer has with the Savior. Truly, the gospel is not about what we can get from God but what God has given to us. We in turn give of ourselves to others.<sup>4</sup>

## Two Results

Paul had two main purposes for the collection. First, he knew that if believers would give sacrificially, extend God's grace, and show compassion for the needy, their efforts would help the poor and unify the church. Scripture leaves no doubt that Paul intended for the collection to help the poor of the Jerusalem church (Gal. 2:10; 6:10; 1 Cor. 16:1–4). Second, Paul was also concerned that the collection be seen as proof of the Gentiles' love for their Jewish brothers (2 Cor. 8:24).

Paul's admonitions moved beyond the legalities of tithing, of giving 10 percent. He encouraged believers to give liberally and cheerfully. Further, he knew that both the giver and the receiver would be blessed by God through the act. The same is true today as believers give in order to support their own churches, to minister to sister churches, to help persons in need, and to reach the world with the gospel. 🔥

1. "מַעֲסֵר" (*maaser*, tithe) in Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Leiden, the Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill, 2000), 617.

2. See "Tithe" in Colin Brown, ed., *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986), 3:853–5.

3. Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians: A Commentary on the Greek Text* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 562–63.

4. David E. Garland, 2 Corinthians, vol. 29 in *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 379.

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