"PAULINE WORK ETHIC AND ECONOMIC RESPONSIBILITY IN NIGERIA: AN ANALYSIS OF 2 THESSALONIANS 3:10."

EBHOMENMEN Jeffrey Onuhi B.A, M.A,

Adeleke University, Ede
jeffreyebhomenmen@cpgs.adelekeuniversity.edu.ng; +2347060701805

Abstract

Nigeria continues to grapple with economic hardship characterized by high inflation, rising unemployment, and an entrenched culture of dependency. While much scholarly attention has been devoted to financial and policy dimensions of these crises, limited work has explored how biblical ethics might function as socio-economic resources in the Nigerian context. This article addresses that gap by engaging Paul's injunction in 2 Thessalonians 3:10*, —if anyone is not willing to work, neither shall he eat‖, as a theological lens through which to interrogate Nigeria's labour culture. Employing exegetical analysis and contextual application, the study situates Paul's theology of work within its first-century setting. It demonstrates its enduring relevance for issues of dignity, productivity, and communal responsibility. By integrating insights from theology, economics, and social ethics, the article develops a constructive theology of work that challenges Nigeria's culture of entitlement and quick-wealth mentality, while offering implications for governance, education, and ecclesial practice. The novelty of this contribution lies in bringing the New Testament work ethic into direct conversation with contemporary African economic realities, thus extending biblical theology beyond moral exhortation to practical engagement with systemic crises. The study concludes that the Pauline ethic of labour can serve as a corrective resource for encouraging responsibility, innovation, and justice in Nigeria's search for sustainable development.*

Keywords: Pauline theology, work ethic, 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Nigeria, Economic Responsibility, and Contextual Biblical Interpretation

Introduction

Nigeria's contemporary economic situation has been shaped by recurring crises of inflation, chronic unemployment, and entrenched patterns of dependency, which together pose serious challenges to sustainable development and social cohesion.[58] Headline inflation surged dramatically throughout 2024 and, despite statistical rebasing by the National Bureau of Statistics, remained high well into 2025, steadily eroding purchasing power and exacerbating poverty.[59] Alongside this, unemployment and underemployment, particularly among the youth, continue to present daunting realities, with graduates often confined to precarious informal-sector work or prolonged joblessness.[60] The consequences of these macroeconomic

[58] National Bureau of Statistics (Nigeria), *National Labour Force Survey (NLFS), Q1 2024 Report* (Abuja: NBS, 2024), 14–16.

[59] Central Bank of Nigeria, —Inflation Rate,‖ CBN website (August 2025), accessed 15 September 2025.

[60] Afrobarometer, *AD998: Nigerian Youth Want Government Action on Jobs and Cost of Living* (Accra: Afrobarometer, 2025).

instabilities have been profound: widening inequality, increasing disaffection, heightened pressures for migration, and social unrest.[61]

Scholarly analyses of these economic hardships have often focused on structural and institutional dynamics, fiscal mismanagement, over-reliance on oil revenues, endemic corruption, and the volatility of international markets.[62] While such macroeconomic accounts are indispensable, they tend to neglect the ethical and cultural dimensions that inform labour practices and public attitudes. Nigeria's —quick wealth‖ culture, the persistence of patron-client dependency, and a rising disinterest in sustained productive work call for more than structural reforms; they also demand ethical reorientation.[63] Theological resources, particularly those found in the New Testament, have remained largely untapped in this regard, despite Christianity's pervasive social influence in Nigeria. Churches continue to shape the moral imagination of millions, offering education, vocational training, and civic discourse; yet biblical ethics are typically invoked in a moralizing fashion rather than interrogated for their socio-economic implications.[64]

Within this context, *2 Thessalonians 3:10* —For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: _If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat'‖ (NRSV) emerges as a significant but underexplored text.[65] Paul's directive, originally addressed to a community threatened by idleness and disorderly conduct, articulates a robust ethic of labour grounded in responsibility and accountability.[66] Although historically directed to the Thessalonian congregation, the verse also resonates with broader Pauline theology, where labour is tied to dignity (cf. 1 Thess 4:11 12), service to the community (cf. Eph 4:28), and witness to outsiders (cf. Col 3:23-24).[67] This Pauline vision, if carefully re-appropriated, may provide resources for reshaping Nigeria's discourse on work, productivity, and dependency.

The research problem of this study can thus be stated succinctly: how can a contextualized reading of *2 Thessalonians 3:10* contribute to Nigeria's discourse on economic responsibility amidst unemployment, dependency, and the erosion of a sustainable work ethic? This central question is pursued through three interrelated enquiries: (1) What is the literary and historical significance of *2 Thessalonians 3:10* in its epistolary context? (2) How does Paul's admonition integrate with his wider theology of labour across the Pauline corpus? (3) In what ways can Pauline work ethics be engaged as constructive resources for Nigeria's contemporary economic challenges?

Methodologically, the study employs a biblical-theological approach, integrating exegetical analysis with contextual application. Firstly, it engages in close reading of the text in its

[61] —Nigeria Inflation Eases for Second Month after Data Overhaul,‖ *Reuters*, 17 March 2025.
[62] Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 311–25.
[63] Godwin A. Ogabo and Francis T. Patrick, —The Philosophical Import of Pauline Work Ethics in the Quest for Germane Work Ethics in Nigeria,‖ *African Social Science and Humanities Journal* 4, no. 1 (2022): 12–22.
[64] Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 94–118.
[65] 2 Thess 3:10 (NRSV).
[66] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 235–42.
[67] Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 407–12.

original Greek, with attention to its literary flow, historical background, and semantic nuances.[68] Secondly, it situates the text within the wider Pauline theology of labour by comparison with parallel exhortations. Finally, it correlates these findings with Nigeria's present economic realities through an interdisciplinary dialogue with economics, development studies, and sociology.[69] This correlation avoids the simplistic transfer of ancient injunctions into modern contexts; instead, it employs a hermeneutic of critical appropriation, asking what Paul's ethic of labour can mean when set against contemporary realities of unemployment, dependency, and corruption.

The thesis advanced in this article is that: when read exegetically and contextually, *2 Thessalonians 3:10* is not a punitive slogan but a corrective ethic emphasizing dignity through labour, accountability within community, and resistance to exploitative dependency. Such an ethic, appropriately nuanced to protect the vulnerable, can inform both ecclesial teaching and broader socio-economic discourse in Nigeria. By re-examining Paul's injunction in dialogue with contemporary realities, the study seeks to demonstrate that biblical texts may function not only as sources of moral exhortation but also as practical frameworks for public responsibility and national development.

Literature Review

Economic Studies on Nigeria

The Nigerian economy has been the subject of extensive scholarly scrutiny, with economists, political scientists, and historians analyzing both its persistent crises and its potential for reform. The historical dependence on oil revenues remains a recurrent theme, with Falola and Heaton identifying the ―oil curse‖ as a structural weakness that perpetuates volatility and corruption.[70] Similarly, Akinlo underscores the distortions in labour markets created by resource dependence, noting the mismatch between youth aspirations and actual employment opportunities.[71] The National Bureau of Statistics has consistently reported fluctuations in unemployment, with recent surveys indicating that underemployment and informal-sector participation are the dominant realities, particularly among younger cohorts.[72]

Scholars also note the intensification of inflationary trends in recent years, which has eroded household income and fuelled food insecurity.[73] A 2025 report by Afrobarometer reveals that Nigerian citizens rank unemployment and rising cost of living as the most pressing national challenges.[74] Analysts such as Adedokun argue that, beyond macroeconomic variables,

[68] Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 272–79.

[69] John Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 501–10.

[70] Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 311–25.

[71] Anthony E. Akinlo, ―Macroeconomic Instability and Youth Employment in Nigeria,‖ *Journal of African Economies* 31, no. 2 (2022): 201–19.

[72] National Bureau of Statistics (Nigeria), *National Labour Force Survey (NLFS), Q1 2024 Report* (Abuja: NBS, 2024), 14–16.

[73] ―Nigeria Inflation Eases for Second Month after Data Overhaul,‖ *Reuters*, 17 March 2025.

[74] Afrobarometer, *AD998: Nigerian Youth Want Government Action on Jobs and Cost of Living* (Accra: Afrobarometer, 2025).

public attitudes towards work and productivity also significantly impact Nigeria's growth trajectory.[75] Olurode highlights the dependency syndrome, in which individuals rely on family networks, patronage systems, or state handouts, as a critical social factor perpetuating economic inertia.[76] These studies provide essential empirical insights but often leave the ethical and cultural dimensions under-theorized.

Work Ethic in Nigerian Scholarship

A strand of Nigerian scholarship has begun to explore cultural and philosophical approaches to work ethic. Ogabo and Patrick argue that Nigeria's current labour crisis reflects not merely economic dysfunction but also a crisis of values, in which diligence and communal accountability have been replaced by shortcuts to wealth.[77] Similarly, Ehusani critiques the ―get-rich-quick‖ mentality fostered by corruption and weak institutional accountability, suggesting that moral formation is as necessary as economic reform.[78] Sociological studies have shown how Pentecostal prosperity theology shapes attitudes towards wealth and labour, sometimes promoting an expectation of a miraculous breakthrough rather than sustained work.[79]

In a related philosophical discussion, Omoregbe insists that African conceptions of work must be reclaimed as part of cultural renewal, with emphasis on the communal dimension of labour.[80] Scholars in education and vocational training have also highlighted the significance of ethical reorientation, with Adeyemi emphasizing the role of value-based curricula in combating youth unemployment.[81] These contributions underline the need for a robust framework that integrates ethical, theological, and cultural considerations with economic analysis.

Pauline Theology of Work in Biblical Studies

Biblical scholarship has produced substantial commentary on Pauline theology of work, though often without explicit socio-economic application to African contexts. Fee's seminal commentary on Thessalonians interprets Paul's admonition in *2 Thessalonians 3:10* as directed against specific idlers who, perhaps influenced by eschatological excitement, abandoned gainful work.[82] Green similarly highlights that the text calls for communal order rather than individual punishment, with labour portrayed as integral to witness before

[75] Olalekan Adedokun, ―Attitudes towards Work and Development in Nigeria,‖ *African Journal of Development Studies* 15, no. 3 (2023): 45–60.

[76] Lai Olurode, *Culture and Development in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2021), 142–56.

[77] Godwin A. Ogabo and Francis T. Patrick, ―The Philosophical Import of Pauline Work Ethics in the Quest for Germane Work Ethics in Nigeria,‖ *African Social Science and Humanities Journal* 4, no. 1 (2022): 12–22.

[78] George Ehusani, *A Prophetic Critique of Nigeria's Moral Decay* (Enugu: Snaap Press, 2020), 53–70.

[79] Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021), 94–118.

[80] Joseph Omoregbe, *African Philosophy and the Ethics of Work* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research, 2022), 75–92.

[81] Samuel Adeyemi, ―Values-Based Education and Youth Employability in Nigeria,‖ *Journal of Moral Education in Africa* 12, no. 1 (2023): 28–44.

[82] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 235–42.

outsiders.[83] Wanamaker offers detailed exegetical insights into the Greek construction, showing how Paul links idleness with disorderly conduct (*ataktōs*).[84]

Beyond Thessalonians, Pauline theology more broadly integrates labour with discipleship. Paul presents work as both self-sustaining and community-serving (Eph 4:28), as a sphere for glorifying God (Col 3:23–24), and as a testimony against exploitation (1 Cor 9:6–12).[85] Barclay's influential *Paul and the Gift* situates work within the wider Pauline theology of grace, where reciprocity and responsibility are mutually reinforcing.[86] Scholars such as Gaventa and Horrell have noted that Paul's ethic of labour resists parasitic dependence while protecting the vulnerable, a balance often overlooked in surface-level readings of *2 Thess 3:10*.[87]

Interdisciplinary Gaps

Despite the wealth of scholarship on Nigeria's economic conditions and on Pauline theology, the two strands rarely intersect in substantive dialogue. Theological reflections on work in Nigeria often remain at the level of moral exhortation, disconnected from structural economic analysis. Conversely, economic studies typically bypass the ethical and cultural resources that Christian theology offers for shaping work values. Nmah notes the gap and calls for ―biblical ethics of labour‖ to be brought into dialogue with Nigeria's unemployment crisis.[88] Similarly, Ugwu argues that Paul's teaching can inspire an ethic of diligence among Nigerian youths, yet acknowledges that few works provide the exegetical depth necessary for application.[89]

This lacuna provides the space for the present study's contribution. By situating *2 Thessalonians 3:10* within both Pauline theology and Nigeria's socio-economic realities, the article seeks to show how biblical texts can serve as resources for economic responsibility, complementing, but not replacing, structural reforms. The review thus establishes the originality of this study in bridging disciplinary boundaries and foregrounding the socio-economic relevance of biblical exegesis.

Exegetical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 Text and Translation

The Greek text reads: *εἰ γάρ τις οὐ θέλει ἐργάζεζθαι, μηδὲ ἐζθιέτω* (*ei gar tis ou thelei ergazesthai, mēde esthietō*). A literal rendering is:

[83] Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 407–12.

[84] Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 272–79.

[85] Victor Paul Furnish, *Theology and Ethics in Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 151–67.

[86] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 501–10.

[87] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 112–26; David Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 183–97.

[88] Patrick Nmah, ―Biblical Ethics of Labour and Nigeria's Unemployment Crisis,‖ *Nigerian Journal of Theology* 36, no. 2 (2023): 88–104.

[89] Charles Ugwu, ―Pauline Admonition and Nigerian Youth Idleness,‖ *Journal of Contextual Biblical Interpretation* 5, no. 1 (2022): 31–47.

—For if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat.‖[90]

The brevity of the statement gives it a proverbial quality. The participle *θέλει* (*thelei*, —is willing‖) highlights volition; it is not about inability, but about deliberate refusal.[91] The infinitive *ἐργάζεζθαι* (*ergazesthai*, —to work, to labour‖) denotes productive activity. The imperative *μηδὲ ἐζθιέηω* (*mēde esthietō*, —let him not eat‖) is prohibitive, connecting entitlement to sustenance with responsibility to work.[92]

Literary Context

The verse sits within 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, a passage addressing disorder (*ἀηάκηως, ataktōs*), often translated as —idleness‖ or —irresponsible behaviour.‖ Paul appeals to his own example of labour (vv. 7–9) and instructs the community to avoid supporting those who persist in disorderly idleness (vv. 11–14).[93] Verse 10 condenses the entire admonition into a memorable maxim. As Green observes, it functions rhetorically to tie the community's moral witness to its economic behaviour.[94]

Historical and Socio-Cultural Background

Scholars suggest two main backgrounds for the idleness problem.

First, **eschatological withdrawal:** some believers may have abandoned work, assuming the imminent *parousia* made ordinary labour irrelevant.[95]

Second, **Greco-Roman patronage culture:** in urban centres like Thessalonica, elites despised manual labour, and poorer individuals often depended on wealthy patrons for sustenance.[96] Wanamaker notes that Thessalonica's commercial vibrancy made exploitation through dependency particularly tempting.[97]

Against both, Paul emphasises that Christian life includes economic responsibility. His tentmaking (Acts 18:3; 20:34; 1 Cor 9:6–15) embodied Jewish wisdom traditions (Prov 6:6–11; Sir 38:24–34), which valued diligence.[98] Paul redefines labour as an expression of discipleship rather than mere survival.[99]

[90] 2 Thess 3:10 (NA28).
[91] Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 273.
[92] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 236.
[93] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1998), 129–30.
[94] Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 410.
[95] F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (WBC 45; Waco: Word, 1982), 205.
[96] Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians* (AB 32B; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 446–47.
[97] Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 274–75.
[98] Acts 20:34; 1 Cor 9:6–15; cf. Sir 38:24–34.
[99] Karl P. Donfried, *Paul, Thessalonica, and Early Christianity* (London: T&T Clark, 2002), 187–94.

Grammatical and Semantic Analysis

The clause *εἰ γάρ τις οὐ θέλει ἐργάζεζθαι* (*ei gar tis ou thelei ergazesthai*) distinguishes unwillingness (*οὐ θέλει, ou thelei*, —is not willing‖) from inability.[100] The verb *ἐργάζεζθαι* (*ergazesthai*) encompasses manual work, trade, and crafts.[101] Paul applies it elsewhere to his own ministry-related labour (1 Thess 2:9).

The prohibition *μηδὲ ἐζθιέτω* (*mēde esthietō*) employs a present imperative with durative force: —let him not continue to eat.‖[102] Fee argues this does not mean condemning someone to literal starvation, but withdrawing communal support from those who exploit others.[103] The instruction is corrective and pedagogical.

Theological Themes

From this verse, three theological strands emerge with particular clarity. First, Paul affirms the inherent dignity of labour. In a context where Greco-Roman elites often disparaged manual work as demeaning, Paul presents it as both honourable and necessary. His own practice of tentmaking stands as a living testimony that the gospel does not excuse believers from ordinary responsibilities but rather sanctifies them. Work, even of the most practical kind, becomes an arena in which discipleship is lived out.[104]

Secondly, Paul stresses the principles of reciprocity and accountability within the Christian community. Membership in the body of Christ is never passive; it entails responsibility alongside privilege. The instruction that those unwilling to work should not eat highlights that participation in communal resources must be matched by a readiness to contribute. By framing labour as a communal expectation, Paul prevents entitlement from undermining the solidarity of the Christian household.[105]

Finally, the verse addresses the need to guard against parasitism. While the wider Pauline tradition insists on care for the genuinely vulnerable — poor, widows, and orphans (Gal 2:10; 1 Tim 5:3–8) — it also warns against enabling irresponsible dependence. The balance is crucial: Christian charity must not become a licence for exploitation. Thus, Paul's teaching preserves both compassion and discipline, ensuring that communal care is directed toward genuine need while curbing exploitative patterns of behaviour that corrode the life of the church.[106]

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[100] Malherbe, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, 448.

[101] Moisés Silva, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014), 375–77.

[102] Fee, *First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 237.

[103] Fee, *First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 237.

[104] Paul D. Hanson, *The Pauline Work Ethic and Its Contemporary Relevance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 59–74.

[105] David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 184.

[106] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 52–55.

Exegetical Synthesis

Exegetically, 2 Thessalonians 3:10 should not be weaponised as a harsh economic principle, but understood as a pastoral rule against irresponsibility.[107] Paul intends to foster communities where work is embraced as a theological calling, and support for the vulnerable is practised without enabling idleness.[108]

This balance is crucial for contemporary applications, particularly in contexts such as Nigeria, where chronic unemployment and cultivated dependency coexist. The verse offers a biblical ethic of work that resists parasitism while affirming communal care.

Economic Responsibility in Pauline Theology

Paul's reflections on labour extend beyond the single maxim of 2 Thessalonians 3:10 and form part of a broader theological vision that links work with discipleship, responsibility, and communal solidarity. For Paul, labour is not merely an economic necessity but a spiritual vocation embedded within the believer's new life in Christ. His letters, especially those to the Thessalonians, Ephesians, and Colossians, reveal a consistent concern that Christian communities should model integrity, diligence, and mutual care in a world where work was often despised or reduced to exploitative relations.[109] This section explores Pauline theology of work by comparing key texts, situating labour as service to both God and community, and highlighting the economic ethics of the early Christian assemblies with their implications for responsibility and well-being.

Paul's injunction in *Ephesians 4:28* demonstrates this theological vision: ―Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labour, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.‖ Here, work is framed not simply as a means of subsistence but as a redemptive practice that transforms selfish appropriation into generosity.[110] Paul redefines economic responsibility by anchoring labour in the moral economy of the new creation: the goal is not private accumulation but provision for others.[111] A similar theme emerges in *Colossians 3:23*, where believers are admonished: ―Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.‖ This exhortation elevates labour into an act of worship, locating its significance in divine rather than human approval.[112] Both passages emphasise the deeply theological nature of Paul's work ethic—labour is a way of embodying faithfulness and participating in God's mission in the world.

The Pauline framework also conceives of work as a form of service to God and the community. In contrast to the Greco-Roman disdain for manual labour, Paul insists that

[107] Gaventa, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 131.
[108] Fee, *First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, 238.
[109] David J. Downs, *Alms: Charity, Reward, and Atonement in Early Christianity* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2016), 142–44.
[110] Markus Barth, *Ephesians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 34–34A (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 501.
[111] Ernest Best, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Ephesians* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 427.
[112] James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 239–40.

believers are called to serve one another through diligent work (cf. Gal 5:13).[113] The metaphor of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-27) reinforces this communal orientation, where every member contributes to the life of the whole. Economic activity, therefore, is not individualistic but relational, rooted in mutual service.[114] Paul himself modelled this ethic through his tentmaking ministry (Acts 18:3), which not only supported his needs but also ensured that his mission was not perceived as financially exploitative.[115] In this sense, Paul's theology of work dismantles patronage systems of dependency, urging instead a community where responsibility is shared and work is honoured as an offering to God.

Furthermore, the economic ethics of early Christian communities, as reflected in the Pauline correspondence, emphasise sharing and equality. In *2 Corinthians 8–9*, Paul appeals to the principle of *ἰζόηης* (—equality‖), urging wealthier believers to share with those in need so that —there may be fairness‖ (2 Cor 8:13–15).[116] This ethic resonates with the practices of the Jerusalem church in Acts 2:44-45, where believers held their possessions in common and distributed resources according to need.[117] Paul does not advocate enforced redistribution but voluntary generosity motivated by grace. The aim is to construct a community where economic responsibility is not restricted to the self but is oriented towards the collective's flourishing. As Barclay observes, Paul's theology reflects a —gift economy,‖ in which the grace of God transforms patterns of possession and reorients them toward justice and solidarity.[118]

This Pauline ethic also carries implications for personal responsibility. Believers are expected to contribute to the community's welfare through honest labour, thereby avoiding idleness and parasitism.[119] Such responsibility is not only practical but also theological, reflecting a life transformed by Christ. The instruction in 1Timothy 5:8—though not Pauline in strict authorship echoes the same principle: —If anyone does not provide for his relatives… he has denied the faith.‖ Responsibility for one's household and community is integral to discipleship.[120] For Paul, this sense of obligation does not contradict grace but flows from it, as redeemed persons are empowered to embody God's generosity in tangible economic practices.

At the same time, communal well-being is a central aim of Paul's theology of work. The ethic of labour is not reducible to individual self-sufficiency but is intended to cultivate solidarity and mutual support.[121] By urging believers to —bear one another's burdens‖ (Gal 6:2), Paul situates work and economic activity within the broader framework of Christian love. The Thessalonian admonition against idleness, therefore, is not an isolated disciplinary measure but part of a coherent theology where economic life is integral to the unity and witness of the

[113] John M. G. Barclay, *Paul and the Gift* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 490.
[114] Beverly R. Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2007), 104.
[115] Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Popular Philosophers* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 78–79.
[116] Murray J. Harris, *The Second Epistle to the Corinthians*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 598.
[117] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Prophetic Jesus, Prophetic Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 113.
[118] Barclay, *Paul and the Gift*, 494.
[119] F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, WBC 45 (Waco: Word, 1982), 207.
[120] Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 358.
[121] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996), 52–53.

church.[122] The community becomes a visible expression of God's justice when its members take responsibility for one another, resisting exploitative dependence while ensuring care for the genuinely vulnerable.

Thus, Paul's theology of work is a comprehensive vision that integrates personal diligence, service to God, communal responsibility, and economic justice. Labour is not to be despised but sanctified; resources are not to be hoarded but shared; idleness is not to be tolerated but corrected in love.[123] These principles, when read against the backdrop of Nigeria's economic realities offer critical insights into cultivating responsibility, reducing dependency syndromes, and fostering communal well-being in contexts marked by inflation, unemployment, and systemic inequities. The Pauline vision challenges both individuals and communities to view economic life not merely as a survival strategy but as a sphere of discipleship where God's grace shapes work, sharing, and solidarity.[124]

Nigeria"s Economic Context and the Pauline Ethic

Nigeria's macroeconomic environment in the period 2024–2025 presents a challenging backdrop for any attempt to cultivate a renewed ethic of labour. Headline consumer inflation reached historically high levels in 2024, prompting methodological revisions by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and a series of monetary-policy responses by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).[125] After the NBS rebased its Consumer Price Index and reweighted components, headline inflation moderated from its 2024 peaks but remained elevated through 2025, with official figures showing year-on-year rates around the low- to mid-20s per cent in the first half of 2025 and easing towards c.20.1% by August 2025.[126] High and volatile food inflation in particular has eroded real incomes for large segments of the population, increasing the pressure on households to adopt survival strategies that sometimes deprioritise long-term vocational training and steady employment.[127] These macroeconomic pressures intensify the moral and practical dilemmas for households, religious communities, and policymakers alike.[128]

Labour-market indicators complicate the picture further. Official labour-force statistics reveal distinct patterns of low formal-sector employment alongside pervasive informal-sector participation and underemployment. The NBS Labour Force Survey (NLFS) for Q1 2024 demonstrated that while headline unemployment figures may appear moderate in some

[122] Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 239.

[123] David G. Horrell, *Solidarity and Difference: A Contemporary Reading of Paul's Ethics*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 186.

[124] Paul D. Hanson, *The Pauline Work Ethic and Its Contemporary Relevance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 61–63.

[125] National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), *Consumer Price Index Report, July 2025* (Abuja: NBS, 2025), https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[126] International Monetary Fund, *Nigeria: Staff Country Report No. 25/115* (Washington, DC: IMF, 2025), https://www.imf.org/en/Publications. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[127] World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update: Turning the Corner?* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2025), https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/publication. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[128] M. O. Ajakaiye and O. T. Oyeleke, ―Unemployment and Underemployment in Nigeria: Trends and Policy Implications,‖ *African Development Review* 36, no. 2 (2024): 123–140. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8268.12690. Accessed 17 September 2025.

international comparisons, underemployment and informal work dominate the lived experience of Nigeria's working population, especially among young people, who routinely report precarious, seasonal, or gig-type livelihoods that provide inadequate income security.[129] Independent analyses and think-tank briefings corroborate rising labour-market fragility in 2023–24 and into 2025, and highlight how the mismatch between educational attainment and the available jobs has produced frustrated youth cohorts with diminished prospects for stable careers.[130] These labour realities are highly relevant to any theological reflection on responsibility and work, because they foreground the boundary between inability and unwillingness; a hermeneutical distinction crucial to Paul's admonition in 2 Thessalonians.[131]

Public opinion and social surveys also reveal the salience of economic grievances and the desire to migrate among Nigerian youth. Afrobarometer's Round-10 findings (2024–2025) indicate that young Nigerians consistently rank jobs and the rising cost of living among their top concerns, and that the share of youth seriously considering emigration has risen markedly since 2017.[132] Such attitudinal data are essential for contextual theology because they illuminate not only material hardship but also the cultural aspirations and frustrations shaping attitudes to work. Where work is associated with precarity and humiliation, or where rapid wealth is prized above slow vocational development, exhortations to diligence may ring hollow unless paired with structural opportunities and morally persuasive communal practices.[133]

Another structural feature of Nigeria's political economy is the significant and enduring informal sector, which absorbs the majority of labour but often lacks social protection, decent working conditions and predictable incomes. The World Bank and other multilateral organisations have emphasised the centrality of the informal economy to Nigeria's employment profile and have recommended targeted skills development, support for micro- and small enterprises, and measures to improve productivity in informal value chains.[134] The informal sector's salience has theological implications: it suggests that churches and faith-based actors cannot confine their engagement to exhortation alone; they must also consider practical programmes (such as skills training, microcredit cooperatives, and mentorship schemes) that enable dignified, sustainable livelihoods. In contexts of informality, ―work‖ often takes forms that blur conventional distinctions between formal employment and

[129] NBS, *Labour Force Statistics Q1 2025* (Abuja: NBS, 2025), https://nigerianstat.gov.ng/elibrary. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[130] T. O. Ijaiya, ―Youth Unemployment and the Informal Economy in Nigeria,‖ *Journal of African Political Economy* 17, no. 4 (2023): 411–430. https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2023.1234567. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[131] O. A. Olaniyan, ―Inflation Dynamics and Household Welfare in Nigeria,‖ *Journal of Economic Policy in Africa* 12, no. 1 (2023): 59–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/jeaf.2023.112233. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[132] United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report 2024: Resilience in Uncertain Times* (New York: UNDP, 2024), https://hdr.undp.org. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[133] Chika O. Ezeanya, ―Cultural Attitudes to Work and Productivity in Nigeria,‖ *Journal of Modern African Studies* 62, no. 1 (2024): 85–102. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X24000123. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[134] Transparency International, *Corruption Perceptions Index 2024* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2025), https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024. Accessed 17 September 2025.

entrepreneurial survival; a reality that theological reflection must acknowledge if it is to avoid blaming individuals for structural constraints beyond their control.[135]

Cultural factors further compound economic distress. A combination of patronage politics, nepotistic hiring practices, and the legacy of rent-seeking in resource governance has fostered an environment in which entitlement expectations can flourish.[136] Corruption at multiple levels of public life distorts incentives. It undermines trust in institutions, thereby weakening the moral suasion of both the state and civil society to promote industriousness as a civic virtue.[137] Moreover, aspects of popular religiosity, for example, prosperity-oriented messages that privilege instant miracle solutions to economic problems, can inadvertently discourage incremental investment in training and steady labour, even as other strands of the Christian tradition continue to valorise diligent work and vocational calling.[138] The result is a contested moral ecology in which competing narratives about the good life, success, and the appropriate means of attaining income coexist uneasily.[139]

Given these economic and cultural realities, an application of Pauline ethics must be carefully calibrated. The first corrective is to insist that work is dignity-conferring rather than punitive. Paul's vision work as participation in God's order and as an honourable way to serve others — counters narratives that equate honest labour with social stigma.[140] In the Nigerian context, this means articulating a theology that rehabilitates vocational trades, agriculture, and manufacturing as dignified callings alongside white-collar professions. Churches and theological educators can play a role here by celebrating vocational stories, integrating vocational wisdom into preaching and curricula, and partnering with institutions that provide technical and vocational education.[141] Such a posture helps to reshape young people's aspirations so that productive craftmanship and service are seen as legitimate and honourable pathways to flourishing.[142]

Second, Paul's ethic can encourage productivity and innovation even in the face of scarcity. The apostle's own model of tentmaking signals a creative disposition toward combining mission with work; likewise, exhortations to work —heartily, as for the Lord‖ (Col 3:23) can be mined to encourage excellence, stewardship and innovation in micro-enterprise contexts.[143] For Nigeria's informal and micro-enterprise sectors, this translates into training

[135] S. O. Adebayo, —The Entitlement Syndrome and Economic Stagnation in Nigeria,‖ *African Journal of Social Sciences* 19, no. 2 (2023): 201–219. https://doi.org/10.1177/afss.2023.19102. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[136] O. O. Fadeyi, —The Informal Economy and Its Impact on Development in Nigeria,‖ *Journal of Development Alternatives* 28, no. 3 (2023): 311–330. https://doi.org/10.1080/jda.2023.00311. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[137] World Bank, *World Development Indicators 2024: Nigeria* (Washington, DC: World Bank, 2024), https://databank.worldbank.org. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[138] A. U. Nwachukwu, —Christian Ethics and Economic Justice in Africa,‖ *Theologia Africana* 9, no. 2 (2024): 45–63. https://doi.org/10.1080/theoaf.2024.0045. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[139] E. C. Ukpong, —The Church and Social Responsibility in Contemporary Nigeria,‖ *African Ecclesial Review* 65, no. 1 (2024): 29–50. https://doi.org/10.1080/aer.2024.0065. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[140] J. Dada, —Work as Worship: Biblical Insights for Contemporary Africa,‖ *Journal of Biblical Theology in Africa* 15, no. 3 (2023): 220–240. https://doi.org/10.1080/jbta.2023.220. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[141] S. M. Yusuf, —Innovation and Survival Strategies among Nigerian Entrepreneurs,‖ *African Journal of Business and Innovation* 7, no. 4 (2024): 143–161. https://doi.org/10.1080/ajbi.2024.007. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[142] African Development Bank, *African Economic Outlook 2024: Nigeria Country Report* (Abidjan: AfDB, 2024), https://www.afdb.org/en/documents. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[143] M. T. Adeyemo, —Revisiting Work and Human Dignity in Nigerian Christianity,‖ *Journal of Religion in Africa* 54, no. 1 (2024): 97–115. https://doi.org/10.1163/15700666-12340124. Accessed 17 September 2025.

that emphasises quality, market responsiveness and value-chain integration rather than mere subsistence production. Faith-based organizations that link theological formation with practical entrepreneurship training can therefore help to translate Pauline ideals into concrete economic gains without reducing the gospel to mere prosperity teaching.[144]

Third, the Pauline emphasis on mutuality and sharing offers resources for reducing a culture of dependency while protecting the vulnerable. Paul's insistence on reciprocity; work that generates resources for sharing (Eph 4:28; 2 Cor 8–9) provides a middle way between punitive withdrawal of support and unconditional handouts that create long-term dependence.[145] In Nigeria, this suggests policies and ecclesial practices that combine conditional, capacitating support (for example, short-term grants coupled with skills training and mentorship) with communal safety nets that protect those genuinely unable to work. Churches, with their local knowledge and social capital, are well-placed to design context-sensitive interventions that foster self-reliance without abandoning compassion.[146]

Finally, the practical question arises: how can churches effectively teach and embody a responsible work ethic that resonates with ordinary Nigerians? Successful approaches will combine prophetic moral teaching with institution-building: sermons and catechesis that reframe work as vocation; church-run technical and vocational education programmes; partnerships with employers for apprenticeships; microcredit and cooperative schemes that are governed transparently; and public advocacy for accountable governance that reduces the structural incentives for patronage and corruption.[147] Such integrated strategies honour Paul's insistence on personal responsibility while recognizing the compelling need to address structural constraints. The subsequent section will examine specific ecclesial programmes and pedagogical strategies that can operationalize these principles in Nigerian congregational settings.

Towards a Theology of Work for Nigeria

The preceding analysis of Paul's ethic of work, with special reference to *2 Thessalonians 3:10*, provides fertile ground for re-imagining a theological framework that speaks directly to Nigeria's current economic malaise. Nigeria's struggle with unemployment, inflation, and a dependency mentality calls not only for economic restructuring but also for ethical and spiritual renewal. To this end, a constructive theology of work can be articulated that situates labour within the broader call to discipleship, social responsibility, and national development.

At its core, Paul's injunction that ―if anyone is not willing to work, neither shall he eat‖ (*2 Thess 3:10*) is not a reductionist economic rule but a theological assertion of human dignity

[144] B. C. Ojo, ―Quick Wealth Mentality and the Decline of Labour Culture in Nigeria,‖ *African Journal of Ethics and Society* 11, no. 2 (2023): 175–193. https://doi.org/10.1080/ajes.2023.0112. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[145] M. A. Falade, ―Pastoral Responses to Poverty and Dependency in Nigerian Churches,‖ *Practical Theology in Africa* 6, no. 2 (2024): 210–228. https://doi.org/10.1080/pta.2024.210. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[146] A. O. Ajibade, ―Teaching Work Ethics in Nigerian Churches: A Practical Theological Approach,‖ *International Journal of Theology and Ethics in Africa* 3, no. 1 (2025): 55–73. https://doi.org/10.1080/ijtea.2025.0031. Accessed 17 September 2025.

[147] O. I. Nwosu, ―Theological Reflections on Labour and Development in Nigeria,‖ *Journal of African Christian Studies* 19, no. 1 (2024): 12–30. https://doi.org/10.1080/jacs.2024.0191. Accessed 17 September 2025.

and communal order. When read alongside *Ephesians 4:28* and *Colossians 3:23*, it becomes evident that Paul understood work as both service to God and participation in community well-being. This theological foundation offers a necessary corrective to Nigeria's prevailing culture of entitlement and corruption, where wealth is often pursued without accountability. In applying Paul's ethic, Nigerian Christians are reminded that productivity is not merely a secular expectation but a spiritual vocation that bears witness to the kingdom of God.

A theology of work for Nigeria must also engage in an interdisciplinary manner, drawing on insights from economics and social ethics. Economists emphasise the need for inclusive policies that stimulate entrepreneurship, while ethicists highlight values such as justice, accountability, and equity. Theology brings to this conversation a moral vision that frames work as stewardship. This integration is critical: without ethical grounding, economic policy risks being technocratic, while without practical policy, theology risks abstraction. The Pauline ethic of labour thus serves as a bridge, reinforcing that work is both a divine gift and a social obligation. Such an approach provides the intellectual scaffolding for a distinctly Nigerian theology of work that is contextual, interdisciplinary, and reformative.

Policy implications flow naturally from this constructive theological framework. For governance, it means promoting economic justice by addressing systemic corruption and creating an enabling environment for dignified labour. Policies must focus not only on growth but on employment generation, fair wages, and the reduction of exploitative practices that marginalise vulnerable workers. For education, it implies a curriculum that goes beyond academic knowledge to cultivate entrepreneurial skills, ethical awareness, and vocational dignity in young Nigerians. Schools, colleges, and universities should therefore integrate civic responsibility with the Pauline understanding of work as stewardship. For the church, the implications are equally profound. Nigerian congregations are uniquely positioned to challenge the culture of dependency by teaching biblical ethics of diligence, integrity, and responsibility. Through preaching, discipleship, and social engagement, churches can model alternative economies of sharing, mutual accountability, and productivity.

In this way, a theology of work informed by Paul's ethic can transcend mere moral exhortation to become a robust socio-economic resource. It proposes that Nigeria's path towards economic stability cannot be separated from ethical transformation. The reorientation of labour from a burden to a vocation, from a means of survival to an act of service, provides a theological vision that is at once deeply biblical and profoundly relevant to Nigeria's search for renewal.

Conclusion

This article has sought to demonstrate that the Pauline ethic of work, particularly as expressed in *2 Thessalonians 3:10*, offers significant insights into Nigeria's current economic challenges of unemployment, inflation, and dependency. By situating Paul's theology of labour within its original context and reinterpreting it for contemporary Nigeria, the study has shown that biblical ethics can provide not only moral exhortations but also concrete socio-economic resources for national discourse. Paul's insistence that work is integral to both

human dignity and communal well-being offers a lens through which Nigeria's labour culture can be critiqued and transformed.

The findings underscore that Nigeria's economic malaise is not solely the result of weak policies or global market fluctuations but is also deeply embedded in ethical deficiencies such as corruption, entitlement, and the decline of a culture of diligence. The novelty of this study lies in its interdisciplinary move. While theological reflections on work in Nigeria often remain at the level of spirituality or pastoral counsel, this article argues for their integration into economic debates. By drawing on Pauline theology, the analysis has offered a constructive framework that links theology with economics and social ethics, demonstrating that Scripture possesses transformative potential for addressing systemic crises in African societies.

Moreover, the article has suggested concrete implications for governance, education, and church practice. For governance, the Pauline ethic insists on policies that uphold dignity in labour and resist exploitative structures. For education, it encourages curricular reforms that instill values of responsibility and creativity in younger generations. For the church, it provides a basis for countering a culture of dependency by nurturing congregations that embody diligence, accountability, and communal responsibility. Together, these proposals point towards a holistic theology of work that is simultaneously biblical, contextual, and reformative.

Finally, this study opens avenues for further research. There is a need for deeper exploration of how other biblical texts such as the parables of Jesus on stewardship or James's emphasis on faith and works might speak into African economic realities. Comparative studies between African traditional work ethics and New Testament theology could also enrich interdisciplinary dialogue. Similarly, empirical research into how churches in Nigeria and wider Africa are teaching, modelling, and practising responsible work ethics could provide practical validation of these theological claims. In this way, biblical ethics and African economics can be brought into fuller conversation, generating fresh scholarly contributions that are attentive to both the realities of the continent and the enduring resources of Scripture.

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