

**PAULINE TEACHING ON DIGNITY OF LABOUR (2 THESSALONIANS 3:7-12): AN EXAMPLE
FOR NIGERIAN CONTEMPORARY CLERGY**

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Abstract

The commercialization of the Gospel has taken different forms in present-day Nigeria. The call to pastorality has significantly shifted from a spiritual vocation to a gainful enterprise. In this regard, the Pauline model as presented in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians is particularly apt. Relying on 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12, this study argues that Nigerian clergy should embrace their pastoral calling as it ought to be, following the Pauline example. The study emphasizes that the vocation to the priesthood is fundamentally a call to service rather than a means of exploitation. The Pauline idea of the dignity of labour challenges Nigerian clergy to embrace self-reliance, ministry as service, ethical responsibility in work, the right use of authority, and a balanced theology of vocation. This work adopts virtue ethics theory and the Pauline model of the shepherd as analytical frameworks for examining the issues raised. It concludes that it is imperative for Nigerian clergy to view ministry and pastorality as service to God and to the people. Ministry should be understood as a sacred vocation reserved for the genuinely called, rather than an avenue for personal enrichment.

Key Words: ministry, clergy, dignity of labour, Nigerian

Introduction

Pastoral ministry has always been regarded as a sacred and highly esteemed calling in Nigeria. To many, being ordained into pastoral office is not only the pinnacle of honour but also a testimony of one's closeness to God. Traditionally, pastors are viewed as shepherds who lead their flocks with humility, sacrifice, and dedication. Unfortunately, in recent times, this noble calling has been tainted by self-seeking individuals who see pastoral work not as a divine vocation but as a lucrative enterprise. Instead of having the people nurtured spiritually, they are manipulated, and exploited under the guise of "sowing seeds," "prophetic offerings," or endless fundraising drives, all attached to one name or the other with some scripturally backing that in most cases lack contextual meanings. What was meant to be a fellowship of mutual love and edification has sometimes become an avenue for some pastors to enrich themselves at the expense of their members. Many clergy who mount the pulpit today seem less concerned with shepherding souls and more preoccupied with material accumulation, power, and personal comfort.

This exploitation often comes from pastors who have not genuinely been called into ministry or are improperly trained but have chosen it as a career path for wealth and influence. Their interpretation of Scripture is skewed to serve their interests, reducing the pulpit to a marketplace where human needs are traded for promises of blessings. Such practices not only diminish the dignity of the pastoral office but also erode the faith of members, many of whom, like the researchers, feel deceived, burdened, and disillusioned. Unfortunately, many pastors have turned ministry into a means of livelihood rather than a divine calling, Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians becomes even more relevant. His message challenges the culture of dependency and manipulation among pastors and reaffirms the truth that pastoral ministry should be rooted in service, responsibility, and integrity. It calls pastors back to the path of hard work and dignity of labour, reminding them that the true measure of ministry lies not in material acquisition but in faithful service to God and His people.

Pastoral ministry is by nature a sacred calling that demands selflessness, integrity, and a commitment to serve God's people. Despondently, the authenticity of this divine calling has increasingly come under question; rather than following the biblical model of servant-leadership exemplified by the apostle Paul in 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12, many pastors have turned ministry into a platform for personal gain. The emphasis has shifted from shepherding souls to amassing wealth, from sacrificial service to material exploitation of church members.

As a result, countless church members find themselves burdened by manipulative demands for money, unrealistic obligations to "sow seeds," and continuous pressure to fund the lavish lifestyles of their leaders. This growing commercialization of the pulpit has not only distorted the sacredness of pastoral ministry but has also eroded the trust and reverence once accorded to pastors. Worse still, it has created disillusionment among believers who, rather than being spiritually nourished, often feel exploited and deceived.

Paul's admonition to the Thessalonian church highlights the importance of pastors embracing hard work and the dignity of labour as a model for their congregations. He refused to live off the church's resources, despite his apostolic authority, choosing instead to work with his own hands to avoid being a burden. This principle, if

applied in the Nigerian pastoral setting, could serve as a corrective measure against the culture of exploitation that has taken root in many churches.

The problem, therefore, is the widening gap between the biblical model of pastoral ministry as outlined in 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12 and the present reality of pastoral practice in Nigeria. Unless this issue is addressed, the dignity of labour and the true meaning of pastoral ministry will continue to be undermined, leading to further loss of credibility, spiritual exploitation, and a weakened witness of the church in society.

This study examines 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12 in relation to hard work and the dignity of labour among pastors in Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to explore Paul's teaching in 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12 as a model for understanding the principle of hard work and the dignity of labour in Christian ministry. the implications of Paul's model of hard work for contemporary Nigerian pastors, especially in addressing exploitation and restoring credibility to pastoral ministry and make recommendations on how pastors in Nigeria can embrace the dignity of labour and promote a ministry style that emphasizes service, integrity, and responsibility rather than material gain.

Definition of Terms

Dignity of Labour: The dignity of labour refers to the intrinsic value and respect accorded to all forms of work, regardless of status, type, or level of skill required. It embodies the idea that all labour, when performed with honesty, dedication, and a sense of purpose, contributes to personal fulfilment, societal development, and human dignity (Dorr, 2019).

Church: The term "**Church**" originates from the Greek word *ekklesia* (ἐκκλησία), which means "an assembly" or "called-out ones." In the New Testament, it refers to the community of believers who are called out from the world to follow Jesus Christ (Acts 2:47; Romans 16:5). The Church is "the whole body of those who through Christ's death have been saved and united by the Holy Spirit into a living community with the purpose of glorifying God and carrying out His mission in the world" (Erickson, 2013, p. 1033).

Clergy: The term "**clergy**" refers to the body of ordained ministers within the Christian Church who are set apart for religious leadership, sacramental functions, and pastoral responsibilities. The word derives from the Greek *klēros* (κληρος), meaning "lot" or "inheritance," which early came to signify those who had received a divine calling to serve the Church.

Pauline Position and the Nigerian Clergy

The emphasis Paul made in his letter to the Thessalonians resonates as issues of manipulation and exploitation continues in Nigerian pastoral arena. Apart from tagging different names that are geared towards getting money from the people, the researchers observe issues of producing certain materials such as oil, stickers, clothes and so on. These items are presented as having spiritual potency for protection, luck, fortune and things of such nature. The truth is that most of these items have no spiritual powers but they are produced to make more money from the congregants. Paul's text becomes apt.

Paul condemned laziness in any form and promoted dignity of labour for everyone. Particularly, he presented himself as an example to the shepherds and would-be shepherds of the flock. Examining Verse 8 -10 of the text "We did not eat anyone's bread free of charge". The word δωρεάν means "freely, without cause, without payment, for nothing." This implies that they did not eat the ἄρτον (bread) "as a gift, gratis, "without reason, without cause, in vain" or without payment. The word ἄρτον means "food, sustenance." It means that it may not necessarily be bread, but whatever that satisfies or that can sustain someone. Apostle Paul made it clear that they did not eat anyone's food without paying for it rather, they worked day and night.

The term "ἐργαζόμενοι" is a deponent verb but present middle participle, active in meaning. It means the one working. The essence of this work is not to be a burden (μὴ ἐπιβαρῆσαι). There is a use of strong the verb μὴ "not" indicating almost the impossibility of an action. Μὴ is used to negate something that is not a matter of fact, but rather a thought, wish, or possibility. By implication, Paul and his co-worker did not have in mind of exploiting the church let alone carrying out the action. The intention of becoming a burden or eating without paying was not conceived in their thought. Paul and his colleagues chose never to become a burden to the church. **ἐπιβαρῆσαι** in this context means "to burden," "to weigh down," "to be a financial burden" **ἐπιβαρῆσαι** is an **articular infinitive** construction introduced by **πρὸς τὸ** ("in order to"). This marks **purpose**: "so that we might not burden any of you." It expresses the goal of Paul's working: self-sufficiency to avoid laying a financial load on the church. The use of μὴ is a strong indication that Paul did not in any way intent to be a burden to the people that was why they worked tirelessly night and day to provide for themselves what they needed. They worked so that they might not burden anyone. That is to say that there was no group they chose to burden rather to make sure they provided for themselves.

Paul emphasized the importance of work in the text. The use of the term ἐργάζεσθαι is fitting. ἐργάζεσθαι is a present middle infinitive. That is to say, the essence of ἐργάζεσθαι is for the benefit of the doer of the action. Therefore, by the use of the present tense, Paul emphasizes the need for daily or continuous work. Hence, the implications of the text to Nigerian clergy are here inferred.

The Clergy and Self-reliance

Paul, even as a spiritual leader of a church did not choose to become a burden to the church, especially a financial burden. He rather chose to work so as to be self-reliant. Unfortunately, some Nigerian clergy are over dependent on the congregations they are pasturing; making frequent and unnecessary demands from these members who are equally facing economic situation like the clergy. This is as a result of not being self-reliant. They over-milk these members by asking for seed of faith, offering for protection, offering for warfare, offering for aversion of death and many more.

This concept of self-reliance among clergy draws heavily from Paul's own ministry model. In 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9, Paul emphasizes that though he had the "right" (ἐξουσίαν) to receive support, he laboured with his own hands so as not to be a burden. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 9:12–18, he defends his apostolic right to material support but chooses to waive it to avoid hindering the gospel. Weima (2014) argues that Paul's self-supporting stance was not merely economic but theological and pastoral, reinforcing integrity and providing an example against idleness. This shows that clergy self-reliance has biblical precedent rooted in the ethics of service, discipline, and witness and this should be upheld by clergy in our contemporary time. This is a call for clergy in Nigeria to shun idleness of any kind rather work to be self-supportive in order to maintain their respect and integrity of ministry.

It is necessary to note that in parts of Macedonia (2 Cor. 8:1–2) where poverty was prevalent, Paul recognized that an over-reliance on congregational giving could burden poor believers and expose clergy to financial vulnerability. Dependence on limited resources can create a cycle where clergy feel pressured to tailor their message or adopt questionable practices to secure income, thus compromising their prophetic voice (Oladipo, 2012). In such environments, pastoral authority may become tied to material support, leaving clergy open to manipulation by wealthy patrons or creating resentment among congregants.

Moreover, in places where congregations themselves struggled economically, clergy dependence risked breeding idleness or entitlement, the very behaviour Paul rebukes in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12. Paul demonstrated that self-reliance fosters both integrity and freedom in ministry. This ensured that the gospel was "offered free of charge" (1 Cor. 9:18), while also protecting clergy from the vulnerabilities of total dependence on struggling communities.

Pastors in Nigerian churches are called to emulate Paul by not becoming a burden to the members that they pastor. They should be happy with whatever the members bring to them willingly, not by compulsion or manipulation.

Diligence in Service

One of the factors that distinguished Paul in his ministry was diligence in service. His purpose of serving for not defined by what he gets rather what he could offer. Diligence in service refers to the consistent and conscientious performance of one's duties with excellence, integrity, and attention to detail. It is the disposition of applying oneself fully and responsibly to the task or calling entrusted to them. As a concept, it encapsulates two inseparable dimensions: the internal discipline to commit oneself earnestly to a purpose, and the external expression of that commitment through action that benefits others or serves a cause (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). Diligence in service is a holistic virtue. It involves mental focus, moral obligation, emotional investment, and practical effort. It is not about working harder for personal gain, but rather about sustaining consistent effort in the fulfillment of duties for the greater good, irrespective of recognition or reward (Guinness, 2003).

Diligence is not merely about hard work; it is an integrated disposition involving careful attention, conscientious responsibility, and sustained excellence in the discharge of duties. When directed toward service, whether in religious, civic, or professional domains, diligence becomes the ethical glue that binds competence to character.

The term *diligence* derives from the Latin word *diligentia*, which means carefulness or attentiveness (Harper, 2023). Diligence is seen as careful and persistent work or effort. It involves traits such as thoroughness, responsibility, endurance, and a drive toward excellence. Diligence is more than mere activity; it is a quality of being intentional and meticulous about one's duties. *Service*, on the other hand, refers to the act of performing duties or rendering assistance, often for the benefit of others. Service can occur in a wide range of contexts religious, educational, public, or professional—and generally entails a sense of duty, responsibility, or calling. When these two concepts are combined, *diligence in service* refers to the ethical and disciplined pursuit of excellence in performing one's responsibilities to others or an institution.

A diligent person, in Kantian terms, fulfills their duty out of rational respect for moral law rather than for personal gain (Kant, 1785). Thus, diligence is an expression of moral autonomy and duty-centered behaviour. When applied to service, such diligence reflects a principled commitment to responsibility and accountability. Kant argued that actions have moral worth when done out of respect for duty rather than consequence. Thus, a person who serves with diligence fulfills their obligation not for praise or profit, but because it is ethically right to do so. Diligence, therefore, becomes a moral imperative that sustains the **integrity of service**.

Furthermore, from a utilitarian perspective, diligence contributes to the greatest good by ensuring efficiency, excellence, and the optimal use of resources (Mill, 1863). In this sense, it is not only a personal virtue but also a public asset. Diligence in service is valuable because it maximizes positive outcomes. Effective, focused, and responsible service tends to yield better results, both for individuals and for society at large (Mill, 1863). The absence of diligence leads to errors, failures, and the erosion of trust in institutions and professions.

In the New Testament, diligence is highlighted as a hallmark of spiritual maturity. Romans 12:11 exhorts believers: “*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*” Similarly, 2 Timothy 2:15 instructs: “*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed.*” The Apostle Paul himself modelled extraordinary diligence in ministry. In 1 Corinthians 15:10, he declares, “*I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me.*” Theologically, diligence is seen as a divine partnership, where human effort collaborates with God’s grace in fulfilling service mandates.

According to Denhardt and Denhardt (2015), public servants must demonstrate diligence as part of the “New Public Service” ethos, which emphasizes accountability, responsiveness, and citizen-centered governance. Similarly, diligence in the educational sector promotes thorough instruction, fairness in assessment, and long-term character formation among students. Diligence in service also serves as **abuffer against corruption and negligence**, especially in contexts where institutional decay is prevalent. Okafor (2019), in a study on public service in Nigeria, notes that systemic dysfunction is often linked to a lack of diligence among civil servants and leaders. Where there is no personal or institutional commitment to diligence in service, mediocrity, inefficiency, and even abuse of office thrive. In the corporate world, diligence is a key factor in business ethics and leadership. Kouzes and Posner (2017) argue that diligent leaders are more likely to inspire trust, foster innovation, and sustain long-term success. Diligence is not only about productivity but also about values showing up consistently, preparing adequately, and fulfilling commitments even in challenging situations.

Diligence is integral to responsible and visionary leadership. It is closely related to dependability, attention to detail, and perseverance. A diligent leader sets the pace for followers through consistent example, thereby cultivating a culture of excellence and ethical service. In ministry and pastoral leadership, diligence becomes even more critical. Leaders are accountable not only to institutions but to God and to the people they serve. As Os Guinness (2003) observes, true calling requires diligence because vocation is both sacred and demanding. A lax or lazy leader may compromise the spiritual health of an entire congregation or institution.

Ministry as a Means of Service

One of the misconceptions of ministry in Nigeria is seeing ministry as business. Obviously, the proliferation of churches in Nigeria may not be for the propagation of the gospel only. Some have opened their churches as a business centre. The essence of ministry is not money making rather service to God and humanity.

Instead of doing ministry as service there have been relentless tithe/seed-sowing appeals tied to promises of quick blessing; monetization of rituals and religious objects; celebrity branding of leaders; and church expansion models emphasizing revenue streams (schools, media, real estate) as spiritual success (Akabike et al., 2021; Diara et al., 2020). Studies describe some founders openly framing church work as an investment and congregants as a market, classic “religion as commodity” dynamics (Diara et al., 2020; Onah & Agbo, 2021).

Sadly, religious platforms (churches) are increasingly commodified and spiritual leadership is often equated with fame, wealth, or influence, a critical re-examination of *ministry as a means of service* becomes not only timely but urgent. At its core, ministry is not a pursuit of personal elevation or institutional prestige it is a sacred vocation defined by **servanthood**, selflessness, and the intentional embodiment of divine compassion in the world. Ministry, in its most authentic form, is the act of offering oneself time, gifts, knowledge, presence for the spiritual, emotional, and material well-being of others, not for reward, but out of covenantal faithfulness to God and humanity. Yet, in much of contemporary religious culture, particularly within prosperity-driven and personality-centred expressions of faith, ministry is often recast as a career path or entrepreneurial venture rather than a sacred responsibility. This distortion not only erodes the theological integrity of Christian vocation but also alienates ministry from its original identity as service-in-love. Theologian Henri Nouwen (1989) warns that “the temptation to be spectacular” is one of the greatest threats to spiritual leadership, emphasizing that true ministry flourishes not in celebrity but in quiet, sustained, and sacrificial service. Therefore, to speak of ministry as a means of service is to return to its biblical, ethical, and theological roots. It is to reclaim a vision of ministry grounded in humility, compassion, and commitment a vision that resists commodification and aligns with the example of the Servant-King.

Greenleaf (1977), echoes this biblical principle, arguing that the true leader is servant first. In pastoral ministry, this implies that the minister is called not to be served by the congregation but to serve them with love, truth, and sacrifice.

Today, the idea of ministry as service remains relevant but is often challenged by the pressures of modern culture. The rise of celebrity pastors, prosperity theology, and ministry as business ventures threatens to distort its essential character (Ukah, 2005). In such contexts, ministry can be reduced to performance, popularity, or profit,

rather than selfless devotion and service. Yet, many faithful ministers continue to embody service through pastoral care, community development, teaching, advocacy, and humanitarian outreach. Whether through preaching, counselling, social justice, or intercession, ministry remains a means of responding to the spiritual, emotional, and physical needs of others. Christian ministry is also deeply tied to social transformation. As Bosch (1991) explains authentic ministry engages not only in proclamation but in service that challenges injustice, heals brokenness, and builds peace. Ministry is thus a form of public service grounded in divine love and moral responsibility.

Ministry is not a status to be wielded but a **vocation of service** a call to meet human needs, heal brokenness, and exemplify Christ-like humility (Matthew 20:28; Philippians 2:5–7). When rightly understood and practiced, ministry becomes a dynamic link between divine mission and social transformation, particularly in complex socio-political contexts like Nigeria, where issues of poverty, corruption, unemployment, ethno-religious conflict, and moral decay are widespread. The widespread embrace of prosperity doctrines has distorted the purpose of ministry, equating success with wealth rather than faithfulness or service (Gifford, 1998).

A Call for Tent-Making Ministry

One of the most important lessons that can be drawn from Paul's ministry was a tent-making ministry, otherwise, bi-vocational ministry. The modern landscape of Christian ministry presents a unique set of opportunities and challenges. In many parts of the world, including Nigeria, the perception and practice of ministry are increasingly characterized by dependency on congregational support, clerical privilege, and even material excess. Against this backdrop, the call for **tent-making ministry** a model wherein ministers support themselves through secular employment while actively engaging in ministry has emerged as a compelling alternative. Rooted in the biblical example of the Apostle Paul and reflective of the values of **diligence in service**, tent-making ministry offers a paradigm that unites spiritual commitment with economic integrity, self-sufficiency, and sacrificial service. The term *tent-making* in ministry derives from the Apostle Paul's practice of supporting himself through manual labour while proclaiming the gospel. Acts 18:1–3 records that Paul, upon arriving in Corinth, stayed with Aquila and Priscilla, "because he was of the same trade...they worked together as tentmakers." This example is further affirmed in 1 Thessalonians 2:9 and 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12, where Paul reminds the believers that he and his companions laboured "night and day" so as not to be a burden to the church.

By refusing to demand material support, Paul maintained credibility, modelled humility, and avoided the appearance of greed concerns that remain critically relevant today (Witherington, 1994). Furthermore, his dual role as labourer and preacher reflected a holistic theology that honoured both secular work and spiritual vocation as complementary forms of divine service.

In the present day Nigeria, some clergy are often wholly dependent on congregational giving, with little or no alternative income source. Sometimes, the churches that they are pasturing may not be able to provide for their needs. This leads the pastors to become beggars in the church. Instead, of this sad scenario, there is the need for the clergy to combine the ministry with other vocation following the economic situation of Nigeria.

What is given as minimum wage is not sufficient to take care of one person, let alone, a family of three or four. Therefore, in order to beef what the clergy takes, he should engage in any other thing that can generate income, be it farming, poultry or any other money yielding venture that will not take away his time for the pastoral assignment. If the clergy is opportune to be highly educated, he can take up a government employment to assist in meeting the needs of his family without fully relying on the church members.

While full-time ministry is biblically justified and necessary in some contexts (cf. 1 Corinthians 9:13–14), this dependency becomes problematic when it fosters entitlement, materialism, or manipulation of the pulpit for personal gain (Obadare, 2018). Tent-making offers a corrective path—allowing ministers to maintain autonomy, serve with integrity, and model industry to their congregations. Furthermore, in socio-economic contexts where churches are small or impoverished, the tent-making model becomes not only practical but necessary. In Nigeria, for example, where youth unemployment is high and many pastors serve in rural or economically disadvantaged areas, self-supporting ministry could help reduce pressure on church members while also enhancing the minister's credibility and social impact (Okafor, 2020).

Tent-making is not merely a financial strategy; it is a theological statement. It affirms the sacredness of all work and challenges the dichotomy between secular and sacred vocations. As Lausanne Movement notes, "Tentmakers witness by their life and work, not only by what they say" (Lausanne, 2004). In this way, tent-making enables holistic ministry that reaches beyond the pulpit into the marketplace, schools, hospitals, and government sectors. Mission-logically, tentmakers often have access to closed or restricted countries where traditional missionaries are not welcome. In such contexts, professionals can serve as bivocational witnesses, modelling Christ through excellence in their field while sharing the gospel through relational engagement (Bikos, 2017). This reinforces the idea that ministry is not confined to religious spaces but extends into all of life a core element of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.

In Nigeria, where some forms of ministry have become highly commercialized and where the "calling" is sometimes seen as a means to wealth and power, tent-making offers a counter-cultural witness. It aligns with

the broader national need for productivity, integrity, and economic creativity. Ministers who work can serve as role models for industriousness and ethical labour. Additionally, by not placing financial burdens on often poor congregations, tentmakers reduce the risk of exploitation and increase the sustainability of ministry efforts. Recent Nigerian theological voices have begun to call for a rethinking of ministerial models. For example, Okonkwo (2021) argues that “the future of the Nigerian church will depend not on the number of pulpits, but on the quality of servant-leaders who can live out the gospel in every sphere of life.” Christian ministry has undergone significant transformation, often marked by commercialization, clerical elitism, and economic dependence on congregants. As ministry becomes increasingly professionalized and monetized, the lines between genuine calling and careerism are blurred, resulting in diminished spiritual credibility and ethical concerns within the church. Against this backdrop, the biblical model of **tent-making ministry** where ministers engage in secular work to support themselves while serving in pastoral or missionary roles offers a theologically sound, ethically grounded, and contextually relevant alternative.

Nigeria’s economic realities present both a challenge and an opportunity for tent-making ministry. With high unemployment and underemployment rates, especially among youth (National Bureau of Statistics, 2024), many pastors enter ministry not from divine calling but as an escape from economic hardship. Consequently, some pastors exploit their congregants, using religious authority to extract tithes, offerings, and "seed sowing" under the guise of divine favour (Alozie, 2020).

Unfortunately, in Nigeria’s mega-churches, pastors are often expected to live lavishly as evidence of divine blessing. This creates pressure on young ministers to pursue ministry as a career, often devoid of spiritual depth or vocational integrity. Tent-making ministry, by contrast, presents a model of bi-vocational ministry rooted in servant leadership, economic self-reliance, and pastoral credibility. In rural and peri-urban Nigeria, many churches are unable to financially support full-time clergy. Tent-making ministry can therefore provide sustainability for ministers while fostering church growth through authentic community engagement. Ministers who are teachers, farmers, artisans, or professionals can live among their congregants, earning their livelihood honestly while proclaiming the gospel in word and deed (Okafor, 2020).

Preaching and Preservation of Ethics of work and Dignity of labour

Paul’s teaching and work ethics is a call to work and dignity of labour. Paul even as highly respected preacher still had some work to do to raise money in order to meet his needs. This is an indication that no job is superior to the other. This example is model for Nigerian preachers and their congregations.

Nigerian clergy ought to preach “Work” not merely an economic necessity but a vocation through which individuals participate in God’s creative activity (Volf, 2001). Paul’s admonition in 2 Thessalonians 3:10—“If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat,” underscores the moral weight attached to responsible labour, showing that the dignity of work is intrinsic to Christian discipleship (Iheanacho, 2022)

Preaching functions as a means of moral formation, shaping attitudes toward work beyond economic gain. By expounding Scripture, pastors can counter the tendencies of idleness, exploitation, and dependency that arise within congregations. In this context, Obielosi (2020) stresses that sermons emphasizing diligence, integrity, and responsibility reinforce Christian witness in society, ensuring that believers see their daily labour as service to God.

Sadly enough in Nigeria, certain forms of work (e.g., manual labour, artisanal crafts) are stigmatized. People who do them are often seen as second class citizens. They are not respected like other in government and private establishments. Hence, preaching can highlight the dignity of all honest labour helps dismantle these prejudices and combats the "get-rich-quick" mentality fostered by prosperity teachings (Diara, Onukwufor, & Uroko, 2020). By elevating the sacredness of every legitimate occupation, the pulpit resists the commodification of ministry and reaffirms that true success lies in diligence, not exploitation.

The rise of prosperity-oriented messages risks undermining the Christian work ethic by promoting shortcuts to wealth through seed sowing and miracle expectations. It can be said that one of the causes of rise in the Yahoo yahoo business is the erroneous sermons by some clergy. In a bid to make it big and bring fat offerings, some young Nigerians have fallen into this trap.

However, in contrast, responsible preaching preserves the ethics of work by teaching that wealth without labour often leads to corruption and moral decay (Onah & Agbo, 2021). This balance prevents the church from drifting into consumerism while nurturing believers who are productive citizens. When clergy faithfully preach about the ethics of work and dignity of labour, they not only strengthen the spiritual growth of their congregants but also contribute to national development. Ethical work habits reduce corruption, enhance productivity, and foster human dignity (Agha, 2019). In this sense, preaching becomes both a religious and socio-political act of nation-building.

Thus, Paul’s caution highlights a balanced theology of provision: clergy have a right to support, but they must not let financial dependence undermine their credibility, mission, or the spiritual well-being of their

congregations. This can tempt clergy into practices like prosperity preaching or financial exploitation to sustain themselves.

In fact, prosperity preaching has become a trap and a means of livelihood for many pastors who manipulate members

The Clergy and Right use of Authority

In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul addresses the issue of disorderliness and idleness in the church. As an apostle, he invokes his authority not to dominate, but to instruct and correct. The verb *παραγγέλλομεν* (“we command”) in verse 6 demonstrates the binding moral weight of apostolic authority, yet Paul’s authority is pastoral, rooted in love and service rather than coercion (Wan, 2017). His commands are coupled with personal example, reminding the Thessalonians of his industrious labour (vv. 7–9). This balance between authority and service underscores that leadership in the church is meant to build up, not exploit.

On the contrary, some of the Nigerian clergy see themselves as demi-gods and exhibit such in giving command to their members. Paul’s model spiritual oversight highlights that spiritual authority must be exercised with humility and integrity. Authority is legitimate when it flows from Christ’s Lordship and is expressed through service (Mk 10:42–45). The misuse of authority whether through financial exploitation, coercion, or authoritarianism—contradicts the gospel. As Green (2002) notes, Paul wielded authority “not to suppress but to empower” believers, guiding them toward maturity in Christ.

Church members are not to be coerced to bring items or money to the church or the clergy themselves. Diara & Onah, (2014) regrettably note that there is high manifestation of manipulation of congregational giving, authoritarian decision-making, or the suppression of dissent. This distortion reduces ministry to a hierarchical system where leaders enrich themselves while members are silenced. Sometimes, members are threatened if they don’t give that certain evil will befall them; out of fear of the “Man of God” and the prophesied calamities, they bring all that they have and submit to the pastor while they go hungry.

The Nigerian clergy should stop harassing and intimidating members rather should humbly shepherd them as God’s flock. This will make the congregation to serve God better without fear or favour, but in sincerity of heart. Too much exertion of authority, especially in the aspect of giving has driven members away from church. This is not healthy for the growth and development of the Christian community.

The Clergy and Balanced Theology

Ignorance, intentional reaping and lack of theological training contribute to the exploitation of church members in Nigeria. Having seen that some clergy preach in order to exploit the mass is an indication that there is need for a better theological training and balancing of theology in preaching. The effectiveness of the ministry depends largely on the ability of the clergy to maintain balanced theology. A theology that is lopsided, overemphasizing prosperity, miracles, or legalism while neglecting holiness, service, and justice—can mislead the flock and distort the mission of the church. Balanced theology calls the clergy to hold together the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27), integrating biblical truth, pastoral care, social ethics, and spiritual growth.

In reality, the clergy face enormous pressures: economic instability, congregational expectations, denominational competition, and cultural challenges. These often tempt ministers to seek wealth, power, and influence at the expense of spiritual depth and theological clarity. This has led to an overemphasis on financial prosperity, miracles, and status, to the neglect of the foundational clerical responsibilities: evangelism, discipleship, sound teaching, and pastoral care. Obadare (2020) observes that Pentecostal clergy in Nigeria increasingly operate like corporate CEOs or media personalities rather than shepherds of souls. The commercialization of ministry creates a context where theology becomes shallow, and ministry becomes performance-driven. In such a setting, a balanced theology that calls for sacrifice, humility, and doctrinal rigor is often perceived as out-dated or unprofitable.

In many Nigerian churches, the clergy often succumb to **doctrinal extremism**, particularly in areas such as prosperity theology, demonology, and eschatology. These emphases, when unbalanced, distort the gospel and create fear, materialism, or confusion. For instance, the prosperity gospel, while containing elements of truth about divine provision, becomes unbalanced when it neglects suffering, stewardship, and humility (Gifford, 2001).

Moreover, some pastors operate with **little or no formal theological training**, relying instead on charisma or visions. While spiritual gifts are valid, **there must be tested and guided by Scripture** (1 John 4:1). The absence of theological depth results in shallow messages, superstition, and sometimes manipulation. Therefore, a bid to be relevant, some clergy accommodate unbiblical cultural practices, such as ritual cleansing, ancestral worship, or “spiritual baths.” These practices betray a lack of theological discernment and compromise the gospel’s purity.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Apostle Paul’s injunction in 2 Thessalonians 3:7–12 presents a timeless model of diligence and responsible living, particularly within the context of pastoral ministry. Paul not only preached

the gospel but also earned his livelihood, thereby avoiding unnecessary dependence on others. His example affirms that labour is not only a necessity for survival but also a divine mandate that safeguards human dignity and fosters credibility in leadership.

The study further concludes that pastoral ministry devoid of diligence and discipline compromises its spiritual and moral authority. Ministers who exploit congregants or indulge in idleness contradict the apostolic model, weaken the Church's witness, and erode members' trust. By contrast, embracing the dignity of labour enhances the image of the Church, strengthens self-reliance, and offers wider society a positive example of Christian responsibility. Thus, Paul's teaching remains a corrective against laziness, exploitation, and materialism in ministry. Pastors are called to demonstrate integrity through hard work, to sustain themselves through honourable means, and to inspire their congregations toward productive and godly living. The dignity of labour, therefore, is not merely a biblical ethic but a practical necessity for the survival, growth, and relevance of pastoral ministry in today's world.

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