

The Perfect Law of Liberty on Poverty and Wealth: A Precursor to Paul?¹

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Abstract

Even as other tensions are resolved, some scholars continue to pit James against Paul with respect to their views on poverty and wealth. This paper first summarises the main contributions of James to the topic. It then asks how far back in the letter-writing ministry of Paul can parallels to James be found. Recognising that relative chronologies usually remain unaltered even if the deutero-Paulines are deemed pseudonymous, the survey looks at the key texts in the Pastorals, the Prison Epistles, 1-2 Corinthians and Romans, the Thessalonian letters, and Galatians. It finds the most striking and informative parallel at the earliest point in the sequence, in Galatians 2:10. While acknowledging other possibilities, the study suggests that the most natural source for most of Paul's teaching on poverty and wealth is, or is mediated by, James. The two authors also agree on what may be the unifying theme of New Testament theology – fulfilment of the Law – expressed in both of these writers particularly in the command to love one's neighbour, which directly affects matters of care for the impoverished. A wedge should not be inserted between Paul and James on poverty and wealth; rather, they demonstrate striking similarities.

1. Introduction

Mentioning Paul and James together in the same phrase often makes many readers automatically recall the Reformation-era debate about faith and works. Do those two writers² not fundamentally contradict one another on the way of

1. The Tyndale Fellowship New Testament Lecture, 2022.

2. While many still opt for an older approach that takes the letter of James as pseudonymous and dates it to the late first century, and a few see it as a second-century cover letter for the collection of Catholic Epistles, a growing number of commentators have mounted persuasive cases for authentic Jacobean authorship. See especially the

salvation? While some scholars still make this affirmation,³ a large swathe today recognise that the terms are being used differently in each corpus and that rapprochement between the two can be achieved. Joachim Jeremias put it as simply and memorably as anyone in the mid-1950s when he explained that Paul was using the terms to refer to Christian faith and Jewish works, while James was referring to Jewish faith and Christian works.⁴ Despite the last half-millennium of scholarly preoccupation with this issue, today at last the recognition that several other topics prove even more central for James seems widespread.

The structure of the epistle, in fact, discloses the three main themes. Ever since Fred Francis's influential article in 1970, an increasing number of commentators have recognised that James introduces three topics or clusters of topics at the beginning of his letter, to which he keeps returning: trials and temptations, wisdom (especially involving speech), and wealth versus poverty.⁵ While there is no consensus on James's overall structure, Mariam Kamell (now Kovalishyn) and I have tweaked Peter Davids's outline, itself heavily indebted to Francis, to argue that James presents these themes in two consecutive sequences in chapter 1 and then elaborates them in inverse order throughout the rest of

very thorough studies of Douglas J. Moo, *The Letter of James*, 2nd ed., Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Apollos, 2021), 11–25; Dan G. McCartney, *James*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 9–32; and Scot McKnight, *The Letter of James*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 13–28.

3. Although even then the 'contradictions' are more indirect. E.g. M. Eugene Boring, *An Introduction to the New Testament: History, Literature, Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012), 434–443, believes that James wrote largely independently of Paul, even though he was aware of his teaching; Delbert Burkett, *An Introduction to the New Testament and the Origins of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 389–393, thinks James misunderstood Paul and therefore thought there was more disagreement between the two than there actually was.

4. Joachim Jeremias, 'Paul and James', *ExpT* 66 (1955): 568–571, <https://doi.org/10.1177/001452465506601205>. For nuancing, see Alexander Stewart, 'James, Soteriology, and Synergism', *TynB* 61 (2010): 293–310, <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.29290>.

5. Fred O. Francis, 'The Form and Function of the Opening and Closing Paragraphs of James and 1 John', *ZNW* 61 (1970): 110–126, <https://doi.org/10.1515/zntw.1970.61.1-2.110>. The unifying thread of simplicity versus duplicity runs through the entire letter and its treatment of all three themes. See Craig L. Blomberg and Ben R. Crenshaw, 'Single-Mindedness vs. Duplicity: Discipleship in James', in *Following Jesus Christ: The New Testament Message of Discipleship for Today: A Volume in Honor of Michael J. Wilkins*, ed. John K. Goodrich and Mark L. Strauss (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2019), 233–249. Hannah C. Johnson, 'God-Centered Wholeness: An Essential Paradigm for Recognizing the Overarching Unity and Central Concern of the Epistle of James' (Littleton, CO: Denver Seminary MA NT thesis, 2022) prefers to speak in terms of 'wholeness', defined to include especially the concept of 'flourishing', as this unifying thread.

the body of the epistle.⁶ If there is anything to this modified chiasmic outline, it makes wealth versus poverty the central and thus climactic topic. Even if the outline imposes more structure on the text than was intended, the sheer amount of James's letter taken up with this theme still makes it a suitable candidate for the central concern of the missive.⁷

Elsa Tamez, nevertheless, sees enough very specific contextual information in James about the nature of his communities being oppressed by (probably absentee) landlords (see especially Jas 5:1-6), that she would dispute its general diasporic nature, in fact likening that interpretation to the 'interception' of a potentially subversive document by a contemporary right-wing Latin American dictatorship, to prevent others from feeling its full force.⁸ Although almost no one still opts for Martin Dibelius's full-blown form-critical approach to James, in which a dozen or so small segments of wisdom were loosely strung together, almost like sections of the book of Proverbs,⁹ few still take seriously just how much situation-specific information emerges from James's text about his audience. Commentators tend to label James as an 'apostolic letter to the diaspora', despite the fact that the only analogies to such a category come from small letters embedded in larger works or complete letters addressed only to a specific region within the diaspora.¹⁰ Much more likely, James is addressed to some very specific Christian communities, probably at the eastern end of the Mediterranean basin (most likely either in Syria or in and around Jerusalem), who are made up of mostly poor people who are experiencing some significant discrimination, including the mistreatment of

6. Craig L. Blomberg and Mariam J. Kamell, *James*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 23–27; Peter H. Davids, *The Epistle of James*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 22–28. Darlene M. Seal and I later tweaked a few section boundaries and headings in *From Pentecost to Patmos: An Introduction to Acts through Revelation*, with Alicia S. Duprée, 2nd ed. (London: IVP; Nashville: B & H, 2021), 574–575.

7. See esp. Nelson R. Morales, *Poor and Rich in James: A Relevance Theory Approach to James's Use of the Old Testament* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2018). Cf. also Andrew Chester, 'The Theology of James', in *The Theology of the Letters of James, Peter, and Jude*, Andrew Chester and Ralph P. Martin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 32, who calls it 'the most striking theme in the whole letter'.

8. Elsa Tamez, *The Scandalous Message of James: Faith Without Works Is Dead*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 2002), 1.

9. Martin Dibelius, *James*, rev. and ed. Heinrich Greeven (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975).

10. See the works discussed or cited in Craig L. Blomberg, 'Genre in Recent New Testament Commentaries', in *On the Writing of New Testament Commentaries: Festschrift for Grant R. Osborne on the Occasion of His 70th Birthday*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Eckhard J. Schnabel (Leiden and Boston: E. J. Brill, 2012), 87; and Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 29.

agricultural day labourers at the hands of their wealthy landlords.¹¹ The parallels between today's affluent Christians' behaviour and what is described in James 5:5-6 – living on the earth in luxury and self-indulgence while condemning the righteous who do not oppose them – make us too uncomfortable to spend much time dwelling on it, so we domesticate James and/or return to our favourite biblical writer, Paul, from whom we think all real theological and ethical blessings flow!

Alternatively, if we can't legitimately distance ourselves from James's letter overall, we can at least marginalise his specific teaching on wealth and poverty. After all, it is *really* different from Paul's views, isn't it? In the only thorough study of Paul and James on wealth and poverty during the past generation of which I am aware, Peter Davids argues that the two writers are speaking from completely different frameworks and drawing on highly divergent backgrounds. According to Davids, for Paul, 'charity' is greatly to be desired but optional, while for James it is 'a mark of genuine piety or faith that saves'.¹² James always speaks of the poor in positive terms and they form the heart of his communities, whereas he always refers to the rich in negative terms as those who are lost. Paul, on the other hand, has nothing *bad* to say about the rich, while the 'poor' are 'out there' rather than forming part of his communities.¹³ When Paul in 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 highlights that not many in the church of Corinth were 'wise', 'influential', or of 'noble birth', he is thinking only of status and not also of socio-economic bracket.¹⁴ Paul 'lacks the sharp note of prophetic denunciation and demand' found in the Jesus tradition that James follows; indeed, he only rarely relies on the Jesus tradition at all.¹⁵

Is Davids correct in these conclusions? Several other recent studies have suggested something similar about James, even without undertaking as extensive a comparative study with Paul. Scot McKnight, for example, endorses Davids's study, believing that it 'clearly show[s] that James and Paul come at the issue of

11. See esp. Pedrito U. Maynard-Reid, *Poverty and Wealth in James* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987). Cf. also Wesley H. Wachob, *The Voice of Jesus in the Social Rhetoric of James* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511488184>; and David H. Edgar, *Has God Not Chosen the Poor? The Social Setting of the Epistle of James* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001).

12. Peter H. Davids, 'The Test of Wealth', in *the Missions of James, Peter, and Paul: Tensions in Early Christianity*, ed. Bruce Chilton and Craig Evans (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2005), 362.

13. Davids, 'Test of Wealth', 374.

14. Davids, 'Test of Wealth', 380-381.

15. Davids, 'Test of Wealth', 358.

the rich and poor from different angles with significantly different convictions'.¹⁶ Sigurvin Jónsson revives the view that James 4:1-2 refers to literal violence and murder, so that although James's discourse is not entirely unique, 'what is different in James is that its author addresses a community where socio-economic disparity and communal strife has led to a variety of *in-group* violence ranging from economic subjugation (Jas 2.1-6; 5.4-6) to fighting (Jas 3.13-18; 4.1-6) and murder (Jas 4.2; 5.6)'.¹⁷ This is worlds away from Paul's contexts. Finally, Martin Hengel's conviction that James is a letter of anti-Paulinism, especially on the topic of poor and rich, continues to be reprinted due to its influence and is cited approvingly in larger, more recent works of New Testament theology.¹⁸

Elsewhere, I have synchronically compared the key teachings of James with counterparts in Paul's letters that showed that James did not disagree with Paul at any fundamental point.¹⁹ Here I would like to tackle something slightly more ambitious and propose diachronically that Paul's teachings can be seen as a natural outgrowth of James's perspectives. Because there is so much more on the topic to survey in Paul, it is possible that there are data that simply did not emerge in my earlier study that would cast matters in a different light. If they do not, then we will have a second way to counter David's charge, and we *may* have an additional piece of evidence beyond those that others have offered in favour of an early (i.e. pre-Pauline) date for James's letter.

This study will therefore review the key data and debates from James on poverty and wealth and then turn to Paul. Following Richard Hays' recent fascination with reading parts of the Bible backwards, as he likes to call it,²⁰ a survey of the primary Pauline texts in a sequence that reflects at least one

16. McKnight, *Letter of James*, 46, n. 187.

17. Sigurvin L. Jónsson, *James among the Classicists: Reading the Letter of James in Light of Ancient Literary Criticism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 281, <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666564840> (emphasis original). Cf. Ralph P. Martin, *James*, WBC (Waco: Word, 1988), 144.

18. Martin Hengel, 'The Epistle of James as Anti-Pauline Polemic: The Aporias of the Epistle', in *The Catholic Epistles: Critical Readings*, ed. Darien Lockett (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2021 (repr. from 1987)), 275-303; endorsed by Peter Stuhlmacher, *Biblical Theology of the New Testament*, ed. Daniel P. Bailey (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018 (German orig. 1999)), 494-495.

19. Craig L. Blomberg, 'Paul and James on Wealth and Poverty: No Disagreement Here', *Presbyterion* 48 (2022): 118-131.

20. Richard B. Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2014); *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2017). Hays, of course, was dealing with New Testament uses of the Old Testament.

probable reverse chronological order will appear next. After all, it is one thing to claim that certain later Pauline (or even deutero-Pauline) texts could have derived from James; it is more audacious to allege that even the earliest ones do so as well. But the longer that parallels continue to emerge as one proceeds backwards historically, the stronger the case becomes that Paul and James are not fundamentally discordant on the topic of poverty and wealth. Of course, concordance need not entail causality, so the most one can fairly allege is that Paul *could* have derived his perspectives from James and that there is nothing that *requires* Paul to have written independently of any knowledge of James's viewpoints.

2. James on Poverty and Wealth

2.1 James 1:1-27

Probably the most debated text on our topic in the letter of James is its very first one: 1:9-11. Here James begins 'but let the humble brother (or sister) boast in their exaltation' (v. 9).²¹ The idea of a humble person (ταπεινός) boasting (from καυχάομαι) suggests that one or both words are not being used with their most common meanings. Several English translations speak about the believer 'in humble circumstances' (NIV, NASB, CSB); the sense might even be 'in humiliating circumstances'. Boasting then would refer to 'taking pride in' (NIV, NAB, NET) or, as the CEB renders it, 'finding satisfaction' in their high spiritual status. Verse 10 begins with only a mild adversative (δέ), but as it unfolds it is clearly depicting an opposite scenario: 'but the rich in their humble circumstances'. Unless one has already decided by this time (and, hence, prematurely) that James simply cannot envisage a rich Christian, the natural way to fill in the two ellipses of this clause is with the same concepts that verse 9 spelled out: 'let the rich *brother (or sister) boast* in their humble circumstances' (or even 'humiliation').²² Verses 10b-11 go on to explain what those humble or humiliating circumstances are – that, like everyone else, he or she will die and face judgement. No amount of riches can spare a person that fate; the end might even come quite soon.

21. All translations of passages from the Greek NT are mine, unless otherwise noted.

22. Kalina Wojciechowska and Mariusz Rosik, *A Structural Commentary on the So-Called Antilegomena*, vol. 1: *The Letter of James: Wisdom that Comes from Above* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2021), 235–236, <https://doi.org/10.13109/9783666573309>; Chris A. Vlachos, *James*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B & H, 2013), 33. A generation ago commentators were split, but a majority favoured this interpretation. Today, a majority take the rich to be exclusively non-Christian, not based on any new linguistic evidence but primarily on ideological preferences.

The next relevant text is James 1:27, which could form the thesis verse for the entire epistle²³ – ‘Pure and undefiled religion before [our] God and Father is this: to care for orphans and widows in their tribulation [and] to keep oneself unstained from the world.’ Orphans (more precisely, the fatherless) and widows were those without the provision or protection of a man in the family, which proved so important in the ancient world. In the Old Testament, they frequently were paired as a paradigm of the dispossessed (e.g. Exod 22:22-24; Deut 10:18; 24:17-21; Ps 68:5; 146:9; Isa 9:17; Jer 7:6 etc.). Nothing limits James’s purview here to *Christian* orphans and widows, and the caution against becoming stained by the world suggests that he may have been specifically highlighting that his churches’ ministry include helping the non-Christian needy.²⁴

2.2 James 2:1-26

James 2:1-7 enjoins impartiality in Christians’ dealings with others. The scenario envisaged is not entirely clear. While James will later use the term ἐκκλησία for the church (5:14), here he employs συναγωγή (‘synagogue’ or ‘assembly’). Is that his way of designating that this is not a regular worship service but an assembly for some other purpose? The legal language throughout the passage has suggested to some that this is a Christian courtroom – the church, like the synagogue before it, is being used to adjudicate in-house disputes.²⁵ If this is the correct interpretation, then the richly dressed man of verse 2a is almost certainly a believer. Even if it is not, the man could still be a well-to-do Christian visitor to the worship service, though he could also be a non-Christian. The same options obtain for the poor man in verse 2b. The contrast is extreme, leading to suggestions that the portrait is hyperbolic, hypothetical, or both. But similar discrimination has plagued many

23. It brings the introduction to a close, forms the transition to the letter-body, and, as the centre of the chiasm summarises the most important theme of the letter, it describes the kind of trials for which believers need wisdom (thus incorporating the two other central themes). Cf. also Mariam Kamell Kovalishyn, ‘James 1:27 and the Church’s Call to Mission and Morals’, *Crux* 46:4 (2010): 15–22.

24. Cf. Walter Brueggemann, *Money and Possessions* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2015), 251–252.

25. First popularised in the second half of the twentieth century by Roy B. Ward, ‘Partiality in the Assembly: James 2:2-4’, *HTR* 62 (1969): 87–97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017816000027632>. But Dale C. Allison, Jr, ‘Exegetical Amnesia in James’, *ETL* 76 (2000): 162–163, <https://doi.org/10.2143/ETL.76.1.541>, has shown that this was one of several very influential views in the 1600s through the 1800s concerning texts in James that was largely forgotten or ignored in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century.

churches throughout history, so it seems that some real incident or incidents may have provoked James's remarks.²⁶

Verses 5-13 give three reasons why such discrimination is wrong. First, it 'is inconsistent with God's choice of the poor' (vv. 5-6a). Second, it is incommensurate with 'the conduct of the rich' (vv. 6b-7). Finally, it violates 'the law of love' (vv. 8-11).²⁷ Verse 5 has regularly formed the foundation for liberation theology's 'preferential option for the poor', though too often without including the observation that God's choice was of the poor 'who love him'.²⁸ On the other hand, we must not spiritualise οἱ πτωχοί ('the poor') here, as if the word itself were a synonym for the pious. These are the poor τῷ κόσμῳ, which may be a simple locative of place ('in the world' – so most English versions) or a dative of respect ('in the eyes of the world' – NIV; 'by worldly standards' – CEB).²⁹ As a sweeping generalisation, the socio-economically poor and outcast have been more responsive to the gospel than other classes in many cultures and eras of church history.³⁰ How ironic, then, that James's congregations may be discriminating against them and thereby dishonouring them (v. 6a). The rich, on the other hand, are those who are dragging the poorer believers into their courts (v. 6b). Here, the rich could be unbelievers, yet the rich Greek or Roman in the first-century world normally brought litigation against other rich people. Only they had enough resources worth pursuing, and even then it was often a contest of honour versus shame rather than wealth versus poverty.³¹ So it may be more likely that these are rich *believers* blaspheming Jesus's name, not directly by cursing Christ but by the very act of bringing charges against those who already have the deck stacked against them, as it were.³²

26. Martin, *James*, 60; Robert W. Wall, *Community of the Wise: The Letter of James* (Valley Forge: Trinity Press International, 1997), 103.

27. Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 102.

28. Davids, *Epistle of James*, 112; Derek Tidball, *Wisdom from Heaven: The Message of the Letter of James for Today* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 65–67.

29. Older grammars sometimes refer to an 'ethical dative', alleged to be a Semitism, and specifically translated 'in the eyes of', but this is simply a variation of the dative of respect. See further Richard Bauckham, *James* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 194, who appears to combine the two.

30. William R. Baker, 'James', in William R. Baker and Paul K. Carter, *James-Jude* (Cincinnati: Standard, 1990), 50.

31. Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth: The Influence of Secular Ethics and Social Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 58–75.

32. On the other hand, the 'blasphemy' may have been a mocking reference to the individual's beliefs in order to undermine the reliability of their character; Pheme Perkins, *First and Second Peter, James, and Jude*, Interpretation (Louisville: John Knox, 1995), 110.

The law of love is more specifically called the ‘royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”’ (v. 8). The adjective modifying law is βασιλικός, so the phrase could also be translated ‘the kingdom law’.³³ It is unlikely, as a result, that this is the Mosaic law, still observed in its entirety unchanged, by a group of Torah-observant followers of Jesus as Messiah.³⁴ Still, fundamental moral principles, like the prohibition against showing favouritism (Lev 19:15) or the command to neighbour-love (v. 18) remain in force. It is interesting that the verb in verse 8a is ‘fulfil’ (τελεῖτε). While the fulfilment of Scripture is not as central a concept in James as it is in many of the New Testament documents, it is by no means absent and reflects James’s understanding of the relationship between the ages of the old and new covenants, just as it clearly does for both Paul and Jesus.³⁵

James 2:14-17 introduces the famous section on faith versus works (vv. 14-26) and shows that the topic that caused Martin Luther so much consternation is merely the outgrowth of the more fundamental issue of care for the dispossessed. This example is clearly hyperbolic but even more poignant as such. If so-called believers can see even the greatest extremes of human need, especially within Christian circles, and be unmoved to help them in any way whatsoever, any profession of faith they make must be vacuous.³⁶ This is even more heartbreaking when the needy are fellow believers, as here. Those used to reading inclusive-language translations, which are increasingly important in today’s world, need to be able to access the Greek enough to see that ‘brother or sister’ here is not an inclusive translation of the masculine singular but represents ἀδελφὸς ἢ ἀδελφή in the original. The explicit appearance of ‘sister’ makes it emphatic, not surprisingly, since women were often more vulnerable and thus more destitute than men.³⁷

33. See esp. J. Alec Motyer, *The Message of James: The Tests of Faith* (Leicester: IVP, 1985), 97; Maurice Hogan, ‘The Law in the Epistle of James’, *SNTSU* 22 (1997): 88.

34. A view defended particularly vigorously by Matt A. Jackson McCabe, *Logos and Law in the Letter of James* (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

35. Craig L. Blomberg, *A New Testament Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2018), 149–151.

36. Davids, *Epistle of James*, 29; John P. Keenan, *The Wisdom of James* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist, 2005), 83.

37. Luke L. Cheung and Andrew B. Spurgeon, *James: A Pastoral and Contextual Commentary* (Carlisle: Langham, 2018), 54.

2.3 James 3:1–4:12

Chapter 3 does not treat our topic directly, though one of the motivations for too many becoming teachers (v. 1) could have involved their hopes for at least some improvement in socio-economic standing.³⁸ James 4:1-10 addresses matters a bit more clearly. Material possessions seem to be at least part of what James has in mind when he announces ‘you do not have because you do not ask; you ask and do not receive because you ask badly, in order to spend on your evil desires’ (vv. 2b-3). Verses 6-10 help define the ταπεινός (‘humble’) he has in mind – they are the opposite of the proud; they submit to God, draw near to him, cleanse their hands and hearts, mourn (presumably for their and others’ unrighteousness),³⁹ and will thus be exalted in return. There is no need to see the fights and quarrels of James 4 as referring to literal violence; this language was common enough in the rhetoric of James’s world for the verbal strife that grew out of envy.⁴⁰

2.4 James 4:13–5:20

The remaining material on wealth and poverty in this little letter spans 4:13–5:12. Chapter 4:13-17 describes the travelling merchants who make plans for a lengthy period of time (v. 13) without taking God’s will into consideration (v. 15). That James rebukes them for not leaving room for the Lord’s will to overturn theirs suggests they are believers who should have known to do this;⁴¹ what is not clear is if these are the same as those James would call ‘rich’. They may be a smaller middle class of some sort, but clearly want to become more prosperous.⁴² Still, they have not factored in the uncertainty and transience of life (v. 14), and they boast in plans that James calls arrogant (v. 16).

James 5 begins with the identical ‘listen up’ call (ἀγγε νῦν) he used in verse 13, but this time explicitly addresses the rich (v. 1). What they are doing and experiencing in verses 2-6 is different enough from the traveling merchants’

38. Cf. Timothy B. Cargal, *Restoring the Diaspora: Discursive Structure and Purpose in the Epistle of James* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1993), 143; Wojciechowska and Rosik, *Letter of James*, 199.

39. Moo, *Letter of James*, 195; Mariam Kamell, ‘The Economics of Humility: The Rich and the Humble in James’, in *Engaging Economics: New Testament Scenarios and Early Christian Reception*, ed. Bruce W. Longenecker and Kelly D. Liebengood (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 169.

40. Luke T. Johnson, *The Letter of James* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 275–276, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300261752>.

41. See further Blomberg and Kamell, *James*, 208–209; McCartney, *James*, 227–228.

42. Alicia Batten, ‘Ideological Strategies in the Letter of James’, in *Reading James with New Eyes: Methodological Reassessments of the Letter of James*, ed. Robert L. Webb and John S. Kloppenborg (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2007), 26.

behaviour and attitudes as to almost certainly represent a different group of people. Almost all commentators take these rich individuals to be the wealthy Jewish or Graeco-Roman landlords employing the day labourers in James's congregations but not paying them a living wage (vv. 3b-4). Meanwhile, the rich people's wealth is already being destroyed due to lack of use (vv. 2-3a).⁴³ James is addressing these people using the literary device of apostrophe for the sake of the believers in his churches hearing his letter read to them. It is hard to imagine as strident a rebuke as 'weep, wailing over your coming miseries' as addressed to true believers, although a few scholars have argued that this was the very mechanism by which James hoped to encourage repentance and return to a life of faithful Christian service.⁴⁴ Part of their sins, as we have already seen, were socio-economic, but spiritual issues formed the root problem. Whether or not they fattened their bellies, they have fattened their hearts in a day of slaughter – one in which judgement is imminent (v. 5). They have murdered innocent, non-resistant workers, most likely by consigning them to debtors' prison in which they would languish until they died (v. 6).⁴⁵

At first glance, James's recommended response seems disappointingly weak: just be patient until the return of Christ like a farmer waiting for harvest time (vv. 7-9). But he commands his listeners to follow the examples of both the prophets and Job (vv. 10-11), who were renowned for denouncing the injustices of their days, even without ever promoting a violent response. This is what Tamez calls a 'militant, indomitable patience' without thereby meaning any resort to violence.⁴⁶ The prohibition against oath-taking in this context may well refer to those who went into debt consistently asking for more time to repay when they realistically could not, swearing that they would do what they then did not (v. 12).⁴⁷

In short, it is hardly the case that James knows no rich Christians. It is just possible that all the wealthy individuals in his letter are believers, though

43. This is the most natural interpretation of the perfect tense verbs in v. 2, though some commentators take them akin to a Semitic future-referring perfect. See Vlachos, *James*, 159-160, for discussion.

44. A handful, nevertheless, think that this could be the mourning that actually brings them to repentance (but if the coming miseries they are to mourn include final judgement, this would not be possible). See, e.g. Kurt A. Richardson, *James* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1997), 204-206; Cargal, *Restoring the Diaspora*, 180-181.

45. Daniel C. Doriani, *James* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2007), 172; Morales, *Poor and Rich in James*, 207.

46. Tamez, *Scandalous Message of James*, 46.

47. William R. Baker, "Above All Else": Contexts of the Call for Verbal Integrity in James 5.12', *JSNT* 54 (1994): 57-71, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0142064X9401605403>.

more likely the ones in 5:1-6 are not. Still, the parallels with our affluence and complacency should make us extremely cautious in drawing these conclusions. James is clearly quite concerned about the destitute in the world, and especially in the church. Those who absolutely refuse to do anything to help them cannot be true followers of Jesus. Those who flirt with anything less than generous giving demonstrate the friendship with the world which equates to enmity with God (4:4); at some point such enmity becomes so ingrained that only wholesale mourning and a dramatic turnaround in behaviour can prove salvific. It is this sense in which faith without works is dead (2:17,26).

3. Paul on Poverty and Wealth

3.1 The Pastoral Epistles

What then of Paul? Whether we treat the Pastoral Epistles as pseudonymous, as authentic, or, adopting Howard Marshall's specially created category, as 'allonymous',⁴⁸ they are almost certainly the latest of the letters attributed to Paul, written no earlier than in the mid-60s.⁴⁹ Interestingly, some of the most striking parallels to James occur in 1 Timothy. Whatever else we do with the vexing passage in 2:8-15, verses 9-10 make it clear that some Christian women in Ephesus were valuing their ability to display their wealth through attire and coiffure, whereas Paul tells them that the beautification that is appropriate for those professing to worship God is the adornment of good works (vv. 9-10).⁵⁰ One immediately recalls James's rebuke for those improperly valuing the gold-fingered man in radiant clothing in James 2:2. In 1 Timothy 3:3 and 8 (cf. also Tit 1:7), one of the qualifications for church leaders is that they not be lovers of money or greedy for gain.⁵¹ The focus not simply on acquiring possessions, but on 'love' and 'greed', reminds one of the traveling merchants in James 4:13-17 who made elaborate plans without taking God's will into account, which they should have done even as they continued their planning. The detailed instructions for

48. I. Howard Marshall with Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), 83-92, by which he meant written by someone other than but similar to (Gk ἄλλος) Paul and with no hint of deception intended.

49. Unless 1 Timothy and Titus are placed during the sequence of events in the late 50s described in Acts. See esp. Peter Walker, 'Revisiting the Pastoral Epistles - Part I', *EuroJTh* 21 (2012): 4-16.

50. Alicia J. Batten, 'Neither Gold nor Braided Hair (1 Timothy 2.9; 1 Peter 3.3): Adornment, Gender and Honour in Antiquity', *NTS* 55 (2009): 484-501.

51. The Greek may not necessarily introduce the concept of 'unjust' gain. See, e.g. the NET, NRSV, CEB, and CSB.

enrolling only worthy widows into what sounds almost like a church office in 1 Timothy 5:3-16 harks back to the need to help particularly distressed widows in James 1:27. 1 Timothy 5:6 even contains the only other New Testament use of *σαταλάω* outside of James 5:5, in both instances referring to luxurious and self-indulgent living,⁵² in one instance with reference to the kind of widow not to support and in the other to the lifestyle of the unjust rich landlords.

First Timothy 6 contains this letter's most extensive teaching on possessions, and the striking parallels to James continue. Verse 5 warns against thinking that godliness is a means to financial gain, a possible motive already mentioned for too many people wanting to become teachers in James 3:1. The famous, often mistranslated, verse 10 ('for the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil')⁵³ returns to the topic of 3:3 and 8, with its parallels in James 4:13-17. The climactic summary of Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy 6 appears in verses 17-19. The expression 'the rich in the present age' (v. 17) recalls the similar descriptor of 'the poor' as 'in the world' in James 2:5, just as the transience of wealth in the same verse echoes the identical theme in James 4:14. Being 'conceited' in 1 Timothy 6:17 employs a synonym for the 'arrogance' to which James refers in 4:16. Paul has hardly soured on good works here, as he uses two forms of the concept in verse 18 to reflect what Timothy must charge his congregants to pursue, and he encourages them in verse 19 to store up spiritual treasure, using a compound form (*ἀποθησαυρίζω*) of the same verb James employs in 5:3 to highlight the judgement that the unrighteous rich have stored up for themselves.

Ascribing a date to James later than the 60s, thereby making it pseudonymous, is almost never the approach of someone who simultaneously holds to Pauline authorship of the Pastorals, which requires dating them *no later* than the 60s.⁵⁴ If it were, we could account for these similarities through cross-fertilisation in that decade and would expect the similarities to tail off as we move to earlier Pauline epistles. But that is not what we find, because the parallels continue. Most would accept the Prison Epistles as the next most recent letters of Paul as we move backwards chronologically. Just about everyone who takes Colossians and Ephesians as pseudonymous does the same with the Pastorals but still dates

52. Cf. Timothy J. Murray, *Restricted Generosity in the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 205-206, <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-156475-8>.

53. See further Luke T. Johnson, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, AYBC (New York and London: Doubleday, 2001), 296, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780300261721>.

54. See esp. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, WBC (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), xlviiii-lxix.

Colossians and Ephesians earlier.⁵⁵ If all four Prison Epistles are Pauline, then they all fit into the chronology established by the book of Acts, probably in the very early 60s,⁵⁶ whereas the Pastorals, even if Pauline, probably come a few years later.⁵⁷

3.2 The Prison Epistles

If Paul wrote all four Prison Letters, then Philippians may well be the last of the four to be penned,⁵⁸ so it should come next in our survey. Philippians contains one important passage on our topic, namely, 4:10-20. Here Paul describes his contentment in all socio-economic circumstances, yet he expresses his gratitude to the Philippians for their financial support since he has been imprisoned.⁵⁹ The early seventeenth-century English of the Authorized Version of verse 12 remains vivid and memorable. In it, Paul insists he knows ‘how to be abased and how to abound’, language which in today’s English means ‘what it is to be in need’ and ‘what it is to have plenty’ (NIV). Paul uses the same verb *ταπεινῶ* that appears in James 4:10 and that has the cognate adjective *ταπεινός* that James introduced first in 1:9. In fact, reading Philippians 4:12 conjures up the picture of Paul experiencing, in turn, the circumstances of both the poor man and the rich man in James 1:9-11. The verb for ‘well fed’ or ‘satisfied’ (*χορτάζω*) in Philippians 4:12 appears nowhere in the New Testament outside the Gospels and one use in Revelation (19:21) except in James 2:16. Was Paul thinking of the destitute Christians told to be warm and well fed by those who offered them no help, when he phrased his account of his own experiences?

Continuing backwards, we come to the other three Prison Epistles. The only verses meriting comment from Philemon, Colossians, and Ephesians in a study as short as this come from Ephesians. In 4:28, Paul pontificates ‘The thief must no longer steal but instead labour, working good with their own hands, in order to have [something] to share with those in need.’ Of course, Paul knew the Ten

55. Representative is Udo Schnelle, *Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2009), 539–573, 578–601.

56. A minority would date Philippians to the late 50s, so that it precedes the other three Prison Letters.

57. For my dating and its rationales, see Blomberg and Seal, with Duprée, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 593–596.

58. Blomberg and Seal, with Duprée, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 471–476, and the literature there cited.

59. Though without ever formally saying ‘thank you’; hence, Gerald W. Peterman, ‘“Thankless Thanks”: The Epistolary Social Convention in Philippians 4:10-20’, *TynB* 42 (1991): 261–270, <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30515>.

Commandments just as James did (Jas 2:11), so he need not have been following James here. But the combination of ἐργάζομαι and ἀγαθός occurs elsewhere in Paul only in Romans 2:10 and nowhere else among the forty uses of ἐργάζομαι in the New Testament. Conceptually, the closest extended parallel is James's exposition of the necessity of good works in 2:14-26. Ephesians 5:5 is one of three Pauline passages listing 'greed' or 'covetousness' as a vice (cf. Col 3:5; Rom 1:29), an allusion to another of the Ten Commandments. As with other vices, at some point they so characterise a person's life that it becomes incompatible with entrance into God's kingdom – in Ephesians 5:5, because coveting becomes equivalent to idolatry.⁶⁰ Is that what has happened with the rich landlords in James 5:1-6?

3.3 The Epistles to the Corinthians and to the Romans

Moving ever earlier in time, we come next to the mid-50s with 1–2 Corinthians and Romans (most likely written in 55, 56, and 57, respectively).⁶¹ Romans 15:25-28 offers the happy results of Paul's multi-year efforts to collect money from the more prosperous churches for the Judean Christians particularly impoverished due to the effects of the famine in the late 40s, which hit the eastern part of the empire particularly hard.⁶² In verse 26 Paul can sum up this facet of his ministry as making 'a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem'. That is

60. On which, see esp. Brian S. Rosner, *Greed as Idolatry: The Origin and Meaning of a Pauline Metaphor* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007).

61. For the Corinthian epistles, see Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Milton Keynes: Paternoster; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 64–67. Some would push one or both dates a year or two earlier. Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, 2nd ed., BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2018), 3–5, notes that plausible dates for Romans range from 55–58, but the majority assign it to a winter date that included part of 57 (either 56–57 or 57–58).

62. Older works tended to emphasise some kind of tribute that Paul wanted his 'daughter' churches to bring to the 'mother' church in Jerusalem and/or a method of creating ecclesiastical unity particularly in light of the belief that the parousia was near. They also often thought 'the poor' referred to the Judean believers irrespective of their socio-economic class. These trends are not nearly as prominent today. For important, recent works on the collection, see David J. Downs, *The Offering of the Gentiles: Paul's Collection for Jerusalem in Its Chronological, Cultural and Cultic Contexts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); Mark A. Jennings, 'Patronage and Rebuke in Paul's Persuasion in 2 Corinthians 8–9', *JGRChJ* 6 (2009): 107–127; Julien M. Ogereau, 'The Jerusalem Collection as Κοινωνία: Paul's Global Politics of Socio-Economic Equality and Solidarity', *NTS* 58 (2012): 360–375, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0028688512000033>; John W. Taylor, 'Poverty and Economic Justice in Second Corinthians', *Journal of Language, Culture and Religion* 3 (2022): 89–104; and John M. G. Barclay, 'Rich Poverty: 2 Corinthians 8.1-15 and the Social Meaning of Poverty and Wealth' (Leuven: SNTS Presidential Address, July 2022).

precisely what James wanted the poor believers in James 2:15-16 to receive, even in Jerusalem (recall above, p. 179).

Second Corinthians 8-9 articulated the key principles Paul was employing in that collection. Four that sequentially account for Paul's main points in these two chapters are that giving should be holistic (8:1-7), proportional (8:8-15), accountable (8:16-9:5), and rewarded (9:6-15).⁶³ Unpacking these four points, we see that first Paul is pleasantly surprised by the Macedonian example of giving beyond what he imagined the people to be able to do as part of a whole-life surrender to the Lord (8:2-5). Second, he does not ask anyone to give a fixed percentage but that which for them is generous, meaning that giving should be proportional to their income (v. 12). In other words, all other things being equal, those with a higher level of income ought to give a higher percentage.⁶⁴ Third, the lengthy discussion of the choice of delegates representing both the Corinthians and Paul and acceptable to both is designed not only to preserve the integrity of the collection and its delivery but also to avoid even the appearance of any kind of mismanagement (vv. 16-24). Finally, some combination of material and spiritual rewards, all subsumed under the rubric of many people praising God for his good gifts, will emerge at the end of Paul's prolonged project (9:11).⁶⁵

One can derive the same four points, in the identical sequence, from Paul's introductory remarks in 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, the one passage in that letter that prepared the way for Paul's more extensive treatment in his second epistle to Corinth.⁶⁶ One might not think of them in exactly these terms without having already worked through 2 Corinthians 8-9, but Paul wants the Corinthian believers to set aside money every week, most likely as part of a collection during the worship service,⁶⁷ so that they don't have to 'cram' their giving at the last minute when they hear that Paul is en route to town (v. 2a). In this way, the offering becomes part of their *holistic* service to Christ. The amount should be δ

63. For similar though not identical concepts, see Verlyn D. Verbrugge and Keith R. Krell, *Paul and Money: A Biblical and Theological Analysis of the Apostle's Teachings and Practices* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 163-182.

64. Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (Leicester: Apollos; Downers Grove: IVP, 2001), 194-195. Cf. Linda L. Belleville, *2 Corinthians* (Leicester and Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 220.

65. Paul Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 443.

66. On which, see esp. Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 1316-1326.

67. Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, rev. ed., NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2014), 899-900.

τι ἕαν εὐδοῶται (v. 2b), an expression that has led to such diverse translations as ‘in keeping with your income’ (NIV), ‘as he may prosper’ (ESV), ‘to the extent that God has blessed you’ (NET), and ‘whatever one can afford’ (NAB). In each case, the *proportionality* of the giving, nevertheless, remains. Some may give less than a tithe, but others should give far more.⁶⁸ ‘These whom you approve’ combines with Paul’s ‘letters [of introduction]’ (v. 3) to help with *accountability*,⁶⁹ while Paul’s decision about whether to accompany the gift (v. 4) may have been based on a variety of factors, but one could easily have been whether he felt the gift was sufficiently generous.⁷⁰ In other words, his approval functions as one kind of *reward* to the Corinthians for their efforts.

There is little difficulty finding these four themes in the letter of James. Just like the Macedonians, James’s audience has been enduring severe financial trials (5:3-6), yet he refuses to allow them not to give to those in need (2:14-17), as one key part of their overall (i.e. holistic) Christian life. This priority should affect their behaviour in church as well (2:1-4). The relative equality or ‘fairness’ (2 Cor 8:13-14 ESV)⁷¹ that Paul hopes to achieve through proportional giving matches the equal treatment James desires of people coming to his churches, whether rich or poor (James 2:1-7). Paul’s scrupulous accountability fits James’s warnings about the coming day of judgement as the great equaliser (5:1-8). And Paul’s promise of reward for generosity includes the language of the Corinthians’ ‘obedience based on your confession of the gospel of Christ’ (2 Cor 9:13), a concept tantamount to James’s faith expressing itself through works (Jas 2:21-25). Indeed, Paul even speaks in 2 Corinthians 9:13 of his addressees having ‘proved’ themselves, using the verb δοκιμάζω, just as James uses the cognate noun, δοκίμιον, in the context of his parishioners’ enduring tribulations (Jas 1:3).

Other features of 1 Corinthians prove relevant to our research even before one reaches chapter 16. Study of this letter over the last forty years has made it a showcase for all the ways that the Graeco-Roman practice of patronage

68. David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003), 754.

69. For an excellent, thorough study, see Christoph Stenschke, “‘Transparency Intercongregational’: Financial Transparency in Paul’s Collection for the Saints in Jerusalem’, in *The Bible and Money: Economy and Socioeconomic Ethics in the Bible*, ed. Markus Zehnder and Hallvard Hagelia (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2020), 243–263.

70. Paul B. Gardner, *1 Corinthians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018), 743, adds ‘Little would better establish the “covenant participation” (κοινωνία) of all God’s people, Jew and Gentile, than the apostle Paul’s accompanying of Gentiles back to Jerusalem with a gift from the next generation of churches populated with many converted pagans.’

71. Cf. Belleville, *2 Corinthians*, 223.

could influence a fledgling Christian church.⁷² Although not many were wise, influential, or of noble birth (1:26), clearly a few were. It does not seem possible to detach all of these from some measure of wealth, because wealth and status were even more intertwined in the ancient world than in ours. They also seem to have contributed a disproportionate amount to the problems Paul has to correct. Given that they would have had the social expectations that attached to patrons in their patron-client relationships before they became believers, it is natural to imagine these carrying over to their Christian lives. Those most directly related to financial matters include the incestuous offender (most likely a generous patron) in 5:1-5 and those involved in the lawsuits in 6:1-8 whom Paul commands to settle in house, perhaps exactly the scenario that we see in James 2:1-4 (recall above, p. 177).⁷³ In 1 Corinthians 7:30-31, Paul tells those buying things not to cling to them (μὴ κατέχοντες - 'not holding on to' them), and those using the things of the world not to be 'engrossed' (NIV; καταχρώμενοι) in them, because the end is near. James 5:7-11 utilises identical motivation.

In 1 Corinthians 9:1-18, Paul argues at length for the right of Christian leaders to receive money for ministry but then refuses to apply it to himself in Corinth, doubtless because he feared remuneration would come with strings attached.⁷⁴ It is hard to know if James would have had a similar fear in James 3:1, but the more Jewish the context, the less precedent anyone had for accepting such payment and thus perhaps the greater danger for doing so with the wrong motives. The Lord's Supper, in 11:17-34, is being celebrated by those able to bring more to eat and drink 'in an unworthy manner' (v. 27; ἀναξίως), with their consuming too much at the expense of the poorer church members who arrive later with fewer foodstuffs

72. Beginning with Gerd Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982); and including esp. John K. Chow, *Patronage and Power: A Study of Social Networks in Corinth* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1992). More recently, cf. Mark T. Finney, *Honour and Conflict in the Ancient World: 1 Corinthians in Its Greco-Roman Social Setting* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2012). For an approach that finds the Corinthians wanting to be under Paul's control instead, see David E. Briones, *Paul's Financial Policy: A Socio-Theological Approach* (London and New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2013). But money would still have come with strings attached, just of a quite different kind.

73. In response to the argument that patronage would not have been applicable in a completely Jewish-Christian milieu such as James may have represented, see Alicia J. Batten, *Friendship and Benefaction in James* (Blandford Forum: Deo, 2010), who argues throughout that it was.

74. The seminal work here is Ronald F. Hock, *The Social Context of Paul's Ministry: Tentmaking and Apostleship* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980).

(v. 21).⁷⁵ Again we think of James's concern for those without daily food in James 2:15. Finally, Paul maintains that without love, all spiritual gifts, including the gift of giving, are worthless (1 Cor 13:3). With no occurrences of ἀγάπη in James, this may be the only text on wealth and poverty in Paul with no obvious parallel in James. Yet James's concern for the poor and oppressed, the orphans, and widows certainly involves love, whether the word itself ever appears.

3.4 The Thessalonian Epistles

We have made our way backwards to the earliest years of Paul's letter-writing ministry. Depending on how one solves the introductory questions surrounding Galatians, it either precedes or follows the Thessalonian epistles. I am persuaded that it precedes them,⁷⁶ so I turn to 1 and 2 Thessalonians next. Especially as persecution for their faith is increasing, Paul wants them to win the respect of outsiders as much as possible (1 Thess 4:12). At the end of 2 Thessalonians, he brings his remarks on this topic to a close with the declaration that whoever is unwilling to work must not eat (3:10). Because no Christian community could have prevented one of its members from all forms of food intake, it is likely that this is a reference to the Lord's Supper, served originally in the context of a regular communal meal.⁷⁷ To be sure, James has nothing comparable to these specific details, but the harsh language and need for decisive action in light of grievous sin matches James's call in 4:7-11 to submit and draw near to God, resist the devil, cleanse oneself morally, repent, and be humbled before the Lord and then be subsequently exalted. In 1 Thessalonians 2:5, Paul avows that he never ministered as a pretext for greed (προφάσει πλεονεξίας), unlike the Christians in James 4:2-3 who asked with wrong motives to spend things on their own pleasures. In both Thessalonian letters, Paul is concerned about those who have stopped working, or who are not working industriously, perhaps in light of their

75. See esp. Rachel M. McRae, 'Eating with Honor: The Corinthian Lord's Supper in Light of Voluntary Association Meal Practices', *JBL* 130 (2011): 165-181, <https://doi.org/10.2307/41304193>; Jin Hwan Lee, *The Lord's Supper in Corinth in the Context of Greco-Roman Private Associations* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2018).

76. Blomberg and Seal, with Duprée, *From Pentecost to Patmos*, 169-174, and the literature there cited.

77. Bruce W. Winter, "'If a Man Does Not Wish to Work ...': A Cultural and Historical Setting for 2 Thessalonians 3.6-16", *TynB* 40 (1989): 303-315, <https://doi.org/10.53751/001c.30546>; Robert Jewett, *Paul: The Apostle to America* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 73-86.

belief in an imminent parousia or, more likely, in order to sponge off their patrons (1 Thess 4:11-12; 2 Thess 3:6-15).⁷⁸

3.5 The Epistle to the Galatians

We finally come to Galatians. If an early date for this letter is correct, we may be in the year 49, only weeks or even days before the Apostolic Council of Acts 15. Remarkably, here appears not only the most striking parallel to James but an actual reference to the man behind the letter and to his view on our topic. At the end of Paul's summary of the meeting in Jerusalem with 'James, Cephas and John' (Gal 2:9), with the order of the names perhaps reflecting their ranking in authority or leadership among the apostles, Paul explains that these men asked 'only that we remember the poor, the very thing which I had made every effort to do' (v. 10; cf. esp. CSB). The aorist indicative, following the present subjunctive, does not suggest a new step on Paul's part, which translations that read simply, 'what I was eager to do' might suggest, but an existing priority for him.⁷⁹ This verse, along with verse 2 on going up to Jerusalem because of a revelation, are regularly cited by those who match this visit with the famine visit of Acts 11:27-30, despite the similarities between parts of the rest of Galatians 2:1-10 and parts of Acts 15.⁸⁰ Paul knows James's priorities at the very latest by this time, but they sync with those he has already been practising.

From where did Paul's habit of helping the poor come? Of course, the Old Testament stresses it, and enshrines the priority in its tithing legislation (Lev 27:30-33; Num 18:8-32; Deut 14:22-29).⁸¹ This system continued in place during Second Temple Judaism.⁸² While there are some parallels in the distribution of

78. The fullest recent survey of the possible background and circumstances to the writing of the Thessalonian letters is now Nijay K. Gupta, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

79. See Bruce W. Longenecker, *Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 183-206.

80. E.g. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1990), 47, 59-60; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, ZECNT (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 22-29, 31; Ben Witherington III, *Grace in Galatia: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 8-20. Particularly thorough and even-handed is Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), 2-18.

81. See further Marty E. Stevens, *Temples, Tithes, and Taxes: The Temple and the Economic Life of Ancient Israel* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2006); Craig L. Blomberg, *Christians in an Age of Wealth: A Biblical Theology of Stewardship* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013), 122-128.

82. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 87-103. For early rabbinic Judaism, see Gregg E. Gardner, 'Pursuing Justice: Support for the Poor in Early Rabbinic Judaism', *HUCA* 86 (2015): 37-62, <https://doi.org/10.15650/hebruniocollannu.86.2015.0037>.

funds or foodstuffs to the less institutionalised models of Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37, and 6:1-7,⁸³ there are no records of individuals taking upon themselves the task of raising money for a large group of dispossessed co-religionists as Paul did. In fact, most of Paul's teaching on wealth and poverty differed noticeably from the existing models of his day, even while overlapping with some of them in smaller ways.⁸⁴ The most natural answer to where Paul learned the details about early Christian commitment to the poor is at his first post-conversion visit to Jerusalem when he met with Peter, John, and James, if he had not been previously exposed to it. And it was those mechanisms with which James, the half-brother of Jesus, would have been intimately familiar even before the conversion of Saul of Tarsus.

Even if James did not pen his letter until close to the end of his life in 62, it would still have been natural for him to articulate the principles he had learned earlier on. Yet if he wrote in the late 40s, it is all the likelier that he would have assumed those early Christian principles and mechanisms. In other words, if there is anything to the argument that James would not likely have even *sounded* as different from Paul on faith and works had he already read Galatians or Romans, so that his epistle should be dated to the late 40s,⁸⁵ then there is that much more reason to assume that Paul *would* have known James's priorities and possibly even seen the copy of the letter that James undoubtedly saved when he sent the original to his churches. The gathering depicted in Galatians 2:1-10, whether it corresponded to Acts 11 or Acts 15, formed the perfect occasion for this transfer of knowledge, had it not occurred even earlier. As Dale Allison has recently stressed,⁸⁶ building on the emphasis of Richard Bauckham and his collaborators in *The Gospels for All Christians* almost twenty-five years ago now,⁸⁷ everybody who was anybody in the early church most likely knew each other. It is time, finally, to abandon the idea that any of the New Testament writings represents the product

83. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty nor Riches*, 167–169; John S. Kloppenborg, 'Fiscal Aspects of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem', *Early Christianity* 8 (2017): 153–198, <https://doi.org/10.1628/186870317X14950055760629>.

84. For details on the full range of options in Paul's world, see David J. Armitage, *Theories of Poverty in the World of the New Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1628/978-3-16-154400-2>.

85. Davids, *Epistle of James*, 22; Moo, *Letter of James*, 25–26. Particularly thorough, and interweaving the questions of date and authorship, is McCartney, *James*, 14–32, 53–56.

86. At the NT seminars of the divinity faculties in Cambridge and Oxford, autumn 2019.

87. Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

of the sectarian isolation of a key Christian writer or community, largely unaware of what other important branches of Christianity were saying and doing.⁸⁸

A much less scrutinised text on our theme appears in Galatians 6:10, on doing good to all people, but especially to the household of faith. This comes in the context of bearing one another's oppressive burdens (v. 2) without allowing people to relinquish the responsibility of contributing their own fair share (v. 5).⁸⁹ Paul also instructs learners to share all good things with their instructors, which thus must include financial remuneration (v. 6).⁹⁰ We have already seen all these themes in other Pauline epistles and thus their parallels in James. And unless we take *μάλιστα* in Galatians 6:10 to mean 'namely' rather than 'especially',⁹¹ Paul discloses that he is not concerned exclusively with helping the Christian poor, even if an understandable priority attaches to that obligation.⁹²

4. James as a Probable Source for Paul

I do not want to sound as if I am claiming that there are no differences between Paul and James on wealth and poverty. James certainly has a consistently strident tone in addressing the sins of the rich, although Paul's language to the incestuous offender and those suing one another in 1 Corinthians 5 and 6 is hardly mild. The claim that Paul, unlike James, does not rely much on the Jesus tradition had already been massively disproved by David Wenham ten years before Peter

88. In endorsing the basic thesis of the contributors to the Bauckham anthology, however, we need not deny that each Gospel was initially envisioned as addressed to one specific church or group of churches, so that its emphases were at least partly determined by its distinctive *initial* audience. See further Craig L. Blomberg, 'The Gospels for Specific Communities and All Christians', in *The Audience of the Gospels: The Origin and Function of the Gospels in Early Christianity*, ed. Edward W. Klink III (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 111–133, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567702166.ch-005>.

89. Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* (Leicester and Downers Grove: IVP, 1996), 80, n. 12.

90. See further Bruce W. Longenecker, "'Do Good to All" (Gal. 6.10): Assets, Capital and Benefaction in Early Christianity', in *Poverty in the Early Church and Today: A Conversation*, ed. Steve Walton and Hannah Swithinbank (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2019), 43–53, <https://doi.org/10.5040/9780567677747.ch-006>.

91. So T. C. Skeat, "'Especially the Parchments": A Note on 2 Timothy IV.13', *JTS* 30 (1979): 173–177, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jts/XXX.1.173>.

92. Cf. further Ronald Y. K. Fung, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 292–299; Frank J. Matera, *Galatians*, Sacra Pagina (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical, 1992), 222–223.

Dauids's article,⁹³ and recent studies of 1 Corinthians have simply driven home that relationship even further.⁹⁴ Paul more consistently stresses the Christians' obligation to help those poorer than themselves, especially fellow believers, and not just in the local community but worldwide as well. Much of his teaching comes as he embarks on his collection for precisely the poor people who could be in James's churches, whereas James is not involved in any itinerant fundraising. Still, it is hard to justify the wedge that various scholars place between these two first-generation Christian writers on matters of rich and poor. While there is no way to demonstrate, based on existing evidence, that Paul derived any or all of his commitments directly from James, either orally or in writing, the suggestion seems eminently plausible. If the similarities between the two are due to a broader, common treasury of teaching on the topic, then the unity of early Christianity on this issue is underlined even more, against those who would want to call attention solely to differences and distinctives among its various forms.

While Paul might have acquired some of this material from the oral tradition of Jesus's teaching that was circulating, his early acquaintance with the 'pillar' apostles makes them, and especially James, likely candidates for transmitters of that tradition. Inasmuch as most of this teaching was largely unparalleled in previous Jewish tradition, it is unlikely that Paul and James independently invented such complementary teachings. And unless we follow Stanley Porter and resurrect an ancient view that Paul had actually seen Jesus himself,⁹⁵ we need a less direct conduit for transmitting his views to the former Saul of Tarsus.

5. Fulfilment of the Law as Neighbour-Love

The title to this paper could easily have been 'James on Poverty and Wealth: A Precursor to Paul?' Instead, I chose 'The Perfect Law of Liberty' as my label for the precursor. The expression, of course, comes from James 1:25 (KJV), but that was not the only reason for the choice. In my New Testament theology, I defend the

93. David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995). Dauids quotes merely Peter Richardson and Peter Gooch's 1984 article 'Logia of Jesus in 1 Corinthians', in *Gospel Perspectives*, vol. 5: *The Jesus Tradition Outside the Gospels*, ed. David Wenham (Sheffield: JSOT; 1985 (mistakenly attributing it to 1984)), ironically, since even though it is more minimalist than Wenham, its burden was to highlight the parallels that do exist rather than focusing on those that do not.

94. See esp. Christopher L. Carter, *The Great Sermon Tradition as a Fiscal Framework in 1 Corinthians: Toward a Pauline Theology of Material Possessions* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2010).

95. Stanley E. Porter, *When Paul Met Jesus: How an Idea Got Lost in History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781316422786>.

concept that ‘fulfilment’ of Scripture, and of all that God has done in preparing for the new covenant age, can be seen as the best unifying theme in the New Testament.⁹⁶ Whenever one argues for a unifying centre of either Testament, or both together, one always must deal with outliers. Nothing appears in every single book, and nothing appears as equally prominent in the books in which it does appear. For many, the letter of James is an outlier to the theme of fulfilment, but it appears significant that he suggests that he views the law as fulfilled in Christ, just like the more major New Testament witnesses do. In 2:8, as we briefly noted, he opines, ‘if you really *fulfil* the royal [or “kingdom”] law ...’ While it is difficult to conclude that this is the Mosaic Law unaltered, it still includes the Mosaic Law, supremely summarised in the double love command. Chapter 2:8 refers to neighbour love, while 2:19 alludes to the beginning of the Shema on the oneness of God, which in its original context immediately adds the command to love God (Deut 6:4-5), which any *Jewish-Christian* audience would immediately call to mind. The royal or kingdom law may be the Law as fulfilled by and in Christ,⁹⁷ but it is still the Law of God. Both James and Paul, moreover, recognise the Scriptural foundations for loving God and neighbour in the meeting of the material needs of the poor. Second Corinthians 8–9 can in fact be outlined according to its quotations of the Old Testament,⁹⁸ while James’s articulation of the fulfilment of the royal law of love, which produces freedom (cf. also 2:12), appears in the immediate context of commands against socio-economic discrimination. Love of neighbour and helping the poor remain wedded in both writers.

6. Conclusion

If James is no longer quite the whipping boy of New Testament writers with respect to faith and works, some would want to keep him in that position with respect to wealth and poverty. This discriminatory behaviour is unjust and even more ironic given James’s injunctions against discrimination. Both James and Paul know of godly poor. Both know that Christians can be rich, while still tempted to sin with their wealth. Both know that there is no inherent virtue in

96. See n. 34 above. Cf. esp. Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008).

97. Cf. also Mariam J. Kamell, ‘Incarnating Jeremiah’s Promised New Covenant in the Law of James’, *EvQ* 83 (2011): 19–28.

98. Craig L. Blomberg, ‘The Centrality of Scripture in 2 Corinthians 8–9’, in *Paul and Scripture*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Christopher Land (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2019): 303–322. Exod 16:18 appears in 2 Cor 8:15; Prov 3:4, in 2 Cor 8:21; and Ps 112:9, in 2 Cor 9:9. Each is central to the main point of 2 Cor 8:1-15; 8:16-9:5; and 9:6-15, respectively.

poverty, or they wouldn't be trying to alleviate it. Their communities are not that different in socio-economic makeup, even if places like Corinth and Ephesus may have a slightly larger minority of well-to-do believers. If they do, Paul is as aware as James of their potential to cause a disproportionate amount of the churches' problems. Is Paul as similar as James on this topic because he has read James's letter? We cannot know for sure; at the very least he became intimately familiar with James's views no later than 49 and perhaps earlier still. Contemporary discomfort with Scripture's teaching offers no legitimacy to the attempt to drive a wedge between James and Paul here.

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