

# **HARD WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY IN 2THESSALONIANS 3:10**

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**UGANDA CHRISTIAN  
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## DECLARATION


I Cosmas Janson Galaliza hereby declare that this research paper is my own work and it has not been submitted to any institution for the award of degree. I confirm that appropriate credit will be given where reference will be quoted from the work of other scholars.

Rev. Galaliza

18<sup>th</sup> June, 2025

**APPROVAL**

This research paper has been under my supervision and now is ready for submission to Uganda Christian University with my approval.

Signature.....

Rev. Dr. Emmanuel MUKEMATA

Date 18/6/2025

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## Abstract

This study investigates the themes of hard work and personal responsibility as expressed in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, with particular attention to the apostolic instruction: *“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.”*(ESV). Employing a library-based methodology, the research engages in exegetical analysis of the passage within its historical and literary context, supported by a survey of biblical commentaries, theological literature, and socio-historical studies. The paper explores how Paul addresses issues of idleness and disorderly conduct in the Thessalonian community, situating the instruction within the broader framework of Pauline ethics and eschatological expectation. The findings suggest that the apostle’s exhortation was not merely a response to economic laziness, but a pastoral correction aimed at restoring communal order and theological integrity. This study further considers the relevance of Paul’s teaching for contemporary Christian understandings of work ethics, social responsibility, and the dignity of labor.

# CHAPTER ONE

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Introduction

Work is an essential part of human life, and the Bible provides clear guidance on its importance. 2 Thessalonians 3:10 states, “if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (ESV), emphasizing the necessity of hard work and personal responsibility. The verse reflects Apostle Paul’s teaching to the Thessalonian church, addressing issues of idleness and dependence on others.

The study explores the Biblical principles of hard work and its relevance to Christian living. It examines the historical and cultural context of 2Thessalonians 3:10, its application in early Christian communities, and its implications for modern believers. By understanding this passage, we can gain deeper insight into how diligence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency align with Biblical teachings and Christian ethics.

### 1.1 Background of the study

Work has been a fundamental part of human existence since creation. The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, emphasizes the value of diligence, responsibility, and self-sufficiency. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10b, the Apostle Paul firmly states, “*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*” This command was given to address a growing issue of idleness among some believers in the early church. Some Thessalonians had misunderstood Christ’s return, leading them to neglect their responsibilities and depend on others for sustenance. Paul, in response, strengthened the principle that work is both a duty and a moral obligation.

Throughout history, this verse has been widely discussed in relation to Christian work ethics, social responsibility, and economic systems. It has been used to promote self-reliance, discourage laziness, and encourage a balanced approach to charity. In

modern society, where issues of unemployment, poverty, and social welfare exist, the application of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 remain relevant. This study seeks to explore the Biblical and theological foundations of work, analyze its historical context, and discuss its implications for contemporary Christian life. By understanding this passage, believers can develop a Biblical perspective on hard work, responsibility, and ethical labor practices.

## **1.2 Problem statement**

In today's world, issues of laziness, dependency, and lack of strong work ethics are established in many societies. Some individuals for example in our diocese (Western Tanganyika- Tanzania) relying on charity, miracles or government assistance without making efforts to be productive, while others misunderstand Biblical teachings on work and provision. 2 Thessalonians 3:10b, which states, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (ESV), provides a clear directive on the importance of diligence and personal responsibility. However, the applications of this verse remain a subject debate, especially in Christian communities where the balance between work, grace, and social welfare must be carefully considered.

The challenge lies in interpreting and applying this Biblical principle in a way that aligns with Christians ethics while addressing actual economic and social concerns. How should believers understand and implement this teaching in our context where some believers are sincerely unable to work due to circumstances beyond their control? What role should the church play in promoting a strong work ethic while also extending to those in need?

This study seeks to examine the theological and practical implications of 2 Thessalonians 3:10b, exploring its historical context, relevance to modern Christian living, and its impact on personal responsibility, charity and economic stability. By addressing these concerns, this study aimed to provide a balanced Biblical perspective on work and social responsibility.

### **1.3 Purpose of the study**

The purpose of studying on hard work and responsibility in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is to understand Paul's directive that those who refuse to work should not expect to eat, emphasizing diligence and accountability in the Christian life. This verse underscores the Biblical principle that labor is essential for sustenance and community contribution, discouraging idleness. It also highlights the moral and spiritual significance of responsibility, aligning with God's design for human work. By examining this passage, we gain insight into Christian ethics regarding self-sufficiency and service. Ultimately, it challenges believers to embody discipline and integrity in their daily lives.

### **1.4 Objectives**

The study was guided by the following objectives;-

1. To analyze the theological and ethical suggestions of Paul's advice in 2 Thessalonians 3:10.
2. To explore the relationship between hard work, responsibility, and community life in the early Christian church based on 2Thessalonians 3:10
3. To evaluate the contemporary application of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 in discussions on work ethic, social responsibility, and Christian stewardship.

### **1.5 Research questions**

1. What is the historical and cultural background of Paul's instruction in 2Thessalonians 3:10, and how does it shape the passage's interpretation regarding work and responsibility?
2. How does 2Thessalonians 3:10 contribute to biblical and theological discussions on the ethics of labor, personal responsibility, and communal support within the Christian faith?

3. In what ways can the principle of hard work and responsibility in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 be applied to contemporary discussions on work ethic, social welfare, and Christian stewardship?

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

My study focuses on hard work and responsibility in 2Thessalonians 3:10b explores how this passage provides a theological foundation for Christian involvement in hard work and responsibility. I will examines the importance of this for Christian to be stable and strong economic in terms of financial and life welfare.

### **1.7 The significance of the study**

This study on hard work and responsibility in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 are significant in several ways, particularly in its contribution to theological, social, and practical discussions on believers and community transformation. It highpoints the biblical principles in shaping societies and offers insights into the role of faith in social progress how they can improve and contribute for church development and remain faithful to their God without be shaken with poverty.

### **1.8 Justification of the study**

The research topic, “Hard work and responsibility in 2Thessalonians 3:10” evaluates the church’s active role in addressing hard work and responsibility within the community. Referencing 2 Thessalonians 3:10 where highlights the importance of hard work and responsibility for people who can work hard to improve their life. The study aimed to examine how the church fulfills this mandate for helping people to gain better success through working hard and preserve ethic work for God’s glory

Hence this study aims to provide valuable insights into the significance of hard work and responsibility as found in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, offering a comprehensive understanding of its role in individual and community development within the Christian context.

## 1.9. Literature review

### 1.9.0 Introduction

Religious perspectives on *hard work and responsibility* emphasize their divine origin, ethical implications, and role in human flourishing. Biblical teachings frame work as an act of worship, service, and participation in God’s purpose. Throughout Christian history, work has been viewed as both a calling and a duty, reflecting obedience to God and stewardship of His creation. This literature review explores theological interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 and its implications for Christian work ethic, social responsibility, and stewardship, while also considering its application in contemporary discussions on labor and faith.

### 1.9.1 Theological and ethical implications of 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul’s exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 “*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat*”(ESV) addresses the necessity of diligence and personal responsibility. In the early church, some believers neglected work, possibly due to misunderstandings about Christ’s return. Paul corrects this, linking work to both survival and godly living.

Paul’s directive is not merely about economic survival but “about maintaining moral integrity”<sup>1</sup>. He roots this command in Genesis 2:15, where work was assigned before the Fall, reinforcing the idea that labor fosters self-sufficiency and generosity (Ephesians 4:28). Calvin similarly describes work as “both a duty and a means of stewardship, warning that idleness leads to moral decay and disrupts community well-being”<sup>2</sup>.

Contextualize 2 Thessalonians 3:10 within Paul’s theology of the kingdom, arguing that “responsible labor aligns believers with God’s ongoing renewal of creation”<sup>3</sup>. He

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<sup>1</sup> Stott, J, (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: The gospel & End of Time*. Intervarsity press, page 112-113

<sup>2</sup> Calvin, J, (2009). *Commentary on the epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians*. Baker academic, page 152-163

<sup>3</sup> Wright, C, J, (2011). *The mission of God’s people: A Biblical theology of the church’s mission*. Zondervan, page 245-247

suggests the Thessalonians' neglect of work stemmed from an overemphasis on Christ's imminent return, leading some to abandon daily responsibilities. Also highlights Paul's practical approach, asserting that faith and daily work are inseparable. Paul himself exemplified this ethic through his tent-making trade (Acts 18:3), demonstrating that all labor is honorable.

Piper (2011) connects Paul's warning against idleness to the Biblical work ethic, arguing that, "work is not merely about sustenance but glorifying God"<sup>4</sup>, aligns with (Colossians 3:23). This theological perspective positions diligence as a spiritual discipline that nurtures faithfulness and responsibility. Furthermore, Paul's teachings suggest that work is a way of expressing obedience to God, ensuring that one contributes meaningfully to both personal and communal well-being.

### **1.9.2 Hard work, responsibility, and community life in early Christianity**

Work in Christian theology is not only personal but communal, fostering social stability and mutual care. Keller asserts that, "labor contributes to human flourishing"<sup>5</sup>, aligning with God's purpose in creation (Genesis 2:15). Work was always intended as a cooperative effort, where individuals serve both God and society.

Volf argues that, "ethical labor reflects divine justice and love, participating in God's redemptive activity"<sup>6</sup>. He expands on this by linking responsibility in work to Biblical ethics. He highlights Proverbs 11:1, which condemns dishonest practices, emphasizing that diligence must be coupled with integrity.

Additionally, early Christian communities valued work as a testimony of faith. Acts 4:32-35 illustrates the importance of mutual responsibility, where believers contributed their resources to support one another. This principle remains relevant today, as Christian responsibility in work extends beyond personal success to the well-being of others.

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<sup>4</sup> Piper, J, (2011). *Think: The life of the mind and the love of God*. Crossway, page 145-146

<sup>5</sup> Keller, T, (2012). *Every good endeavor: Connecting your work to God's work*. Dutton, page 43-47

<sup>6</sup> Volf, M, (2001). *Work in the Spirit: Toward a theology of work*. Oxford University Press, page 82

### 1.9.3 Perspectives on Christian responsibility in work and leadership

Beyond personal diligence, Christian leadership also demands a strong work ethic. MacArthur underscores perseverance and discipline in spiritual growth, connecting it to 2 Timothy 2:15, where believers are called to “diligent service before God”<sup>7</sup>. This principle applies to both ministry and secular work, as Christians are called to be exemplary workers in all spheres of life.

Piper warns against complacency in ministry, emphasizing that “diligence strengthens not just the worker but the entire community”<sup>8</sup>. Also relates Christian responsibility to leadership, arguing that work should be a witness to the gospel (Matthew 5:16). This reflects a broader theological theme: work is not merely an obligation but a means of demonstrating God’s truth through excellence and integrity.

Wilkins (2018) and Stevens highlight how “hard work shapes Christian discipleship, underscoring the connection between labor, worship, and mission”<sup>9</sup>. When “believers approach work with a kingdom mindset, they model Christ’s teachings and contribute to God’s redemptive work in the world”<sup>10</sup>.

### 1.9.4 Contemporary Applications of 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Modern discussions on work ethic, social responsibility, and Christian stewardship continue to draw from Paul’s teaching. Smith challenges traditional interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 3:10, considering the complexities of economic systems and the

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<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, J, (2017). *The gospel according to Paul*: Thomas Nelson, page 276-281

<sup>8</sup>Piper, J, (2013). *Brothers we are not professionals: A plea for Pastors for radical ministry*. B & H publishing, page30-32

<sup>9</sup> Wilkins, S, (2018). *Following the Master: A Biblical theology of discipleship*. Zondervan, page 350-362

<sup>10</sup> Stevens, R, P, (2012). *Work matters: Connecting Sunday worship to Monday work*. Eerdmans, page 133

Christian call to social care. He argues that “while diligence is essential, Christians must also extend compassion and support to those unable to work”<sup>11</sup>.

The Protestant concept of vocation, Holl showing how Biblical principles shaped historical work ethics. Many Protestant traditions emphasize the idea that “work is a calling from God”<sup>12</sup>, reinforcing responsibility and personal discipline.

Miller critiques rigid Protestant views on vocation, “arguing for a nuanced approach that considers diverse economic realities. He asserts that Christian work ethics must address systemic issues such as poverty and labor exploitation”<sup>13</sup>. Kwon explores Paul’s emphasis on diligence in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-10 and its implications for “social and economic development promoting integrity and stewardship”<sup>14</sup>.

Hugen and Scales discuss the integration of Christian faith in social work, demonstrating how “Biblical principles inform social welfare efforts”<sup>15</sup>. Their study aligns with contemporary efforts to balance personal responsibility with community care, reinforcing the Christian calling to serve others through work.

In addition, modern applications of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 extend beyond individual labor to discussions on fair wages, ethical business practices, and social justice. Christians are called not only to work diligently but also to advocate for fair and just labor conditions that reflect God’s righteousness.

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<sup>11</sup> Smith, F, (2022). *If a person doesn't work let them eat anyway*. Christians for social actions, Online search/work 13rd, March, 2025

<sup>12</sup> Holl, K, (1958). *The history of the work vocation. (Berufi)*. Review and expositor. 55 (2) page 126-154

<sup>13</sup> Miller, D, W, (2013). *Rethinking work as vocation: From protestant advice to Gospel corrective*. Christian scholar’s review, 42(4), page 347-362

<sup>14</sup> Kwon, L, (2015). *Paul and Hard work (2 Thessalonians 3:6-10): A Christian approach to social and economic development*. *Journal of Biblical perspectives in leadership*. 5(1) page 3-12

<sup>15</sup> Hugen, B, & Scales, T, L, (Eds.). (2020). *Christianity and social work: Readings on the integration of Christian faith and social work practice (6<sup>th</sup> Ed.)*. Botsford, CT: NACSW Press, page 112-114

## **1.10 Research Methodology**

### **1.10.1 Research design and methodology**

Since the study is theological research based on the Bible qualitative approach was used to obtain the information on writing this work whereby Documentation method helped also to get the existed information from scholars' views regarding to research topic

### **1.10.2 Research tools**

Since the study was a library based study the research tools used to get the information was literary method such as documentation, other literary work from other scholars (primary source, secondary source and tertiary) concerning the topic of my research which based on the Bible on 2Thessalonians 3:10 aimed on encouragement for believers to work hard for better life and find how to relate this message with the study area in the Diocese of Western Tanganyika.

### **1.10.3 Scope of study**

The study was conducted in the Diocese of Western Tanganyika Tanzania. This diocese found in the country of Tanzania it located at the Western part of the country of Tanzania. The name of Diocese carries the famous Lake which located at this side the Lake Tanganyika. This area border with Burundi and Congo at the West, the distance from Uganda Christian University to Kasulu town is around 1000 kilometers, where you can spend two days on journey by using a road.

### **1.10.4 Justification**

The study on, hard work and responsibility in 2Thessalonians 3:10 seeks to evaluate the church's active role in addressing social participation in hard work and responsibility within the community. Referencing St. Paul, where highlights the importance of responsibility for people who misinterpret the meaning of work hard

and blessings. This study aims to examine how the church fulfills this duty which we have given since the Garden of Eden through Adam after creation. Understand the extent and the impact of such teachings is crucial for enhancing the church's contribution to holistic community development especially when people will understand and work hard for God's glory.

### **1.10.5 Significance**

The significance of study lies in its potential to highlight the church's vital role in addressing the hard work and responsibility as a way of economic prosperity as a significant need of the community. By examining how the church's actions align with the teachings of Christ such the parable of talent, fishing for paying tax, the study offers valuable insights into the effectiveness and the scope of the church's outreach efforts. The findings could not only affirm the church's impact but also provides guidance for enhancing its initiatives, ensuring that its mission to help people to work hard and take their responsible properly, both fulfilled and expanded in meaningful ways. This study could serve as a model for true believers and community in the Diocese of western Tanganyika or other organizations seeking to deepen their Biblical teachings on hard work and responsibility in 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

### **1.10.6 Theoretical framework**

For the topic "Hard work and responsibility in 2 Thessalonians 3:10" provides a structured approach to understand the church's role in social development from both academic and practical perspectives. This framework is built on two key dimensions; the theological basis for social action and relevant social development theories.

Theologically, the framework draws from Biblical teachings, particularly those found in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, where He emphasizes the importance of hard work and responsibility y its contribution on social development as central to Christian life. This scriptural foundation establishes the Church's responsibility to engage in social development as an expression of its faith. The church's Biblical teachings on developments that address well- being, against poverty, health care and social

justice, is viewed as a tangible demonstration of living out of the gospel message. This theological perspective underscores the idea that social development is not just an optional activity for the church but an essential part of its mission.

Theoretically, the framework integrates concepts from hard work and responsibility theory, which emphasizes the importance of community empowerment, sustainability, and the reduction of inequality. The church is seen as a key holder in the development process, capable of leveraging its resources, influence and moral authority to effective positive change. By applying theories of social capital, capacity building, and participatory development, the framework provides tools for assessing the effectiveness of the Church's hard work and responsibility. It helps in evaluating how well these address the root causes of social issues, foster community engagement, and contribute to long-term development outcomes.

This combined theological and theoretical framework guides the assessment by providing a lens through which the Church's hard work and responsibility efforts can be critically analyzed, ensuring that they align with both spiritual values and effective responsibility practices.

### **1.10.7 Data analysis**

In the process of data analysis qualitative method used, in order to get balance discovered information. Therefore qualitative data from scholars subjecting to content analysis. On data presentation, I will analyze data and present them by writing, and text to the meaningful explanations and discussion of the findings.

### **1.10.8 Conclusion**

Through the structure of the chapter one the study was enabled to follow the procedures to make the study meaningful and useful to the diocese of Western Tanganyika on relation to the topic

## CHAPTER TWO

### ANALYSIS OF 2 THESSALONIANS 3:10 ON HARD WORK AND RESPONSIBILITY

#### 2.0 Introduction

Apostle Paul's call in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "*If anyone is not willing to work, neither should he eat*" (KJV), has had played a crucial role in shaping Christian ethics regarding work and responsibility. The verse reflects Paul's response to the issue of idleness within the Thessalonian community, emphasizing the necessity of diligence, self-sufficiency, and communal order.

The literature review seeks to explore the socio-historical context, exegetical meaning, theological themes, and ethical dimensions of Paul's instruction. By engaging with scholarly interpretations and theological discussions, this chapter provides a deeper understanding of how 2 Thessalonians 3:10 has been applied throughout history and its relevance for contemporary Christian work ethics.

#### 2.1 The socio historical context of 2 Thessalonians

The city of Thessalonica, was a significant economic and political hub in the Roman Empire, had a diverse population that engaged in various forms of trade, craftsmanship, and social interactions. The early Christian community in the city faced challenges related to economic survival, social expectations, and eschatological concerns.

Scholars suggested that "some Thessalonian believers misunderstood the return of Christ (Parousia) and abandoned their jobs, relying on communal support"<sup>16</sup>. Unlike modern societies with social welfare programs, "ancient societies depended on

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<sup>16</sup>Green, G, L, (2002). *The letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 215

mutual aid networks, where those in needs relied on the generosity of wealthier patrons or the church”<sup>17</sup> Paul’s admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 was not merely about promoting a strong work ethic but aimed at protection the sustainability and integrity of the Christian public. Furthermore, Roman culture held distinct views on labor. Guide labor was often associated with the lower class and slaves, whereas elite citizens were expected to engage in intellectual and political games. Paul’s command challenged these social norms by affirming the dignity of all forms of labor as part of Christian responsibility.

## **2.2 Paul’s Purpose in Writing 2 Thessalonians**

### **2.2.1 Clarifying theological misunderstandings about Christ’s return (2 Thess. 2:1-12).**

Paul wrote 2 Thessalonians to address three main concerns: clarifying theological misunderstandings about Christ’s return (2 Thess. 2:1-12), encouraging perseverance amid persecution (2 Thess. 1:4-10), and correcting issues of idleness and disorderly behavior (2 Thess. 3:6-15). A major issue in the Thessalonian church was “the belief that Christ’s return was imminent, leading some believers to abandon their work and depend on communal support”<sup>18</sup>. The misunderstanding resulted in economic strain and moral disorder, prompting Paul to issue a firm command against idleness. He presents himself as an example of hard work and self-sufficiency, reminding the church that even as an apostle; he labored to provide for his needs (2 Thess. 3:7-9).

Paul also instructs the Thessalonians to withdraw from those who refuse to work; emphasizing that diligence is not only a personal virtue but a fundamental Christian duty (2 Thess. 3:6). His exhortation highlights the balance between personal responsibility and communal care, ensuring that “while the church supports the

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<sup>17</sup>Witherington, B, (2006) *1 & 2 Thessalonians: A socio rhetorical commentary*. Eerdmans, page 250

<sup>18</sup>Fee, G, D, (2009). *The first and second letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 279

needy, it does not enable laziness”<sup>19</sup>. Through these teachings, Paul reinforces the importance of maintaining order, discipline, and a productive work ethic within the Christian community.

### 2.2.2 Encouraging perseverance amid persecution (2 Thessalonians 1:4-10)

In 2 Thessalonians 1:4-10, Paul encourages the Thessalonians believers to remain steadfast in their faith despite severe persecution. He commends their endurance, stating, “*We ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure*” (2 Thess. 1:4, KJV). The Thessalonians Christians “faced opposition from both Jewish and Roman authorities, making their commitment to Christ costly”<sup>20</sup>. Paul reassured them that their suffering is evidence of God’s righteous judgment, as it refines their faith and prepares them for His kingdom (2 Thess. 1:5). He further comforts them with the promise that God will bring justice, repaying their oppressors with affliction while granting relief to the faithful when Christ returns in glory (2 Thess. 1:6-7). The study highlights two theological themes: the certainty of divine retribution and the hope of eternal reward. Paul warns that those who reject the gospel will suffer “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (2 Thess. 1:9), “reinforcing the seriousness of rejecting Christ’s salvation”<sup>21</sup>. At the same time, “he assured believers that their perseverance will result in glorification with Christ, urging them to remain faithful despite present hardships”<sup>22</sup>. This teaching serves as a powerful encouragement for Christians facing persecution, reminding them that faithfulness in suffering will be rewarded by God’s justice and eternal presence.

### 2.2.3 Correcting issues of idleness and disorderly behavior (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)

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<sup>19</sup>Beale, G, K, (2003). *1&2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament Commentary series*. IVP academic page 19

<sup>20</sup>Green, L, (2002). *The letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 178

<sup>21</sup>Beale, G, K, (2003). *1&2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament commentary series*, IVP academic, page 134

<sup>22</sup>Fee, D, G, (2009). *The first and second letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 256

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, Paul directly addressed the problem of idleness and disorderly behavior within the Thessalonians church, issuing a strong command for believers to separate themselves from those who refuse to work. He warns, *“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us”* (2 Thess. 3:6, KJV). The term “disorderly”(KJV) (ἀτάκτως, ataktōs- Greek) refers to individuals who lived irresponsibly, avoiding work while relying on the generosity of others. The issue likely arose from “misunderstandings about Christ’s return, leading some believers to abandon labor under the assumption that the end was imminent”<sup>23</sup>. Paul sets himself as an example, reminding the Thessalonians that he worked hard to support himself, even though he had the right to receive financial aid as an apostle (2 Thess. 3:7-9). He then lays down a firm principle: *“If any would not work, neither should he eat”* (2 Thess. 3:10), reinforcing the idea that Christian responsibility includes productive labor. Paul also warns that some idle individuals had become “busybodies” (2 Thess. 3:11), meddling in the affairs of others instead of engaging in honest work. He exhorts them to live quiet, disciplined lives and to provide for themselves (2 Thess. 3:12). For those who persist in idleness, Paul instructs the church to practice a form of social correction, distancing themselves from such individuals to make them ashamed, though without treating them as enemies (2 Thess. 3:14-15). The theological implications of this passage emphasize the dignity of work, the necessity of self-sufficiency, and the importance of preserving order in the Christian public (Beale, 2003, p. 197). Ethically, Paul’s instruction seeks to balance Christian charity with personal responsibility, ensuring that support is extended to those in genuine need while discouraging exploitation of communal generosity (Fee, 2009, p. 283). This remains relevant today, serving as a biblical foundation for discussions on work ethics, social responsibility, and church discipline.

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<sup>23</sup>Witherington, B, (2006). *1&2 Thessalonians: A socio rhetorical commentary*. Eerdmans, page 250

## 2.3 Exegetical analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10

A proper interpretation of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 requires an analysis of the Greek terminology and grammatical structure used in this passage. Paul's command, "*If any would not work, neither should he eat,*" is structured in a way that establishes a direct relationship between work and provision, emphasizing personal responsibility within the Christian community.

"The Greek word ἔργον (ergon) means "work,"<sup>24</sup> referring to physical labor, employment, or productive effort"<sup>25</sup>. This term appeared frequently in Paul's letters, often in the context of diligence, ethical labor, and fulfilling one's vocation (Ephesians 4:28; 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).

The verb ἐσθιέτω (esthietō) translates to "let him eat" (ESV), which, in Greek, is in the imperative mood, making it a command rather than a suggestion. Paul asserts that access to food should be linked to one's willingness to contribute through work, reinforcing a biblical principle of fair labor and sustenance.

The phrase "εἴτις οὐ θέλει ἐργάζεσθαι (ei tis ou thelei ergazesthai)"<sup>26</sup> is particularly significant. The word θέλει (thelei) means "willing," indicating that "Paul is addressing those who are unwilling to work, not those who are unable to work due to legitimate reasons such as illness, disability, or oppression"<sup>27</sup>. The verb ἐργάζεσθαι (ergazesthai), meaning "to engage in work,"<sup>28</sup> is in the present tense, suggesting unceasing and customary labor rather than a former effort

Paul's language was both practical and disciplinary, establishing a clear ethical expectation within the Christian community. He didn't condemn charity or communal support, but rather emphasized that those who are capable of working must not take

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<sup>24</sup>Greek lexicon, online search April, 1<sup>st</sup>, 2025

<sup>25</sup>Beale, G, K, (2003). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament commentary series*, IVP academic, page 198

<sup>26</sup> Greek Lexicon, online search April 1<sup>st</sup> 2025

<sup>27</sup>Witherington, B, (2006). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: A socio rhetorical commentary*. Eerdmans, page 251

<sup>28</sup>Beale, G, K, (2003). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament Commentary series*. IVP Academic, page 198

advantage of the generosity of others. The teaching aligns with his broader Pauline work ethic, which promotes self-sufficiency, contribution to the common good, and avoiding dependency (1Thessalonians 4:11-12; Ephesians 4:28). “Ethically, this provides a balanced view on Christian responsibility, ensuring that aid is given to those in genuine need while discouraging laziness and exploitation of communal resources”<sup>29</sup>.

### 2.3.1 Paul’s teaching on work and responsibility in his other letters

Paul’s instruction in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 aligns with his broader theology of work and responsibility, which he reinforces in other epistles. Throughout his writings, Paul emphasizes the necessity of hard work, self-sufficiency, and ethical labor while maintaining a commitment to charity and communal care.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, Paul instructs believers to “work with your own hands... so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (KJV). Here, he highlights two key principles: dignity in labor and Christian witness. Working diligently ensures that “believers do not become a burden to others, and it also strengthens their testimony before non-Christians, reflecting the values of integrity and responsibility”<sup>30</sup>.

In Ephesians 4:28, Paul states, “Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work... so that he may have something to share with anyone in need” (KJV). The verse emphasizes ethical labor as both a means of self-sufficiency and a way to support the less fortunate. Paul is not merely advocating for work as an obligation but “as a way to contribute to the well-being of others”<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup>Fee, G, D, (2009). *The first and second letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 285

<sup>30</sup>Witherington, M, (2006). *1 and 2 Thessalonians: A socio rhetorical commentary*. Eerdmans, page 254

<sup>31</sup>Beale, G, K, (2003). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament commentary series*. IVP Academic, page 199

Thus, Paul does not oppose charity, but “he insists on fairness and accountability within the Christian community”<sup>32</sup> While believers are called to help those in genuine need, they must also ensure that resources are not exploited by those who are unwilling to contribute. His teachings present a balanced view of work and generosity, reinforcing that responsibility and compassion must go hand in hand.

## 2.4 Theological themes in 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul’s instruction in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 convey several key theological themes that emphasize the role of work in Christian life. One of the most significant themes is:-

### 2.4.1 Work as a Christian duty.

Paul presents labor as a divine responsibility, aligning with Genesis 2:15, where God commands Adam to cultivate and care for the Garden of Eden. This indicates that work was part of God’s original design for humanity, not a result of the Fall, and serves as a means through which humans fulfill their God-given purpose. In Paul’s theology, work is more than just an economic necessity; “it is an act of faithfulness and obedience to God”<sup>33</sup>. By working diligently, Christians demonstrate their commitment to God’s order, their willingness to avoid idleness, and their desire to contribute to the well-being of the community. Additionally, hard work strengthens Christian testimony, as Paul encourages believers to be independent and honorable in their labor (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12). Therefore, Paul’s teaching in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 affirms that work is not only a means of provision but also an integral part of the Christian calling, reflecting God’s creative nature and His expectation of human stewardship.

### 2.4.2 Discipline and accountability

Another major theological theme in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is discipline and accountability, particularly within the Christian community. Paul emphasizes that the

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<sup>32</sup>Nwanguma, M, (2020). *The theology of work in Pauline epistles*. University press, page 132

<sup>33</sup>Beale, G, K, (2003). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament commentary series*. IVP Academic, page 197

church has a responsibility to correct disorderly members who refuse to work (2 Thessalonians 3:6). “He commands believers to “withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly” (KJV), indicating that idleness is not merely a personal failing but a communal concern. In this context, disorderly (ἀτάκτως, ataktōs) refers to those who disrupt the peace and stability of the church by neglecting their responsibilities and depending on others for sustenance”<sup>34</sup>. By addressing idleness, Paul reinforces that “hard work is essential for spiritual maturity, as it instills discipline, perseverance, and self-reliance”<sup>35</sup>. Moreover, a disciplined Christian community requires each member to contribute meaningfully, ensuring that resources are fairly distributed and not misused by those who are unwilling to labor. Paul’s directive serves as a corrective measure, ensuring that believers do not take advantage of Christian generosity while also maintaining compassion for those genuinely in need. The principle remains relevant today, as it highlights the importance of balancing grace with accountability, encouraging both personal diligence and communal responsibility in the life of the church.

#### 2.4.3 Balance between self-reliance and community support

A key theological theme in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is the balance between self-reliance and community support. Paul upholds the importance of charity for the truly needy, recognizing that the Christian community is called to care for the weak, the poor, and those unable to work (Galatians 6:2; Acts 2:44-45). However, he simultaneously warns against the exploitation of generosity, ensuring that those who are capable of working do not take advantage of communal resources. By stating, “*If any would not work, neither should he eat*” (2 Thess. 3:10), Paul distinguishes between genuine need and willful laziness. This principle encourages believers to cultivate self-reliance, understanding that “labor is not just about personal gain but about contributing to the common good”<sup>36</sup>. At the same time, Paul does not promote uniqueness at the expense of compassion; rather, he advocates for both personal responsibility and

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<sup>34</sup>Fee, G, D, (2009). The first and second letters to the Thessalonians. Eerdmans, page 283

<sup>35</sup>Marshall, I, H, (1983). *1 & 2 Thessalonians (New century Bible commentary)*. Grand Rapids, page 209

<sup>36</sup>Green, G, L (2002). *The letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 221

communal accountability. The Christian community should be a place where resources are shared wisely, generosity is extended to the truly needy, and accountability is upheld to prevent misuse. This balanced approach remains vital today, as it informs discussions on social welfare, economic justice, and Christian stewardship, ensuring that compassion and responsibility coexist within the church.

## 2.5 Ethical scopes of 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul's instruction in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 present several important ethical dimensions, particularly regarding the relationship between individual responsibility and communal justice. First, Paul emphasizes the need to prevent exploitation, rebuking those who take advantage of Christian generosity without contributing to the community's well-being. His instruction, "*If any would not work, neither should he eat*"(KJV), serves as a safeguard against individuals who refuse to labor despite being able to do so. Second, Paul promotes fairness in the distribution of resources, ensuring that "work serves as a means of equitable provision. In a communal Christian setting, each member is expected to contribute, fostering a system where needs are met without encouraging dependence or laziness"<sup>37</sup>. Lastly, Paul's teaching distinguishes between genuine need and conscious neglect. His command does not target those who are unable to work due to illness, disability, or external circumstances but rather those who choose idleness over responsibility. This ethical balance underscores both justice and mercy, as it maintains Christian charity while upholding accountability. In modern contexts, Paul's principle continues to shape discussions on social welfare, work ethics, and responsible generosity, calling Christians to practice compassion without enabling carelessness.

## 2.6 Theological perspectives on work and responsibility

Throughout church history, theologians have emphasized the importance of work as both a spiritual calling and a social responsibility. Martin Luther defined work as "vocation, teaching that all labor, whether manual, intellectual, or clerical, has

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<sup>37</sup>Fee, G, D, (2009). *The first and second letter to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 283

spiritual significance”<sup>38</sup>. He rejected the medieval notion that only religious work was sacred, instead arguing that every believer serves God through their daily labor, whether as a farmer, craftsman, or ruler. “John Calvin expanded on this idea, teaching that work is a means of glorifying God and promoting social stability”<sup>39</sup>. His theology emphasized diligence, responsibility, and ethical labor, which later influenced Protestant work ethics, shaping attitudes toward industry and economic development. In modern times, “scholars apply Paul’s teaching on work and responsibility to contemporary issues such as unemployment, economic justice, and social welfare”<sup>40</sup>. The challenge today is to balance Paul’s principle of self-reliance with the need for compassionate policies that support the disadvantaged. Paul’s directive in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 continues to inform Christian discussions on work ethics, poverty alleviation, and the moral responsibility of individuals and societies, demonstrating the enduring relevance of biblical principles in shaping modern views on labor and responsibility.

## 2.7 Conclusion

The theological and ethical implications of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 emphasize the vital role of work as a divine responsibility and an expression of faith. Paul’s instruction affirms that labor is not merely an economic necessity but a spiritual duty that reflects obedience to God and commitment to communal well-being. Additionally, this passage presents ethical challenges in balancing generosity and accountability, as it encourages Christians to practice charity while discouraging the exploitation of communal resources. While the Christian community is called to care for those in genuine need, it must also promote independence and fairness, ensuring that aid is provided responsibly. Finally, Paul’s concern for communal order and moral discipline is evident in his directive to withdraw from the idle, reinforcing the importance of structure, diligence, and correction within the church. His teachings continue to shape Christian work ethics, social justice discussions, and the church’s approach to

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<sup>38</sup>Witherington, B, (2006). 1 & 2 Thessalonians: A Socio Rhetorical Commentary. Eerdmans, page 252

<sup>39</sup>Beale, G, K, (2003) *1& 2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament Commentary Series*. IVP Academic, page 199

<sup>40</sup>Nwanguma, M, (2020). *The theology of work in Pauline epistles*. University press, page 141

economic responsibility, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of biblical principles in both personal and societal contexts.

## CHAPTER THREE

### AN EXPLORATION OF THE INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF HARD WORK, RESPONSIBILITY, AND COMMUNITY LIFE IN THE EARLY CHURCH

#### 3.0 Introduction

The intertwining of hard work, responsibility, and community life in the early church is a recurring theme in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, where Paul says, “If any would not work, neither should he eat” (KJV). This instruction stresses Paul's stress on self-support, moral toil, and public order. Early Church was a network of mutual support, and work was not only a personal endeavor but also an ethical one to the well-being of the community. The function of hard work and responsibility in early Church community life is stated in this chapter in biblical teaching, socio-economic context, and theological significance.

#### 3.1 The topic of work and responsibility among the early church

Diligence and hard work were at the heart of early Christian doctrine, drawn from both Jewish theology and Greco-Roman social custom. Work in Jewish society was seen as a type of worship, and passages such as Proverbs 10:4 “Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth”(ESV), were used to set diligence as a value. Diligence was being obedient to God and a means of maintaining social cohesion. Similarly, the Greco-Roman culture had viewed idleness as shameful, especially for those common laborers who were intended to contribute their value to society's economic and social well-being. Christianity, however, raised a different kind of attitude toward work by upgrading it from the mere economic necessity to a religious practice and a social obligation. Paul, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, exhorts believers to “work with their own hands,”(ESV) emphasizing the virtues of self-support, personal accountability, and proper Christian witness. His emphasis on work was not only for their individual survival but for the name of the Christian community among outsiders as well. “Early church practiced work as a means of serving God,

providing for one's needs, and meeting other people's needs, in order to provide for those in genuine need while shunning idleness and dependency on the charity of society"<sup>41</sup> Work ethic remains a key consideration in Christian ethics, shaping theological reflection on economic justice, personal responsibility, and social welfare in the church and society in general.

## **3.2 Paul's vision of responsible Christian community**

Paul's instruction on work and responsibility was to protect the integrity and stability of the Christian community. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, he warns against disorderliness, and in particular writes to those who were idle and disobedient, living by the charity of the community and not working. Paul is upholding the virtue of mutual responsibility, "where every believer has to do his or her share while ensuring that assistance is only extended to the genuine needy"<sup>42</sup>. His admonition holds good to three such vital virtues of early Christian life as follows:

### **3.2.1 Personal responsibility**

Paul urges believers to become self-supporting through work, rather than unnecessarily burdening others. His teaching in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (ESV), upholds the principle that those who are able to work should support their own living. This is similar to 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your daily hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody"(NIV). Paul clearly orders believers to work with their own hands so that they may live quietly and owe not anything to anyone. Paul's invitation to take responsibility for oneself is not merely a pragmatic need, but also religious practice, since work is a demonstration of obedience and loyalty towards God.

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<sup>41</sup>Witherington, B, (2006). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: A socio - rhetorical commentary*. Eerdmans, page 114

<sup>42</sup>Fee, G, D,(2009).*The first and second letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 285

### **3.2.2 Communal ethics; the church as a shared economy**

Not only was labor during the early Christian church an individual responsibility but also a communal one, where everybody shared resources in a common base. The church was a common economy where laborers labored for themselves and the sake of others. This was seen in the Jerusalem church, where the brethren shared resources to provide for the less fortunate brethren and sisters (Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:32-35). But the admonition of Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 suggests that some had abusing this generosity without paying back anything to the community's good. Not to be exploitative and unsustainable, Paul prescribes that benefits in the form of communal charity alone should be gained if one is ready to work. His approach strikes a balance between Christian beneficence and personal accountability so that "beneficence will not be abused in helping the genuinely needy"<sup>43</sup>. This provision based on work encouraged respect, dignity, and harmony within the church and established Christian ethics to be reliant on responsibility as well as compassion. The principle of one economy is still dominant in the present time in terms of church welfare schemes, economic justice, and social responsibility due to its focus on maintaining equal labor policies and community support systems in Christianity.

### **3.2.3 Spiritual discipline on work as an act of worship and faith**

To Paul's vision of a responsible Christian community, work was not being but spiritual exercise, proof of obedience to God's plan. Work as tied in the Bible to worship and faithfulness, e.g., Genesis 2:15, when God tells Adam to "dress and keep" the Garden and work is part of human purpose before the Fall. Paul upholds this belief by not liking work as a witness to evidence of faith, whereby the believers work diligently and honestly as a way of glorifying God (Colossians 3:23). In 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12, he scolds idle members and invites them to work quietly and eat their own food, "emphasizing that work breeds spiritual self-discipline, humility, and contentment"<sup>44</sup>. To Paul, idleness was not just economic failure but a spiritual

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<sup>43</sup>Green, G, L, (2002). *The letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 221

<sup>44</sup>Marshall, I, H, (1983). *1 & 2 Thessalonians (New Century Bible Commentary)*. Grand rapids Eerdmans, page 209

sickness, leading to idleness, gossiping, and indecent living (2 Thess. 3:11). Diligence, then, was a real expression of faith, expressing devotion to God's sovereignty, moral accountability, and fellowship peace. Thus the view remains today, reminding Christians that they are not laboring for money but as a sacred obligation, a means of gratifying God, benefiting mankind, and gaining personal self-discipline and spiritual maturity.

### **3.3 Work, charity, and social responsibility in the Early church**

The early Christian church worked on a principle of mutual support so that the genuinely poor were helped but idleness and dependency were actively discouraged. Paul's emphasis on work and responsibility was as much an issue of individual morality as it was of ensuring Christian charity to be sustainable. In Acts 2:44-45, the Jerusalem church, shared financially by selling possessions and distributing to the poor, and were exercising a spirit of generosity and concern for the community. However, Paul's warning in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, "If any would not work, neither should he eat," (KJV) suggests his intent that such sharing is not to be abused by those unwilling to contribute. "His pedagogy is a balanced form of Christian social responsibility: while the church has a duty to serve the poor, it must also exercise responsibility, so that its resources are utilized ethically and in a just way"<sup>45</sup>. This saying still holds true today, for Christian churches and organizations still struggle with the issue of economic justice, social welfare, and genuine charity, struggling to find the line between compassion and personal responsibility within outreach and aid programs.

### **3.4 Idleness and its consequences in the Christian community**

Paul sternly rebukes idleness in 2 Thessalonians 3:11, where he indicates that some of the brethren had turned into "busybodies" (NIV) ("περιεργαζομένους, periergazomenous"<sup>46</sup>) causing trouble with their idle work instead of working.

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<sup>45</sup>Green, G, L, (2002). *The letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 221

<sup>46</sup>*Greek lexicon*, online search, 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2025

Busybodies are people who spend time with other people's affairs instead of working on theirs. This idleness had catastrophic consequences on the community of believers, leading to economic, social, as well as spiritual unrest.

### **3.4.1 Burden on church resources**

Non-contributing members place an unfair burden on communal assistance, robbing the genuinely poor of resources. In a church that was a shared economy (Acts 2:44-45), such behavior undermined the sustainability of charity work. Paul's command in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 was a "corrective action so that charity was not exploited and church resources were shared fairly"<sup>47</sup>

### **3.4.2 Social harmony disturbed**

Laziness that caused gossip, fragmentation, and chaos apart from burdening community resources, idleness also ravaged social harmony in the early Christian community. Paul's criticism in 2 Thessalonians 3:11 against some of the members who had turned into busybodies (περιεργαζομένου, periergazomenous), bothering other individuals regarding matters that did not concern them rather than seeking productive work. Such a practice led to gossip, worthless strife, and schism within the church, contrary to unity and peace. Rather than generating value in to society, "the unemployed were a source of trouble, leading others astray from responsibility and casting a slur on the testimony of the church"<sup>48</sup>. Paul's solution was to instruct such individuals to "work with quietness and eat their own bread" (2 Thess. 3:12), where work provides discipline, humility, and social order. By maintaining a sense of responsibility and work ethic, Paul did not wish to cause disruptions that would destroy the purpose and credibility of the church in society at large.

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<sup>47</sup> Fee, G, D, (2009). *The first and second letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 287

<sup>48</sup> Beale, G, K, (2003). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament commentary series*. IVP academic, page 200

### **3.4.3 Hindrance to Christian witness**

External dependence took away from the credibility of the church in the outside world; Paul feared that complacency among the members of the Christian community would not only lead to internal disruption, but also destroy their reputation in the eyes of outsiders who were not Christians. In 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, he orders believers to “work with your own hands. So, that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (NIV). This was a strong implication of the virtue of self-sufficiency as a means of maintaining Christian integrity and credibility. Inasmuch as Christians became lazy and depended on communal welfare for failing to work, they risked solidifying adverse Christian stereotypes of shiftlessness or attempting to exploit goodwill. Paul’s exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 is both an evangelistic and moral axiom in the fact that Christians need to be sound citizens in consonance with the church’s witness. By emulating diligence, responsibility, and integrity, Christians could positively influence their immediate world and demonstrate the redemptive potential of their faith. This remains a significant issue today, as churches strive to maintain a good witness through righteous labor practice, social responsibility, and community involvement.

## **3.5 Theological and ethical implications of work in the Early Church**

Paul’s emphasis on work and responsibility in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is not just Biblically but also morally significant, establishing the first Christian theology of work, stewardship, and community living. His command is a Biblical work ethic that resonates with God’s initial design for human beings, affirming that work is not just economic necessity but spiritual discipline, moral obligation, and public service.

### **3.5.1 Work as a Christian duty**

Paul depicts work as a divine ordinance, reestablishing the biblical doctrine that God ordained work. In Genesis 2:15, God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to “dress it and to keep it,” (NIV) establishing work as a central part of human life before the Fall. This is opposite to the notion that work is a product of sin, but a divine calling that

reflects God's creative nature. Paul reaffirms this in Colossians 3:23, urging believers to “work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men,” (ESV) since diligence is obedience and worship. By working responsibly and hard, “Christians not only provide for themselves but also render their societies affluent and bear witness to God’s economy”<sup>49</sup>. Paul’s command holds that work is not just individual gain but doing what one is called by God to do, doing it to His satisfaction and for the benefit of others.

### 3.5.2 Church accountability

Christians ought to discipline and correct those who do not work and become burdens on the community. Paul’s doctrine in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 has a direct connection with the matter of church accountability since it emphasizes that work is not something private but communal. In 2 Thessalonians 3:6, Paul commands brethren to “withdraw yourselves from every brother that walked disorderly and not after the tradition which he received of us” (KJV). The adverb disorderly (ἀτάκτως, ataktōs - Greek) used to describe those who did not work and sustained themselves by living off fellowship without laboring. Paul’s teaching has the church react in disciplining and correcting sloth, “so its members can experience personal responsibility as well as benefit for the public”<sup>50</sup>. Church accountability was needed in order to prevent dependence, social anarchy, and abuse of Christian benevolence. Paul instructs the Thessalonians Christians to “mark them which cause divisions and are contrary to the doctrine of Christ” and “do not have fellowship with him, that he may be ashamed” (2 Thess. 3:14), exercising the church’s obligation to remove idleness by spiritual and social discipline. Paul cautions against excessive harshness as well, urging believers “not to regard him as an enemy, but to admonish him as a brother” (2 Thess. 3:15).

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<sup>49</sup> Beale, G, K, (2003). *1&2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament commentary series*. IVP academic, page 201

<sup>50</sup> Fee, G, D, (2009). *The first and second letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 289

This balance of “correction and restoration ensured correction to be performed by and for love with a vision towards spiritual growth and not exclusion”<sup>51</sup>.

Paul’s accountability model for work and community life remains relevant to church life today. Most Christian communities today still struggle with the same tensions between responsibility and generosity in aspects such as church welfare schemes, financial assistance, and community service. His teaching presses churches to help the genuinely needy, and yet also to foster self-support, so that Christian charity does not promote dependency or irresponsibility. Through biblical discipline and accountability in the church, churches are able to provide an environment in which diligence, integrity, and responsibility to the community are not ideals, but core values.

### **3.5.3 Social justice and charity:**

Paul’s teaching a call for both generosity and responsibility Paul, in a similar manner, teaches in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 to expand a general biblical principle that charity must be wedded with justice and responsibility so that help is given ethically and not exploited. He was very committed to social justice, as seen in Acts 2:44-45 where Christians shared their property with the intention of catering for the needy. However, Paul was also worried that Christian charity would be exploited by people who would not labor. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, he establishes a guideline that “only those who would work were to benefit from community resources, affirming the requirement of both responsibility and compassion in Christian charity”<sup>52</sup>.

Paul’s approach to social justice aligns with Old Testament social justice principles regarding work and provision, such as Proverbs 14:23, which states, “In all labor there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury” (KJV). The Bible consistently enforces aid to the poor, but not idleness and expectation (Proverbs 6:6-11). In Ephesians 4:28, then, Paul commands believers to labor honestly so that they will have something with which to share with those who are in need, noting that work is

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<sup>51</sup> Marshall, I, H, (1983). *1 and 2 Thessalonians (New century Bible commentary)*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, page 213

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. page 209

not merely for self-sustainment but also to help others. That balance ensures that Christian generosity helps persons who are genuinely in need and dissuades dependency.

In today's social justice, welfare, and economic ethics discourse, Paul's teaching remains as relevant as ever. Churches, Christian agencies, and politicians must consider how they can do their part responsibly so that charity empowers individuals rather than creating dependency on other people's handouts. His teaching calls out believers to give generously but with discernment, using resources to help the poor while encouraging self-sufficiency, responsibility, and moral labor.

### **3.6 Early church lessons for modern Christian communities**

The early church's ethics of work and responsibility have lessons for modern Christian communities, particularly in charity, social justice, and economic ethics. Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 provides a foundation on which generosity is exercised responsibly without opening room for exploitation of resources but assisting those who are truly needy. His emphasis on work, responsibility, and moral stewardship remains relevant to modern churches trying to reconcile compassion and accountability in their social ministries and programs.

#### **3.6.1 Balancing generosity and self-sufficiency**

Paul's teaching demands that churches encourage responsibility at the individual level without sacrificing compassion for the poor. Modern Christian communities must assist strugglers without creating dependency or entitlement. This is a fundamental principle to be applied particularly in church relief ministries, food banks, and welfare programs, where empowering individuals towards independence rather than creating perpetual dependency should be the objective. Paul's approach teaches that charity should restore and enable so that aid can be provided ethically, equitably, and sustainably.

### **3.6.2 Encouraging work as worship; and hard work as a proof of faith**

One of the most significant lessons to be gleaned from the early church today is that work does not only have to do with economic survival but worship. Paul's statement here reminds us that work is a response to God, as when in Colossians 3:23 he exhorts believers, "Whatsoever ye do, do your work heartily, as unto the Lord and not unto men" (KJV). This mindset turns work from a mere survival mechanism into a means of ministry to God and a demonstration of His character.

Adam was commanded by God to work in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2:15, showing that work was a component of human calling before the Fall. Paul reminds us of this rule in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 by saying that "hard work is a necessary aspect of Christian discipleship and spiritual discipline"<sup>53</sup>. When work is performed in faithfulness and honesty, it is an act of worship and service to God, whether performed in ministry or business or in daily activities.

For the Christian society today, this principle challenges believers to see their work, trade, and daily labor as pleasing to God, and not solely for economic reasons. Churches can solidify this mindset through vocational calling, marketplace ministry, and instruction in ethical labor practice so that Christians can carry faith to work. The concept of work as worship inspires application, thankfulness, and Christ-centered productivity, and it eventually gives rise to personal faith and Christian testimony in the larger society.

### **3.6.3 Bringing order within the Christian community; encouraging accountability and judicious stewardship**

Another important lesson of early church to today's Christian churches that accountability and wise stewardship are necessary. Paul's plea in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 that church leaders have the obligation of maintaining order by ensuring productive and moral utilization of resources. He commands the believers to "have no

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<sup>53</sup> Beale, G, K, (2003). *1 & 2 Thessalonians: The IVP New Testament commentary series*. IVPacademic, page 201

fellowship with any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us” (2 Thess. 3:6, (ESV)), who do no work and live on other people’s charity. The rule emphasizes that Christian generosity must not be abused, and “the church leadership must establish some guidelines for giving in order to avoid its misuse”<sup>54</sup> Accountability in the Christian perspective entails the correction of behavior in chaos as well as the restoration of the individuals with grace. Paul does in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 instruct believers to have people take heed of those who ignore his writings and “have no company with him, that he may be ashamed,” but also instructs them to “admonish him as a brother” and not as an enemy. It is this balance between restoration and correction that lies at the center of successful modern church leadership, “wherein correction is made in love and with an eye toward spiritual growth”<sup>55</sup>

For the churches today, responsible utilization of material and financial resources is imperative. This principle guides church welfare activities, ministries, and outreaches in society in a way that assistance is delivered to those who are truly needy without eroding self-determination and work ethics. Church leaders have to preach accountable Biblical teachings, responsibility, and ethical work and nurture a body that adopts generosity as well as responsible management of resources

### 3.7 Conclusion

The examination of work, responsibility, and cohabitation in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 highlights that work was a distinguishing feature of early Christian self-understanding, which shaped personal behavior and communal ethics. Paul’s command was not merely economic survival but also spiritual formation, ethical labor, and the well-being of the Christian community. The early church interpreted self-sufficiency and communal support in balance with a view to being able to offer charity to those who were truly in need without allowing exploitability of goodness by the stubborn. Paul’s insistence on discipline and order in the church remains an underlying basic

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<sup>54</sup>Fee, G, D, (2009). *The first and second letters to the Thessalonians*. Eerdmans, page 289

<sup>55</sup>Marshall, I, H,(1983). *1 and 2Thessalonians (New century Bible commentary)*. Grand Rapids Eerdmans, page 213

assumption of modern Christian approaches to work ethics, economic justice, and social responsibility. His teachings encourage hard work as a faith issue, church accountability, and responsible stewardship of resources, all of which are vital to building strong Christian communities. These values continue to have significant things to say to churches, workplaces, and social policy more broadly, promoting a culture of diligence, generosity, and integrity in all areas of life. By the use of Paul's teaching today, the church can address contemporary issues of work, social care, and moral obligation in a manner in which Christian communities reflect God's design for work, stewardship, and care for each other.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE APPLICATION OF 2THESSALONIANS 3:10 TO CONTEMPORARY LIFE AND ITS RELEVANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE DIOCESE OF WESTERN TANGANYIKA

### 4.1 Introduction

The 2 Thessalonians 3:10 statement, “If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat” (ESV) this gives a theological platform that has a grip on matters of work ethics, responsibility, and social welfare. Though the foregoing has mentioned its socio-theological application, the current section examines how the passage may be applied in practice to three interdependent domains of Christian life in Western Tanganyika diocese. Across all the arenas, Paul’s admonition involves balancing harsh diligence and gentle compassion, founding Christian self on personal stewardship and social obligation.

### 4.2 Diocesan application

In the diocese of Western Tanganyika, 2 Thessalonians 3:10 informs “strategic planning, policy development, and public witness of the larger church community”<sup>56</sup>. Theological education and advocacy: Both clergy and lay leaders need to be educated by diocesan leadership regarding Biblical teachings about work, economic justice, and stewardship. The teaching might be incorporated into seminaries and training institutes as a component of courses in Christian ethics and social engagement.

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<sup>56</sup>Boston Faith & Justice Network, (2024). *Faith and public policy: Work, welfare and justice*, <https://www.bostonfaithjustice.org/> April, 13,2025

### **4.2.1 Economic justice ministries**

Campaigns can be held by the dioceses against structural injustices like, unemployment, economic exclusion, or labor exploitation, while promoting the dignity of work. Diocese, in partnership with NGOs and civil society, can campaign for just labor laws and lobby for fair employment policies in the church and in its affiliate institutions.

### **4.2.2 Church aid policy**

Diocesan welfare ministry leadership must demand theological integrity in aid programs for example, helping the genuinely poor without engendering long-term dependency. Diocesan subsidies and grants can provide for capacity development and self-funding initiatives.

### **4.2.3 NGOs and Government partnerships**

Taking lessons from Paul's instruction, the diocese can become prophetic voices in society by being a call for structures of people empowerment but still having a protection safety net for the poor and vulnerable. With such partnerships, the church will also be able to touch more lives in the rural and poor sectors.

### **4.2.4 Internal stewardship policies**

Diocesan office need to be model of stewardship by example of diocesan staff, institutions, and parishes in ensuring financial integrity, administrative care, and responsibility in the use of resources for all according to Biblical work and care principles (cf. Luke 16:10-12). In all these ways, a diocese is not only a spiritual authority but a perfect of monetary wisdom, social compassion, and Scriptural righteousness.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 reaffirms the biblical tradition that “work is not simply an economic necessity but a moral obligation.”<sup>57</sup> This has to be injected to the Christians of Western Tanganyika Diocese. Work ethic and responsibility as a spiritual debt which dependents and children owe parents to learn responsibility and to create that industriousness is worship and a display of faithfulness (Prov. 6:6-11). Doing domestic work, assisting in the family enterprise or school discipline can be framed as spiritual works.

Reciprocal support that does not entail dependency Christians must support disabled or elderly members (or members in crisis), but Paul’s instruction warns against decadent idleness. Home-based adult children at home, for instance, should be encouraged to contribute positively, possibly by working, studying, or serving. Budgeting and stewardship Christian families have to show Christian stewardship by practicing Christian stewardship through responsible handling of money, trying to take care of the family and be generous to others (cf. 1 Tim. 5:8, Eph. 4:28). Practicing instructing children to work, save, and give them an ethic of both self-responsiveness and generosity. Christian households will then require a support ethic, with grace and discipline in tension so that no one will be wanting or enabled to laziness.

2 Thessalonians 3:10 is relevant to the Christians for pastoral care and social ministry, identifying the necessity of balancing work encouragement and attending to the poor. Church-based empowerment programs, Organized by the Diocese creates or fund job-readiness training, entrepreneurship training, or vocational education. These have their origin in Paul’s exhortation to work but allow parishioners to achieve economic independence.

Pastors and lay leaders are to provide pastoral counseling affirming a theology of work, whereby people find their calling and connect their secular work to God’s plan (cf. Col. 3:23). Compassionate welfare ministries: Food banks, clothing drives, and benevolence accounts need to be supplemented by practices of accountability. Relief is needed now, but long-term aid should have avenues to productivity. Such as job

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<sup>57</sup> Giddens, A, (1971). *Capitalism and modern social theory: An analysis of the writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber*, Cambridge University Press, page 120

training and temporary housing will break cycles of dependency. As a model established by the Acts 2:44-45 model, the diocese can provide mutual aid groups where members support one another financially, emotionally, and spiritually, especially in cases of unemployment or health crises. Following and operating out of Paul's instruction: "rewarding work where possible, while preserving dignity and aid provided to the genuinely needy"<sup>58</sup>.

### 4.3 Conclusion

Applying 2 Thessalonians 3:10 to different orders of Christian society discloses an integrated ethic: "work is a divine calling, and care is a Christian responsibility."<sup>59</sup> Families, parishes, and dioceses alike share this dual obligation to foster industriousness and to exercise mercy. Paul's admonition against idleness is not an eradication of sympathy but a call for order within the community and prudent stewardship.

Clearly grasped, this passage gives us a vision of binding Christian living in economic righteousness, human dignity, and spiritual loyalty. Parenting, or shepherding their parishes, or leading as bishops, the church is called to a Biblical ethic that honors the worker, exalts the poor, and manifests the glory of God in the sweat of travail and abandon.

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<sup>58</sup> Green, J.B, (2010). *Practicing the resurrection: The church's life and mission*. Bracos press, page 98-99

<sup>59</sup> Marshall, I.H, (2008). *New Testament theology: Many witnesses, one gospel*. IVP Academic, page 162-163

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter summarizes the findings of the research on diligence and hard work in 2 Thessalonians 3:10, offers the research findings, and issues recommendations for theological reflection and practical engagement. The research has analyzed the biblical and theological meaning of Paul's instruction, its application in the early Christian communal life, and its application today in conflicts over work ethic, social welfare, and Christian stewardship.

#### 5.2 Summary of the findings

In the research, it has been determined that 2 Thessalonians 3:10 must be interpreted historically and literarily. Paul's command—"If any would not work, neither should he eat"—was aimed principally at the redefinition of idleness among a number of the Thessalonians Christians who, perhaps because of eschatological misunderstandings about the imminence of Christ's (parousia), had retired from economic life and lived on the resources of the Christian community. This situation and undermining the feasibility of the shared life also undermined the reputation of the clergy within the wider Greco-Roman world. The research maintained that Paul's instruction was in no sense a general prohibition of the support of those who were truly poor but a corrective to a trend of conduct that threatened the inner health as well as the outward reputation of the church.

An exegesis of the Greek, namely the verb ἐργάζεσθαι (ergazesthai, to work), highlighted Paul's emphasis on the moral and theological necessity of work. Work was not only established as a pragmatic need but also as a moral imperative based on apostolic example and followed by Paul himself (cf. 2 Thess. 3:7-9). The verse is a disciple's principle that links diligence with spiritual maturity and social responsibility.

Paul thereby connects work to the broader Christian ethics framework, whereby work is an exercise in being under God's order and a way of serving others' well-being.

The study also traced the broader Biblical theology of work, bridging Old and New Testament doctrine connections. In Genesis' record, work is situated in the God's plan into the world and, is within God's good creation (Genesis 2:15), human participation in God's work of creation and upkeep. The Fall polluted but did not destroy work's goodness. In Paul's writings, if anywhere, in Ephesians 4:28 and 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 perhaps more than anywhere, work is not just presented as a personal responsibility but as a means of preserving freedom and being generous towards others in need. Both passages are concerned with a calling theology where work is both a sign of faith and for the common good.

Historical theological interpretations, especially those emerging out of the Reformation, have significantly shaped Christian thinking about work. The Protestant work ethic, as developed by Martin Luther and later sociologically examined by Max Weber, laid strong emphasis on the sacredness of secular callings and the responsibility of every Christian to serve God by working conscientiously. Such an interpretation will also be in harmony with Paul's own instruction in 2 Thessalonians, giving a sense of continuity with earliest Christian instruction and subsequent Protestant theological imagination despite difference in context and use.

Finally, the research also took into account the ethics of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 in contemporary discourse of public policy, poverty, and social welfare. The research made an assumption of a nuanced reading that avoids exploitation of the text to promote idleness among the poor on one hand, and self-centered ethics that neglects shared responsibility on the other hand. It is in accordance with Bible teachings that the passage is a call to balance being responsible and being a good caregiver to the weak. The Christian body is thus challenged to create care giving systems that are reflective of God's justice and compassion and contribute positively to their lives without leaving anyone feeling abandoned.

In brief, the inferences combine into the fact that 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is a profoundly theological and shrewdly contextual summons. Read correctly, it instructs us functional things concerning Christian responsibility, the function that labor plays within the enabling of spiritual growth, and the ethical context in which it must continue to sustain true community life.

### **5.3 Conclusion**

The research presumes that Paul's exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 is not a general condemnation of helping the poor but a call to the sense of responsibility of believers. While Paul insists on hard work, his writings must address broader Biblical concerns with generosity and compassion for the poor. The research affirms that Christian living entails hard work, diligence, and responsibility but these must be exercised in the context of justice, love, and solidarity. Today, the same applies in order to promote self-reliance but in the context of advancing just social policies that benefit the common good of all, especially poor individuals.

### **5.4 Recommendations**

From the findings, the study recommends the following:

#### **5.4.1. Theological education and church teaching**

Churches and seminaries have a responsibility to offer a balanced Biblical understanding of work and responsibility, including individual effort and duty to care for those worse off than them. Incorrect interpretations of 2 Thessalonians 3:10, and possibly overly individualistic definitions of work, need to be challenged by good exegesis and theological instruction.

#### **5.4.2 Ethical and social policy considerations**

Christian politicians, social leaders, and institutions need to refer to the pages of Paul in Christian ethics as a whole when legislating about work and welfare. Rewards for

work and self-sufficiency need to be encouraged but there must also be provision made for the sick, disabled, and resource-poor.

### **5.4.3 Christian stewardship and work ethic**

Christians are encouraged to think of work not merely as personal survival but rather as stewardship and ministry to the world and to God. Churches must continue vocational discipleship, encouraging Christians to live out their faith in the marketplace and to think of their work as part of Christian witness.

### **5.4.4 Further research**

The study further argues that other work may explore where Biblical work ethics intersect with prevailing economic systems in the modern period like capitalism, socialism, and concert economies. A comparison of Paul's works-related writings from his various letters would reveal additional information on whether his work ethics evolved differently with varying economic as well as societal contexts.

## **5.5 Final thoughts**

According to the conclusions of this study, there is no doubt that 2 Thessalonians 3:10 work and responsibility ideology has an effect on the Christian community and the world as a whole. From this research, it has been determined that Paul's rebuke was not trying to establish rough treatment of the poor but respond to a specific problem of idleness and disorder in the church of Thessalonica. His emphasis on individual responsibility reflects concern with maintenance of social integrity and positive use of resources, and efficient work ethic according to Christian teachings.

When contemporary readers and ministers attempt to operationalize this Biblical imperative, care must be taken not to slide into simplistic or fundamentalist readings which eliminate the wider Biblical call to justice and compassion. Effort and toil are to be admired, but these must be balanced by care for being in charge of those who are truly needy, as the balance throughout Scripture teaches. Moreover, as the world

continues to change economically and socially, the Christian community must find ways of reconciling Paul's teachings with the issues of the day such as unemployment, economic inequalities, and changing work patterns.

This study places its priority on the urgency of a theologically grounded and ethically attentive response to the work-and-accountability challenge. Confronted by the specificity of given situations, Christians are in the best position to invoke an all-of-life understanding of work as worship of God, good for the common good, and sustenance to the hungry. As we go forward, we need to develop a work ethic of love and discipline based on the truth and grace of the gospel so that the church will testify to God's justice and love in the world.

## Appendices

Since my research is a library-based and theological research project focused on 2 Thessalonians 3:10 ("If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.") (ESV). Below are appendices for this research. These are tailored to support a theological or exegetical paper, drawing on scholarly and library-based research methods.

### Appendix A: Biblical text and translation comparisons

Version 2 Thessalonians 3:10

**KJV** *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

**NIV** *For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."*

**ESV** *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*

**Greek (NA28)** Ὅτι καὶ ὄτε ἦμεν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, τοῦτο παρηγγέλλομεν ὑμῖν, ὅτι εἴ τις οὐ θέλει ἐργάζεσθαι, μηδὲ ἐσθιέτω.

## Appendix B: Word study on key Greek terms

| Greek Word | Transliteration    | Meaning        | Usage Notes                                                 |
|------------|--------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| θέλει      | <i>Thelei</i>      | wills, desires | Implies volition—distinguishes unwillingness from inability |
| ἐργάζεσθαι | <i>Ergazesthai</i> | to work, labor | Present infinitive, emphasizing continuous action           |
| ἔσθιέτω    | <i>Esthietō</i>    | let him eat    | Present imperative in prohibition                           |

## Appendix C: Historical-Cultural Background

| Topic                          | Details                                                                                                                                                                                         |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Economic Context               | Thessalonica was a busy port city with a mix of wealthy patrons and working-class citizens. Issues of idleness may have related to patron-client relationships or eschatological disengagement. |
| Jewish Ethic                   | Work Paul's Jewish background emphasized labor as a form of worship and community responsibility (cf. Proverbs 6:6-11).                                                                         |
| Early Christian Community Life | Acts 2:44-47 shows early believers shared resources; Paul's command in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 suggests a misuse or misunderstanding of communal generosity.                                       |

Appendix D: Summary of secondary sources consulted

| Author                | Title                                                                         | Relevance                                                                                              |
|-----------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Green, Gene L.        | <i>The Letters to the Thessalonians (PNTC)</i>                                | Offers detailed exegetical analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 in light of Greco-Roman social structures. |
| Wanamaker, Charles A. | <i>The Epistles to the Thessalonians (NIGTC)</i>                              | Focuses on Greek textual analysis and historical context.                                              |
| Bruce, F.F.           | <i>1 &amp; 2 Thessalonians (WBC)</i>                                          | Balances theological insights with socio-historical observations.                                      |
| Malherbe, Abraham J.  | <i>Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care</i> | Explores the moral exhortation in light of philosophical traditions.                                   |

## Appendix E: Library Research Methodology

### Library resources used:

**Commentaries** from the *New International Greek Testament Commentary* (NIGTC), *Word Biblical Commentary* (WBC), and *Pillar New Testament Commentary* (PNTC)

**Academic Journal Databases:** JSTOR, ATLA Religion Database

**Library Catalog:** Search terms included "2 Thessalonians 3:10," "Paul and work," "idleness in early Christianity," "patronage in Greco-Roman world"

## Appendix F: Theological themes identified

| <b>Theme</b>                | <b>Description</b>                                                                                                                         |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Christian<br>Responsibility | Work is portrayed not only as economic necessity but as a moral duty within the community.                                                 |
| Community<br>Discipline     | Paul advocates boundaries for mutual care, balancing grace with accountability.                                                            |
| Eschatological<br>Ethics    | Some Thessalonians possibly ceased working in anticipation of Christ's imminent return; Paul counters this with a call to faithful living. |

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