

Economic Inequality in the Roman Empire and Paul's Appeal to *isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 with Consideration of Inequality in South Korea Today

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1. The Collection in Corinth

Paul's collection "for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem" (Rom 15:26) was a multi-regional economic venture among the earliest churches. The relatively wealthier Gentile churches of the Pauline mission took on the responsibility to "remember the poor" (Gal 2:10) of the relatively poorer Jewish church in Jerusalem. On a purely economic level, it was a calculated attempt to bring about equality between the haves and the have-nots in the larger economic setting of the Roman Empire. Indeed, Paul mentions this economic purpose in 2 Corinthians 8:13-14: "Our desire is not that others might be relieved while you are hard pressed, but that there might be equality. At the present time your plenty will supply what they need, so that in turn their plenty will supply what you need. The goal is equality" (NIV). Fair distribution of economic resources, it appears, is at the heart of Paul's aim for the collection. But how should Paul's aim of equality be understood in the ancient economic context of Roman Empire?

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In this article, the Roman economy is studied with particular focus on understanding income distribution and gaging economic inequality. Further, the place of Roman Corinth in the imperial economic landscape is considered. Second, Paul's appeal to *isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 is examined against the backdrop of inequality in the Roman Empire. Third, in order to bring the study into today's context, a brief overview of the inequality in modern South Korea is described and compared to the inequality of the Roman Empire. Finally, the article concludes with a short reflection of how 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 might speak to prosperous South Korea today at the forefront of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

2. Inequality in the Roman Empire

Recent studies on income distribution and inequality in the Roman Empire offer an insightful look into the economic realities of Paul's world. In a ground-breaking 2009 article, Walter Scheidel and Steven Friesen appraise, using the available ancient data, the size of the Roman economy as well as the extent of inequality in the Roman Empire.¹⁾ They estimate that the "economic product of the Roman Empire at its peak approached 50m tons of wheat equivalent or somewhat less than HS20bn ..."²⁾ The performance of the Roman economy "approached the ceiling of what was feasible for ancient and medieval economies..."³⁾ As an "ancient economy,"⁴⁾ the Roman Empire

1) W. Scheidel and S. J. Friesen, "The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire," *Journal of Roman Studies* 31 (2009), 61-91.

2) Scheidel and Friesen, "The Size of the Economy," 74. From this, they posit that the per capita GDP of the Roman Empire at its peak was around \$700 in 1990 Geary-Khamis dollars = International dollars (Intl.\$). Geary-Khamis dollars are a hypothetical currency value based on the USD of 1990.

3) Scheidel and Friesen, "The Size of the Economy," 74.

was fundamentally primitive when compared to modern-day advanced economies. However, among pre-industrial economies in history, the economy of the Roman Empire was not surpassed until the development of advanced economies in England and in the Netherlands during the early modern period.⁵⁾ As interesting this might be, the more fascinating aspect of the study is on income distribution in the Roman economy.

Social historians have long understood the Roman world to be dominated by a small minority of the extremely wealthy at the top. However, Scheidel and Friesen attempt to quantify the disparity between the elite and the poor by an economically sophisticated approach to measure Roman Empire's income distribution. In this task, they depend on previously published scales that separate the elite from the non-elite, Scheidel in four and Friesen in nine groupings, refining the scale to seven levels in their article.⁶⁾ The elite, including senatorial, equestrian, decurional orders, plus "other wealthy," account for 1.2 to 1.7% of the population, and claim 3 to 5 billion sesterces in annual income or about 15 to 30% of the total income.⁷⁾ The non-elite, roughly 97% of the total population, comprising of top groups with surplus income between 1.7 to 10 times above subsistence

4) M. I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

5) Scheidel and Friesen, "The Size of the Economy," 64.

6) They have refined the seven levels of poverty, including the elite groups, as defined earlier by the second author, S. J. Friesen, "Poverty in Pauline Studies: Beyond the So-called New Consensus," *JSNT* 26 (2004), 323-361. Note the extended evaluation by B. Longenecker (*Remember the Poor: Paul, Poverty, and the Greco-Roman World* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010], 44-53) of Scheidel and Friesen's article, opting for a slight revision of the "optimistic" scale.

7) Scheidel and Friesen, "The Size of the Economy," 75-82. Elite households number between 215,000 to 290,000, by their calculations, which is between 1.2 to 1.7 percent of the 70 million total at the peak of the empire. This quite a bit lower than the 3% other studies have put forth. See Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 45, 53.

level and bottom groups at or below subsistence level. The top (middling) groups of the non-elite, some 7 to 13% of the population, earned 15 to 25% of the total income (3 to 5 bn HS) while the bottom groups, some 84 to 90% of the population, earned around 50% of the total income.⁸⁾ In short, the top 10% of the population claimed approximately 50% of the total income of the Roman Empire while between 10 to 22% of the population may have lived “below subsistence.”

Income Distribution: Roman Empire (elite/non-elite)

Income Scale	Percentage of Total	Total Income Range (HS)	Percentage of Total Income
Elite	1.2-1.7%	3-5 billion	15-30%
Non-elite	(middling) 7-13%	3-5 billion	15-25%
	(bottom) 84-90%	7-10 billion	50%

From the ancient economic data and appropriate income scales, Scheidel and Friesen ultimately calculate a Gini coefficient of income inequality for the entire Roman Empire at between 0.42 to 0.44.⁹⁾ This, they suggest, is “middle of a broad historical range,” when compared to other pre-industrial economies. It would appear that their estimation of income inequality is not as high as one would expect, given the economic prominence of the elite in the Roman Empire. However, they suggest a higher coefficient for wealth inequality because “while for a rich person, income may largely be a function of that personal wealth

8) The remaining 1 billion HS of the total is state and other income.

9) Scheidel and Friesen, “The Size of the Economy,” 86. “Gini coefficient” is a statistical measure of inequality where 0.0 is perfect equality and 1.0 is total inequality. E.g., a high Gini coefficient means that income and wealth are more unevenly distributed. They note that the Roman economy was “less developed than some of the most advanced economies of the eighteenth century,” yet it may be because the income inequality was limited by the low level of mean income.

that produces an annual return, a poor person may be virtually property-less but still earn a subsistence income.”¹⁰) In other words, since wealth generates its own income, those of higher incomes likely had many times the wealth of those of lower incomes.

The empire-wide distribution model of Scheidel and Friesen (2009) may be appropriately applied to the particular setting of Roman Corinth, but it should be nuanced. The publication of *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality* in 2014, edited by Friesen among others, tried to approach economy and inequality from various directions for the particular context of Roman Corinth. In line with this study, I point out two ways that might help us tweak the Scheidel - Friesen model. First, the conceptions of elite and especially non-elite should be adjusted to fit Roman Corinth and its commercial capacity.¹¹) Both the elite and non-elite groups must have had strong ties to the commerce in Corinth. Benjamin Millis suggests that the freedman elite of Roman Corinth were essentially imported, already very wealthy, from other parts of the Greek East and were drawn to Corinth by its commerce.¹²) In the same volume, David Pettegrew argues that the “emporion” (wholesale commerce center) of the two harbors generated wealth for the few elite

10) Scheidel and Friesen, “The Size of the Economy,” 88 n. 90.

11) Strabo, *Geography* 8.6.20: “Corinth is called ‘wealthy’ because of its commerce, since it is situated on the Isthmus and is master of two harbours, of which the one leads straight to Asia, and the other to Italy; and it makes easy the exchange of merchandise from both countries that are so far distant from each other.” C. K. Williams II, “Corinth as Commercial Center,” in *The Corinthia in the Roman Period*, ed. T. E. Gregory, JRA Supp 8 (Ann Arbor: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1994), 46, claims that the Roman Corinth grew rapidly in commercial capacity during the reign of Claudius which saw frequent famines.

12) B. W. Millis, “The Local Magistrates and Elite of Roman Corinth,” in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality*, ed. S. J. Friesen, S. A. James, and D. N. Schowalter (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 38-53.

who owned most of the economic commerce, but actually amplified local inequality through the need for seasonal workers.¹³⁾ The commercial capacity of Roman Corinth may have afforded new opportunities for the elite to increase their income and wealth while at the same time the number and dependence of “below subsistence” workers may have also increased.

Second, in line with its commercial capacity, the larger imperial economic and political landscape should be accounted for when thinking about the economy of Roman Corinth. Friesen concludes in his study of Junia Theodora that “Corinth was not only a bridgehead for the spread of Roman domination, but also a competitor for the acquisition of economic resources in the region.”¹⁴⁾ Indeed, Susan Alcock has argued that there was a large-scale inequality in the Roman imperial landscape as a whole.¹⁵⁾ Taxes and goods flowed from the frontiers of the East (Egypt, Syria, Palestine) to the center of the Empire, namely Rome, while power and control flowed from the center to the periphery through the same trade and travel routes. The geography of Corinth at the heart of these trade routes stimulated its commercial success. Interestingly, in a study of subsistence farming in Roman Corinth, Guy Sanders suggests an economic scale of 2% elite, 20-30% managers and tradesmen, and 60% or more of subsistence level workers. He contends, “Corinth at the time of Paul may have had quite a substantial consumer class...when compared with the average income distribution of

13) D. K. Pettegrew, “The Diolkos and the Emporion: How a Land Bridge Framed the Commercial Economy of Roman Corinth,” in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality*, ed. S. J. Friesen, S. A. James, and D. N. Schowalter (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 139-142.

14) S. J. Friesen, “Junia Theodora of Corinth: Gendered Inequalities in the Early Empire,” in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality*, ed. S. J. Friesen, S. A. James, and D. N. Schowalter (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 222.

15) S. Alcock, *Graecia Capta: The Landscapes of Roman Greece* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

the Roman Empire.”¹⁶) This seems to suggest that Roman Corinth may have had a larger middling group than the Roman Empire as a whole. Yet, stark inequality between the haves and the have-nots was a normal sight in Roman Corinth.

Income Distribution: Roman Empire and Roman Corinth

Scale	Roman Empire	Roman Corinth
elite	1.2-1.7%	2%
elite + middling group	10-14%	20-30%
the rest	84-90%	60%
Gini coefficient	0.42-0.44	0.302-0.428

In sum, inequality was visible at multiple levels in the Roman Empire. At the (micro) level of city or town, the elite likely had multiple times the income and wealth of the middling group while the two groups together totally overshadowed the income and wealth of the rest. On the (macro) empire-wide scale, inequality likely took regional shape where frontier regions like Palestine were relatively poorer than the interior regions like Roman Corinth and most certainly far poorer than Rome, the imperial city. This background of inequality makes sense of Paul's appeal in 2 Corinthians 8-9, and especially to the notion of *isotēs*¹⁷) in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15:

¹³ I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance

16) G. D. R. Sanders, “Landlords and Tenants: Sharecroppers and Subsistence Farming in Corinthians Historical Context,” in *Corinth in Contrast: Studies in Inequality*, ed. S. J. Friesen, S. A. James, and D. N. Schowalter (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 123.
 17) *Isotēs* may denote either equality (NIV; NASB; NEB) as in “proper balance” or fairness (ESV; NRSV “fair balance”), which is closely associated with justice (BDAG 481). An illustration of the latter meaning is found in Philo who calls *isotēs, mētēr dikaiosynēs* (the mother of justice) in *De specialibus legibus* 4:231. D. Georgi, *Remembering the Poor: The History of Paul's Collection for Jerusalem* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1992), 88, understand *isotēs* as a “divine force...used for paraphrasing even God himself.”

(*isotēs*) between ¹⁴ your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. ¹⁵ As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.” (NRSV)

3. *Isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15

Isotēs is foundational to Paul’s collection as a “principle undergirding the whole project.”¹⁸⁾ It may mean either a state of proper balance (equality) or a state of being fair (fairness), the latter closely associated with justice.¹⁹⁾ Thus, Philo suggests that *isotēs* is “the mother of justice.”²⁰⁾ The notion of justice or fairness may be implied in the idea of giving “according to your means” (2 Cor 8:11) or “according to what one has” (2 Cor 8:12). But *isotēs* goes beyond mere proportionality because it is the result of divine grace, already pointed to in the Macedonian giving (2 Cor 8:1-2) and in the self-impoverishment of Jesus Christ (2 Cor 8:9). In the latter case, divine grace is active in bringing about equality, to the point where the giver becomes poor in order to achieve equality, without regard for what is fair to the giver. However, generally speaking, divine grace has an equalizing effect since no one may rightfully deserve grace. Thus, in 2 Corinthians 8:13, equality appears to be the ground²¹⁾ or effective cause of giving.²²⁾ Yet, in 2 Corinthians

18) D. E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, NAC 29 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 382.

19) BDAG 481, preferring the first meaning in 2 Cor 8:13-14.

20) *Spec.* 4.231.

21) Garland, *2 Corinthians*, 382: “[Paul] writes unexpectedly, ‘but out of equity’ (*all ex isotētos*). Paul is not talking about the purpose for their giving—to create equality—but the ground of their giving—from equality.” Similarly, Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 87.

8:14, equality is “ebatic in import, stating a consequence” in the way Paul frames the *hina* clause.²³⁾ Thus, Paul’s appeal to *isotēs* must be understood as an outcome of a generosity enabled by divine grace. This is forcefully communicated by a terse reference to Exodus 16:18 in 2 Corinthians 8:15.

Many commentators suggest that Exodus 16:18 in 2 Corinthians 8:15 merely illustrates the principle of equality.²⁴⁾ But in regard to this “echo of Scripture,” Richard Hays thoughtfully remarks, “Paul taps Exodus 16 and then walks away, leaving the reader to draw out the sap.”²⁵⁾ And there is much sap to be drawn. Exodus 16 tells the story of how God provided the wondering Israelites with manna for food. The gathering of the manna was both “as much as one needs” (Exod 16:16) and fixed to one *omer* per person. On the one hand, the *omer* limit teaches equality while on the other, the gathering according to needs is a test of Israelite hearts. Equality is enforced when personal gatherings were miraculously increased or decreased, as necessary, to the one-*omer* standard. Hearts are tested for obedience in that some tried to keep a portion of the remaining (since no one could gather more than an *omer*) manna for the next day and found that it had spoiled. Miraculously, the only time the manna remained edible for the following day was on the Sabbath. Hays concludes, “Paul sees in this manna story an economic parable whose moral is that God provides for those

22) M. J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 589-590.

23) Harris, *Second Epistle*, 591.

24) M. E. Thrall, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, Vol. II, ICC (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 543; V. P. Furnish, *II Corinthians*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1984), 420; R. P. Martin, *2 Corinthians*, 2nd ed., WBC 40 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 445; P. Barnett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 415.

25) R. B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 90.

who rely on him for their daily bread, taking no thought for the morrow.”²⁶⁾ It is a story that teaches about trust in the God who provides. But it also how grace and equality converge, suggesting in effect that God shows grace to bring about equality.

For the Corinthians, Paul’s appeal to equality based on Exodus 16 would have challenged them to manifest grace as the Macedonians had (2 Cor 8:1-5), and not as unbelieving Corinthian patrons who might show favor to their clients for the sake of self-glory. Divine favor has already been shown to the Corinthian church (2 Cor 8:7; 9:8) and Paul envisions an economic equality that will ultimately lead to God’s glory (2 Cor 9:13). This vision particularly challenges the inequality in the Roman world. In a study of *isotēs* in its three Greek contexts of friendship, the *polis*, and the *cosmos*, Larry Welborn notes that Paul’s idea of equality reverses the “ancient logic of inverse proportion,” prevalent in these contexts in that the superior party submits to the inferior party in order to achieve equality.²⁷⁾ He suggests that in so doing, “Paul contributes to the tentative emergence of a new category of thought—the economic.”²⁸⁾ Paul understood the distribution of resources and the importance of economic equality, even if it was only applied to the Christian community (but on an imperial scale!). Indeed, the economy of resource distribution ought to be the same economy of incarnation (and the gospel). Both were economies of grace in which God acts to bring about equality by “making many rich” (2 Cor 6:10).²⁹⁾

26) Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*, 90.

27) L. L. Welborn, “‘That There May Be Equality’: The Contexts and Consequences of a Pauline Ideal,” *NTS* 59 (2013), 73-90.

28) Welborn, “‘That There May Be Equality,’” 88.

29) Note Georgi, *Remembering the Poor*, 89, who concludes, “Thus *isotēs* is brought closer to the understanding of *charis*... In verse 13 Paul could have written *ek charitos*.”

Paul's appeal to *isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 confronts the inequality of the Roman Empire in other ways. In the economic setting of Roman Corinth, the twenty-three percent of the top income bracket (elite + middling group) would have had the needy on their doorstep on a daily basis, reminding them of the immediate needs of their town. Those of the upper income group in the church would experience the same pressures, perhaps leading to the worry that they themselves may become poor in the precarious famine-stricken state of the ancient economy. There is certainly an individual dimension to Paul's plea for economic equality that the relatively rich members of the Corinthian church must accommodate personally. At the same time, by appealing to *isotēs*, Paul is encouraging the Corinthians to see things on a grander scale. In the larger imperial economic landscape, inequality was regional, and resources were directed toward Rome. The Corinthians in the interior were far better off than the Jerusalem believers on the frontiers of the empire. Indeed, Paul's economy of grace that aims for equality channels resources in the opposite direction of the Roman economy—toward the needy in the frontiers, away from the center, and not the other way around.

Having considered Paul's appeal to *isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 in the light of inequality in the Roman Empire, this article shall come full circle and bring the study into conversation with inequality in the advanced economy of South Korea today.

4. Inequality in spite of the “Miracle on the Han”

South Korea's “economic miracle”³⁰) transformed one of the

30) The years of “miraculous” growth were the 1960s, 70s, and 80s. Since then, there have been notable bumps in the road. The IMF crisis of 1997-1998 and

poorest nations in the world after the Korean War (1950-1953) into one of the richest nations today. The per capita Gross National Income (GNI) in 1953 was \$67, but by 2014, it climbed to \$28,180. The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) increased from \$40.9 million in 1953 to nearly \$1.3 trillion in 2014, a 31,000-fold increase.³¹⁾ The per-capita GDP will likely reach the coveted \$30,000 mark in 2018.³²⁾ It is no wonder that Korea's economic rise is commonly dubbed the "miracle on the Han."³³⁾ South Korea is now the world's eleventh largest economy³⁴⁾ and was ranked fifth in export volume, at \$573 billion in 2014, behind China, the USA, Germany, and Japan.³⁵⁾ In 2017, export volume set a new record at \$574 billion.³⁶⁾

the global financial crisis of 2008 had many suggesting that the Korean economic miracle was decidedly finished. Cf. however F. Jánossy, *The End of the Economic Miracle: Appearance and Reality in Economic Development* (London: Routledge, 2015), who argues that economic miracles are nothing but normal post-war reconstruction.

- 31) "S. Korea's GDP surges 31,000-fold since 1953: data," *Yonhapnews.co.kr*, August 10, 2015, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/business/2015/08/10/0501000000AEN20150810006300320.html>.
- 32) "S. Korea's per-capita GDP to top US\$30,000 in 2018: Goldman Sachs," *Yonhapnews.co.kr*, December 5, 2017, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/business/2017/12/05/0502000000AEN20171205006200320.html>.
- 33) The "miracle on the Han" was so named after the "miracle on the Rhine," which saw post-WWII West Germany's economic growth of 15% a year between 1948-1950 and GDP rise by an average of 8.2% a year in the 1950s. Only Japan's "economic miracle" topped Germany's in the 1950s at 8.8% a year. See H. Giersch, K-H. Paqué, and H. Schmieding, *The Fading Miracle: Four Decades of Market Economy in Germany* (Revised and updated; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 3-4.
- 34) International Monetary Fund website, accessed February 5, 2018, <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/NGDPD@WEO/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOORLD>.
- 35) Michigan State University, Global Edge website, accessed May 30, 2016, <http://globoledge.msu.edu/countries/south-korea/tradestats>.
- 36) Hooyeon Kim, "South Korea Exports Climb to Record in 2017 on Semiconductors,"

But there is a dark side to Korea's economic rise. Most economists agree that inequality was not a problem during the high-growth years (1965-1993), and that "the Gini coefficient has not changed significantly since the 1960s."³⁷⁾ The OECD.org website shows Korea's Gini coefficient (for income inequality) at 0.295 in 2015, down slightly from 0.307 in 2012, which is below the OECD average of 0.318.³⁸⁾ However, the same source shows that Korea has the highest "relative income poverty" at 14.6% of the population (2013).³⁹⁾ Meanwhile, according to an IMF report, the top 10% earned more than 45% of total income in Korea, up from 29% in 1995, higher than Singapore and Japan, at 42% and 41% respectively, and the highest of the 22 nations studied in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴⁰⁾ Further, Korea's National Tax Service data from 2012 show that the top 10% of earners made over 90% of the dividend and interest earnings, suggesting that wealth inequality is even worse.⁴¹⁾ Moreover, the top 1% of earners account for 16.6% of the

Bloomberg, January 1, 2018. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-01-01/south-korea-exports-climb-to-record-in-2017-on-semiconductors>.

- 37) B. J. Eichengreen, W. Lim, Y. Pak, and D. H. Perkins, *The Korean Economy: From a Miraculous Past to a Sustainable Future* (Harvard East Asian Monographs 375; Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 196.
- 38) The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development website, *oecd.org*, accessed May 30, 2016, <http://www.oecd.org/social/income-distribution-data-base.htm>.
- 39) I.e., percentage of the population with income less than 50% of the national median income.
- 40) Jae-won Kim, "Korea worst in income inequality in Asia-Pacific," *Koreantimes.co.kr*, March 16, 2016, http://www.koreantimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2016/03/488_200524.html. Similarly, Kyung-rok Kim, "Income inequality in South Korea the most severe in Asia," *The Hankyoreh (Hani.co.kr)*, March 17, 2016, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/735462.html
- 41) "Data show 10% of South Korea with 90% of the wealth," *The Hankyoreh (Hani.co.kr)*, October 8, 2014, http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_editorial/658877.html.

national income.⁴²⁾ Economists note, “In the early stages of the high-growth era, South Korea was a model of success in reconciling growth with low levels of inequality. One might expect this pattern to have been maintained with democratization and the end of government repression of unions, but a growing body of evidence points in the other direction.”⁴³⁾ Troubling inequality, it would seem, is hiding beneath the better-than-average Gini coefficient of the OECD data.

Income distribution in South Korea tells a more alarming story. An analysis based on a government survey in 2014⁴⁴⁾ showed that while the bottom quintile (1/5) of the population only earned 3.5% of the total ordinary income, the top quintile earned 46.5%.⁴⁵⁾ More disturbingly, the top quintile accounted for 63.8% of total “financial assets” while the bottom quintile had only 0.8%. The report indicates a Gini coefficient quite different from the OECD figure. For income inequality, the

42) “Top 1% Take Up Bigger Slice of National Income,” *The Chosunilbo* (*english.chosun.com*), April 25, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/04/25/2012042501165.html.

43) Eichengreen, et al., *The Korean Economy*, 12.

44) Sang-ho Nam, “Household Income and Asset Distribution in Korea,” *Korea Institute for Health and Social Affairs* (*Kihasa.re.kr*), accessed March 20, 2016, <https://www.kihasa.re.kr/common/filedown.do?seq=33788>.

45) This value seems to be at odds with the news article of the IMF report cited above. However, it is unclear what “ordinary income” means in the government survey data. Further, there appears to be some disparity in the sources. See S. Jain-Chandra, et al., “Sharing the Growth Dividend: Analysis of Inequality in Asia,” (IMF Working Paper: WP/16/48), 12, <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp1648.pdf>. The study based on tax return data by Minki Hong of the Korea Labor Institute, “Income Inequality in Korea, 1958-2013,” seems to corroborate the higher 45% figure. (Paper presented at The Fourth Conference of the *Regulating for Decent Work* Network Organized by the *International Labour Office*, Geneva, Switzerland, July 8-10, 2015, accessed May 30, 2016, http://www.rdw2015.org/uploads/submission/full_paper/208/Income_Inequality_in_Korea.pdf.)

Gini coefficient was 0.428 while for wealth inequality (total assets), it was 0.584.

In addition, a more nuanced look at Korea's income distribution shows that inequality is particularly menacing for select groups. First, the elderly is now the most vulnerable segment of the Korean population in that "45 percent live in relative poverty as compared with the OECD average of 13 percent,"⁴⁶⁾ the highest of any OECD nation. Unfortunately, other social indicators such as the raising suicide rate among the aged aligns with this alarming trend of inequality. Second, "Korea has the highest gender-based wage gap in the OECD."⁴⁷⁾ Especially among women with tertiary education, the gap is exceptionally large. Although not unique to Korea, the gender wage gap is embarrassingly high for an advanced democratic nation. Third, the gap in education is a perpetual problem for transgenerational poverty. The inadequacy of free public-school education and the heavy reliance on costly *hagwon* (after-school academy) education means that low income families are incessantly unable to climb the social ladder through education. Thus, elite tertiary universities are less and less accessible to low income families.⁴⁸⁾ Income inequality is thus transmitted to the next generation because of the lack of access to educational opportunities. Although not obvious at first sight, inequality is a dogged economic and social problem in South Korea today.

46) Eichengreen, et al., *The Korean Economy*, 206.

47) Eichengreen, et al., *The Korean Economy*, 13.

48) Eichengreen, et al., *The Korean Economy*, 192-94.

5. Between Rome and Seoul

Comparing the income distributions of the Roman Empire and South Korea today, there are some arresting similarities. The top 10% of South Korea earns 45% of the total income while the top 10% of the Roman Empire earned roughly between 40-50% of the total income. For Roman Corinth, the percentage of income of the top 10% was probably similar if not slightly higher. The Gini coefficient for income inequality of the Roman Empire is calculated to be between 0.42 to 0.44 while Korea's is between 0.295 (OECD) to 0.428 (government survey). Wealth inequality when compared to income inequality was likely more noticeable for the Roman Empire and Roman Corinth as it similarly is in South Korea, since wealth generates its own income.

In an ancient economy, the vast majority earned subsistence-level or near subsistence-level income while a small number of super-wealthy and elite took the lion's share of the income and wealth.⁴⁹⁾ A middling group would have been relatively small compared to the subsistence level group, even for the more nuanced setting of Roman Corinth. In other words, a large income disparity and income poverty as a perpetual problem is to be expected in an ancient economy like the Roman Empire. However, it is astonishing that a modern economy of a democratic nation like South Korea exhibits a similarly pronounced inequality.

49) Sometimes called "the binary model of economic differentiation." See Longenecker, *Remember the Poor*, 40-44.

Comparing Income Distribution: Roman Empire vs. South Korea

	Roman Empire (pop. ~ 70 million)	South Korea (pop. ~ 50 million)
Total Income	~ 49 billion Intl.\$	~ 1.72 trillion Intl.\$
Top 1% - elite	16-19%	16.6%
Top 10% - elite + middling group	40-50%	45%
P90 - the rest	50-60%	55%
Gini coefficient	0.42-0.44	0.302-0.428

It should be noted, however, that because total income differs vastly between the Roman Empire then and South Korea today, the disparities are not strictly comparable. In other words, there were far fewer resources to go around in the Roman Empire than in South Korea.⁵⁰⁾ Indeed, a rough calculation shows that the total GDP of the Roman Empire was only 49 billion 1990 Geary-Khamis dollars while the total GDP of South Korea in 2015 was over 1.72 trillion 1990 Geary-Khamis dollars. South Korea's total GDP is over 35 times larger than the Roman Empire's at its peak (~200 C.E.). There is no question that South Koreans today have far greater resources, wealth, and income than the ancient Romans had. Thus, it is a given that a top percentage owning a lion's share of the wealth and income when most in society are near subsistence level is fundamentally different when most in society are living well above subsistence level. At the same time, however, it would seem that the wealth and income of the top income earners is that much greater when most in society live well above subsistence level. In other words, the wealth of the Roman elite, in absolute terms, pales by comparison to that of the South Korean elite.

Having observed the striking similarities in the inequalities of the Roman Empire and of South Korea today, Paul's appeal

50) Professor Friesen kindly pointed this out after the presentation of a similar similar at the Early Christianity and Ancient Economy Section of the SBL International Meeting in Seoul, Korea, 3-7 July 2016.

to *isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 must be brought again into the conversion and allowed to confront the inequalities of South Korea in much the same way it did to the Roman world. Ever since the “miracle on the Han,” the world has been looking to Korea for another economic miracle.⁵¹⁾ Paul’s appeal, however, redefines and subverts even the notion of an economic miracle. On Paul’s reference to Exodus 16, many commentators point out a sharp discrepancy between the equality of the manna provision and the Corinthian giving toward equality. Unlike the former equality, the latter is neither forced nor miraculous in character.⁵²⁾ Yet, Paul understands that God’s grace working through the voluntary generosity of the Corinthians is as miraculous because both are gracious provisions of God. Indeed, Paul is looking for a new economic miracle as a divine act of grace that similarly aims for and achieves equality of provision but now through the grace-enabled generosity of the Corinthian believers.

6. Toward *Isotēs*

Equality is the aim of Paul’s collection on the basis of an economy of grace. His notion of equality reverses the unequal income and wealth distribution of the Roman Empire and Roman

51) Richard W. Rahn, “Korea’s economic miracle: The jury is still out on whether the juggernaut can roll on,” *WashingtonTimes.com*, May 8, 2017. Korean leaders routinely promise one. E.g., impeached President Park Geun-hye promised a “second miracle on the Han River” in her 2013 inaugural address as she was sworn in as President. Tae-gyu Kim, “We’ll have 2nd Miracle on the Han,” 25 Feb 2013. http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2013/02/116_131116.html.

52) E.g., C. K. Barrett, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians* (BNTC; London: Continuum, 1973), 227. Also, Barnett, *Second Epistle*, 415.

Corinth. His teaching had far-reaching economic implications for both the local Corinthian inequality and the large-scale inequality of the Roman Empire. Members of the church from the middling group of income earners, who had at least some disposable income, must have been challenged to bring about divine equality among God's people in their town as well as for the Jerusalem poor. Beyond Roman Corinth, the significance of Paul's collection taken from his Gentile churches in Achaia, among others, to give to the poor in Jerusalem was a reversal of inequality in the imperial landscape and the flow of taxes and goods under Roman imperial rule. The real economic miracle was realizing equality even on the largest possible scale.

As South Korea is poised for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, alarming inequalities must not be overlooked in the tireless drive toward the next economic miracle. Indeed, as optimistic proponents of the Fourth Industrial Revolution point to one miracle to come after another, others warn about the potential for increased inequality as technological advancements actually reduce the demand for unskilled workers, already disadvantaged in income share. Income inequality will actually rise as Korea advances toward the Fourth Industrial Revolution as it has in other advanced countries.⁵³ Paul's appeal to equality reminds us living in South Korea that we need a different kind of "economic miracle." A miracle economy of grace that advances toward *isotēs*.

53) E. Brynjolfsson and A. McAfee, *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress, and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2014), 147-149.

<주제어>

4차 산업혁명, 은혜 경제, 경제적 평등, 불균등, 로마 경제, 로마의 고린도, 경제적 기적

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<초록>

현재 한국의 경제적 불균등에서 본 로마 제국의 경제적 불균등과 바울의 평등성(*isotēs*)에 대한 호소(고후 8:13-5)

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예루살렘 교회를 위한 사도 바울의 모금 활동은 로마 제국의 경제 현실에 비추어 이해해야 하는 경제적 벤처 사역이었다. 특히, 고린도후서 8장 13-15 절에 나오는 사도 바울의 평등성(*isotēs*)에 대한 호소는 로마 제국의 고린도 도시와 로마 제국의 소득 불균등의 현실을 배경으로 읽어야 한다. 당시 로마 제국의 최상위층은 높은 소득을 향유한 반면, 대다수의 사람들은 겨우 생계를 유지할 정도로 바닥 수준의 삶을 살았으므로 불균등은 놀라우리만큼 심하였다. 경제적인 균등을 지향하는 바울의 은혜 경제는 로마의 통치 하에서 경제적 흐름을 역전시키고, 소수의 최상위층과 대다수의 하위층 사이에 있는 불균등성을 직면하게 하려는 지향점을 갖고 있다.

한국의 경제적 기적을 잠깐 살펴보아도 제 4차 산업혁명을 향하여 더 큰 경쟁력을 향해 박차를 가하는 과정 가운데 로마 시대와 비슷한 정도의 불평등성이 이루어지는 흐름이 보인다. 사도 바울의 평등성(*isotēs*)에 대한 개념은 오늘날 한국 경제가 미래의 경제 기적을 맹렬하게 추진하면서 불평등의 현실에는 눈을 돌리는 흐름에 대해 통렬하게 경고한다.

<Abstract>

Economic Inequality in the Roman Empire and Paul's Appeal to *isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 with Consideration of Inequality in South Korea Today

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Paul's collection was an economic venture that must be understood in the light of the economic realities of the Roman Empire. Especially, his appeal to *isotēs* in 2 Corinthians 8:13-15 should be read against the income inequalities in Roman Corinth and the Roman Empire. The top income groups earned a startlingly disproportionate amount of the total income while the vast majority lived near subsistence level. Paul's economy of grace that aims toward equality reverses the economic flow under Roman rule, and confronts the inequalities between the few at the top and the majority at the bottom. A cursory look at the "economic miracle" of South Korea shows a trend toward a similar degree of inequality that could worsen as the country moves toward greater competitiveness for the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Paul's idea of *isotēs* poignantly warns against the relentless drive for the next economic miracle while turning a blind eye to the realities of inequality in Korea today.