

## EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF SACRED STEWARDSHIP IN PAULINE EPISTLES AND IT'S PRACTICAL IMPLICATION ON ECONOMIC PRINCIPLES

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### ABSTARCT

*Sacred stewardship referred to as divine stewardship or divine economy, is a fundamental aspect of Christian theology. It encompasses both God's actions towards His people and humanity's responsibility to ethically and faithfully manage God's possessions. The letters of Paul have received significant attention from theologians in relation to this concept of divine stewardship. The aim of this study is to examine Paul's theology and its contribution to our understanding of economics, while also considering the practical implications of economic principles within his teachings. The research methodology combines qualitative and interpretive approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of Paul's insights into economic thought. This study holds great relevance for academics and practitioners across various fields. Academics, in particular, can use this in-depth understanding of the concept of Sacred Stewardship, as viewed through the lens of Paul's theology, as a foundation for further research.*

**Keywords:** Sacred Stewardship, Economic Principles, Pauline Epistles.

### INTRODUCTION

The intersection of theology and economics, particularly through the lens of stewardship, is a subject of scientific interest that highlights the relationship between spiritual belief and behavioral economics (Budovich, 2023). In Christian theology, stewardship emphasizes the responsible management of resources under divine ownership, calling for ethical and faithful management by humanity (ÇINAR, 2023). Scholars recognize the potential insights from Paul's theology, especially as found in New Testament of his Epistles, to reevaluate economic principles through the perspective of sacred management (Hogeterp, 2023). By delving into Paul's teachings, researchers aim to gain a deeper understanding of the ethical aspects of economic decision-making, justice, equality, and human development within economic systems (Wang et al., 2023). The study seeks to explore the theological underpinnings of economic principles, with a focus on management, wealth and the social responsibility to improve the insight of theological-economic interaction.

The concept of stewardship in Christian theology emphasizes the responsible management of resources entrusted by divine sources, promoting equitable distribution and loving care for the vulnerable (Azisi, 2023). This theological principle is interwoven with economics, urging a re-evaluation of economic practices through the lens of sacred management (Gregersen, 2023). The writings of the Apostle Paul provide deep insight into the moral imperatives that guide economic decisions, offering a foundation for ethical economic behavior (Muzakki, 2023). By studying Paul's theology, scholars can uncover the ethical considerations inherent in the economic decision-making process, contributing to a deeper understanding of the moral responsibilities that shape contemporary economic practice ('Dominant Leadership Themes in Paul's Epistles', 2023). This exploration aims to enrich the discourse on the intersection of theology and economics, fostering a comprehensive view.

This research focuses on analyzing Paul's letters to explore concepts of stewardship,

wealth, and social responsibility in economics. The goal of this study is to examine the contribution of Paul's theology to our understanding of economics and consider the practical implications of economic principles in his teachings.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Historical Context of Paul's Theology**

Key idea: Investigate the historical context in which Paul's theology developed, including the social, political, and cultural conditions of the time.

To fully comprehend Paul's theology, it is essential to understand the historical context in which he lived and worked. This context encompassed the social, political, and cultural conditions of Paul's era, which significantly influenced his understanding and communication of theological concepts.

1. **Social Conditions:** Paul's writings and letters were shaped by the social conditions of his time, characterized by a hierarchical structure and divisions among different groups of people (Gunderson et al., 2023). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul addresses the issue of social and ethnic divisions within the church, highlighting unity in Christ as a unifying force that surpasses social and ethnic boundaries (Malomo, 2022). For Paul, Christian identity eliminates distinctions based on social status, ethnicity, and gender, emphasizing equality among believers in the eyes of God (Kuncoro et al., 2022). Despite the prevailing social differences in Roman society, Paul's message of unity in Christ emphasized inclusivity that went beyond the societal norms of his time (Ruzer, 2022).
2. **Political Conditions:** During Paul's time, the Roman Empire held significant political and social influence over its territories, including Palestine (Conclusion, 2022). Paul's letters occasionally touch upon the political landscape of his era, particularly in his letter to the Romans, where he addresses concerns related to false teachers and the ramifications of the Council of Jerusalem's decision regarding Gentile circumcision (Faith in Romans, 2023). This reflects Paul's engagement with the political realities of the Roman government and the interaction between religious beliefs and governmental authority. The Roman political context influenced Paul's theological arguments, especially regarding the inclusion of Gentiles in the Christian community without adherence to Jewish customs like circumcision (Wenno, 2022). Therefore, Paul's writings provide insights into how he navigated the political complexities of his time while staying true to his theological teachings.
3. **Cultural Conditions:** Paul's approach to cultural adaptation and outreach is evident in his letter to the Corinthians. He emphasizes the importance of relating to different groups in order to effectively spread the gospel (Malomo, 2022). This aligns with broader practices of enculturation and acculturation, where interaction with different cultures is maintained while upholding core principles of truth (Butticaz, 2023). Additionally, Paul's writings demonstrate a nuanced view of Jewish ritual teaching, prioritizing moral commandments over strict adherence to the Torah (Pacheco, 2022). His ability to navigate diverse cultural contexts, as exemplified in Corinthians, showcases his strategic approach to sharing the message of Christ with different community groups. This approach emphasizes flexibility and empathy in his ministry (Kuncoro et al., 2022).

One relevant example of Paul's approach to cultural adaptation can be found in his letter to the Corinthians, where he addresses various cultural and traditional issues of his time. Particularly, 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 highlights his willingness to adapt to different groups in order to gain their acceptance and share the gospel effectively. Paul describes how he becomes like the Jews to win them over, like those under the law to reach them, and like those not under the law to connect with them. He clarifies that even though he is not bound

by the law himself, he submits to the law of Christ in order to resonate with those who are not under the law. His approach extends to becoming weak for the sake of those who are weak, in order to win them over. In his ministry, he strives to become all things to all people so that he may save them through various means.

### **The development of Paul's theology from the perspective of church history and theological history.**

Paul's personal encounter with Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus played a crucial role in shaping his theology and mission (Russia et al., 2023). This encounter served as a pivotal moment in Paul's life, resulting in a profound transformation and redirection of his role as an apostle and bearer of the gospel (Whitworth et al., 2023). In his epistles, Paul frequently references this life-altering experience as the foundation of his authority in delivering theological teachings (Olaniyi & Oyekan, 2023). The dramatic nature of these events not only altered the course of Paul's life, but also instilled in him a profound sense of purpose and confidence in spreading Christ's message (Forsgårde et al., 2023). Paul's encounter with Jesus Christ became the bedrock of his theological framework and missionary zeal, exerting a significant influence on his teachings and guiding his mission (Epaillard et al., 2023).

Galatians 1:15-16a:

"But when God chose me from my mother's womb and called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son in me, that I might proclaim him among the nations."

1 Corinthians 9:1

Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord?"

In 1 Timothy 1:12-13: "Thanks be to Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me, for he considered me faithful and assigned me to be a servant, when once I was a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an angry man."

Philippians 3:7-8

"But everything that was once gain to me, I count as a loss for Christ's sake. More than that, I count all things as a loss, knowing Christ Jesus our Lord." In these verses, Paul describes firsthand his dramatic personal experiences, including a special call from God and his encounter with Jesus Christ. This experience not only radically changed the course of his life, but also became a strong foundation for his mission as an apostle and evangelist. Paul often referred to this experience as a source of authority in imparting theological teachings to the churches he served.

Paul's theological message was greatly influenced by his experiences in Roman Jewish society, where he blended Jewish religious beliefs with the political and social dynamics of the time. This influence is evident in his writings, which emphasize the importance of social ties and political relationships in entrepreneurial activities (Ben-Shahar et al., 2023, "Hustle and Influence: The Dynamics of Illicit Small Business and Political Connections"). Additionally, Paul's understanding of how political beliefs intersect with societal responses to health risks demonstrates his awareness of the context in which he lived (Ben-Shahar et al., 2023). Furthermore, excavations of ancient waste in Roman urban areas provide insights into the environmental and social challenges that Paul may have been familiar with (Flaux et al., 2023). Lastly, by analyzing the interactions between Jews and Christians in late antiquity using network analysis, we gain insight into the complex relationships that developed during this time.

Romans 13:1-2:

"Every man must submit himself to the government that rules over him, for there is no government that is not ordained by God, and that which exists is that which has been ordained by God. Therefore, whoever rebels against the government rebels against God's

provisions, and those who rebel will receive punishment for their deeds."

1 Corinthians 9:20-22:

"To the Jews I became like the Jews, so that I could win over the Jews. To those under the law, I become like one under the law, even though I myself am not under the law, so that I can win over those under the law. To those who are not under the law, I become like those who are not under the law, even though I am not free from the law of God, because I submit to the law of Christ, that I may win over those who are not under the law. For those who are weak, I become weak, that I may win over those who are weak. To all I have become everything, that by all means I might save some."

Filipi 3:20:

"But our citizens are in heaven and from there we await the Savior, even the Lord Jesus Christ."

In these verses, Paul demonstrates his understanding of the political structure of his time, where government was believed to have authority from God. He also shows his adaptable attitude towards various groups of people, both Jewish and Gentile, and his willingness to adjust to the needs of evangelistic missions in different cultural and political contexts.

**Paul's Apostolic Mission Journey:** Through his apostolic missionary journeys across the Hellenistic world, Paul gained profound insights into diverse cultural and religious contexts (Barberá, 2023). By engaging with Christian communities in various cities, Paul developed a comprehensive understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by the early churches (Tierney-Hendricks et al., 2023). These diverse experiences significantly influenced his theological narrative and message, which were tailored to address practical and theological questions specific to each church's context (Olaniyi & Oyekan, 2023). Paul's interactions with different communities enabled him to adapt his teachings to meet the specific needs and circumstances of each congregation, demonstrating his ability to effectively contextualize his message in diverse cultural settings (Jung et al., 2023). Here are some verses from Paul's writings that reflect his broad understanding of different cultural and religious contexts, as well as his responses to the challenges and opportunities faced by the early churches:

1 Corinthians 9:22-23:

"For those who are weak, I become weak, that I may win over those who are weak. To all people I have become everything, so that by all means I may save some people. I have done all things because of the gospel, that I might share in its blessing."

Act 17:22-23:

Then Paul stood in the midst of the Ariopagus and said, 'O men of Athens, I see, in every thing, that ye revere the gods very much. For when I passed by and looked at your statues, I found also an altar with the inscription: To the unknown God. Then it is he whom you worship without knowing.'

Act 17:30-31:

"Indeed, God once kept that ignorant time, but now declares to all people, everywhere, that they must repent. For he has appointed a day, when he will judge the world justly, by the one whom he has appointed; and he gave confidence to all men in this matter by raising him from the dead."

In these verses, Paul demonstrates his willingness to adapt to various cultural and religious contexts in order to communicate the gospel. He faced the challenges and opportunities of the early churches by paying attention to the particular context of each Christian community he served. Paul builds his theological narrative and message by responding to practical and theological questions that arise from the unique context of each

church.

#### Discussion

A discussion of the relevance of this historical context to Paul's understanding of theology includes how economic thought at that time was reflected in Paul's writings. This discussion can be found in Paul's letters and narratives about early church life in the Book of Acts. In these books, Paul often refers to historical, cultural, and economic contexts to express his thoughts on faith, morality, and Christian social responsibility.

One striking example is found in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, where he faced various social and economic challenges. In 1 Corinthians 16:1-4, Paul instructs the church about collecting donations for needy Christians in Judea. He organizes regular fundraising according to the financial capabilities of each member of the congregation. In this setting, Paul not only showed concern for the poor social and economic conditions of Christians but also affirmed the principles of justice and social solidarity in religious practice.

Furthermore, in his epistles, Paul often uses economic tropes to explain his theological concepts. For example, in his letter to the Romans, he uses images of debt and payment to explain the concept of redemption by Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23) and our responsibility as recipients of grace to live godly lives (Romans 13:8). In this way, Paul used economic terms known in his day to facilitate the understanding of spiritual truth.

Thus, economic thought in Paul's day was reflected in his writings in a way that provided an understanding of moral values and theological principles relevant to their social and economic contexts. This demonstrates how relevant the historical context is in understanding and applying Paul's theological teachings in the context of modern times. The importance of revisiting economic principles through the lens of Paul's theology can be found in various Bible verses. One relevant verse is 1 Timothy 6:10, where Paul writes to Timothy, "For the love of money is the root of all evil. For this reason, some have strayed from the faith in their greediness and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

This verse affirms that the love of money is not the source of good, but rather the root of all evil. Paul highlights the dangers of greed and obsession with material wealth, which can cause a person to stray from the faith and inflict suffering on themselves and others. Thus, economic principles based on greed and self-interest contradict Paul's theological teachings on love, justice, and social responsibility. In addition, in Philippians 4:11-13, Paul writes: "Not because of lack, not because of abundance, I say so, because I have learned the secret of life, which is to be content in any circumstance. I am able to do all things in Him who gives me strength." In this verse, Paul teaches about the importance of simplicity and contentment in life, regardless of economic circumstances. He emphasized that the strength to face all situations comes from Christ, not from material wealth. This suggests that economic principles based on simplicity and dependence on God are more consistent with Paul's theological teachings.

#### CONCLUSION

The study of sacred stewardship, as viewed through the lens of Paul's theology, provides a profound understanding of economics, morality, and social responsibility. This research reveals how Paul's historical, political, cultural, and personal experiences shaped his thinking and the way he expressed his theological message.

Firstly, Paul, as a Jew living under Roman rule, encountered various challenges and opportunities during his apostolic mission. Through his mission trips in the Hellenistic world, he gained valuable insights into different cultural and religious contexts. Paul's interactions with Christian communities in different cities enabled him to develop a comprehensive understanding of political and social realities, and to address practical and

theological questions as they arose. Secondly, we emphasize the significance of historical, political, and cultural context in comprehending Paul's theology. In his writings, Paul teachings reflect the social, political, and cultural conditions of his time, including moral principles and social responsibility. Paul stresses the importance of unity in Christ, surpassing social, ethnic, and political differences.

Thirdly, we underscore the importance of reevaluating economic principles through the lens of Paul's theology. In his writings, we see how spiritual and moral values influence wealth management and the relationship between wealth and spiritual life. Paul highlights the importance of simplicity, contentment, and reliance on Christ in the face of economic reality. Thus, this article provides a profound understanding of how Paul's theology can serve as a foundation for economic thinking grounded in spiritual and moral values. As suggestions for future research, we propose further exploration of the relationship between Paul's theology and contemporary economic practices, as well as its social and ethical implications in this digital age. It is our hope that this article can contribute meaningfully to our understanding of the connection between faith and daily life.

These conclusions are particularly relevant to academics and practitioners in various fields. For academics, a deep understanding of the concept of sacred stewardship, as viewed through Paul's theology, can serve as a basis for further research in economics, theology, and religious studies. This article establishes a solid foundation for interdisciplinary research that combines elements of economics, morality, and spirituality. Additionally, for practitioners, this article offers valuable insights into how the principles of Paul's theology can be applied in everyday life, particularly in the areas of wealth management and social responsibility. By understanding and applying the concept of sacred stewardship, practitioners can develop more sustainable and morally responsible economic practices. In conclusion, this article not only contributes to the advancement of academic knowledge but also provides practical guidance for seeking to apply theological values in their daily lives.

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