

PAUL'S TEACHING ON HARDWORK (2 THESS 3:6-15) VIS-À-VIS THE IMPACT OF PROSPERITY GOSPEL ON THE YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Noticing the unique challenge posed by those who decided to adopt an idle lifestyle probably because of their confused eschatology, the apostle Paul emphasised the importance of hardwork as a recipe to success. Today, like the Thessalonians, the face of Christianity appears to be changing since prosperity preachers mounted the centre stage in Nigeria. This gospel is perceived to encourage laziness among youths who tend to believe that when they sow and are asked to receive in faith, a miracle of sort would lay prosperity on their laps without having to work. The true gospel is stripped of its focus and reduced to a means by which everyone can experience his or her best life. What the Prosperity gospel presents is a mirage: many adherents are worse off materially because of a faith that lacks sound biblical basis. God prospers people through the work of their hands. This paper shall undertake an exegetical analysis of the text of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 with a view to assessing the impact of prosperity gospel on the youths in Nigeria. Hence, if we are to produce quality youths and future leaders, we must encourage them to attain success through hard-work, faithfulness and diligence.

Key Words: Hardwork, Youth, Prosperity Gospel

Introduction

Christianity began as a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. When it went to Athens, it became a philosophy. When it went to Rome, it became an organization. When it went to Europe, it became a culture. When it went to America, it became a business. What is it in Nigeria today? The face of Christianity appears to be changing since prosperity preachers mounted the centre stage in Nigeria. This gospel asserts that believers have the right to the blessings of health and wealth and that they can obtain these blessings through positive confessions of faith and the 'sowing of seeds' through the faithful payments of 'tithes and offerings.' The extent of material acquisition and well-being is often equated with God's approval. The prosperity protagonists are reiterating that it is the will of God for his children to be emancipated from the

spirit and shackles of poverty to a life of cross-less abundance of wealth and dominion in Christ because they are worshipping a rich God.¹

This kind of message presents a strong pull to most youths who are deceived into believing that by merely trusting God with positive confession, it will bring about effortless abundance of wealth and health miraculously. But the experience of this type of teaching has shown that the Gospel of Jesus Christ does not promise prosperity hard work and sacrifice.² This gospel is perceived to encourage laziness among some of the youths who tend to believe that when they sow and are asked to receive in faith, a miracle of sort would lay prosperity on their laps without having to work. What the Prosperity gospel presents is a mirage: many adherents are worse off materially because of a faith that lacks sound biblical basis. God prospers people through the work of their hands. This paper shall undertake an exegetical analysis of the text of 2 Thess 3:6-15 with a view to assessing the impact of prosperity gospel on the youths in Nigeria. Hence, if we are to produce quality youths and future leaders, we must encourage them to attain success through hardwork, faithfulness and diligence.³

Literary Context of 2 Thess 3:6-15

The second epistle to the Thessalonians was written in large part to address a faulty understanding of the day of the Lord. After the greeting (1:1-2) and an opening prayer of thanksgiving designed to encouraged the believers to persevere in the midst of persecution (1:3-12), Paul begins to correct their perception of the day of the Lord (2:1-17) concluding the section with a prayer for his readers (2:13-17). In the immediate context of the passage under consideration, Paul has just given an exhortation to the Thessalonians to pray for his missionary team (3:1-5). Paul then transitions to two matters of concern: the conduct of certain disorderly believers and the need for Church discipline of these disorderly brothers (3:6-15). Immediately follows Paul's exhortation

¹ Hilary Achunike, "Televangelism and the Survival of Churches in Nigeria, 1970-2000" in Achunike, H. C. (ed.). *Evangelization in the Third Millennium: A Contemporary Analysis*, Onitsha: Africana-Feb. Publishers, 2002, 64-89.

² Isidore Igwegbe, "Pentecostalism - A sign of Times" in Nnamani, A.G. (ed.) *The New Religious Movements: Pentecostalism in Perspective*. Benin City: Ava Publishers, 2007, 212-234.

³ Femi Adeleye, *Preachers of a Different Gospel*, Bukuru: ACTS Bookshop, 2007, 3.

concerning the Thessalonians' conduct. Paul concludes the book with a prayer, greeting, and benediction (3:16-17).

The postpositive *de* (now) and Paul's use of *adelphoi* (brothers) in 3:6 mark the transition between the exhortation regarding prayer and his exhortation regarding disorderly brothers in 3:6-15.⁴ The *de* (now) in 3:16 reveals another transition from Paul's exhortation to his closing prayer. In between 3:5 and 3:16 he gives the believers a command as to how they are to respond to those in the Church who are disorderly.

Text of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

⁶ Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep away from any brother who is living in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ we did not eat any one's bread without paying, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not burden any of you. ⁹ It was not because we have not that right, but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: If anyone will not work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work in quietness and to earn their own living. ¹³ Brethren, do not be weary in well-doing. ¹⁴ If any one refuses to obey what we say in this letter, note that man, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not look on him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Exegetical Analysis

Verse 6:

Paul had prepared his readers for this command when he mentioned his confidence in the Thessalonians' obedience to his commands in verse 4, but makes the command explicit here in verse 6.⁵ Though Paul addressed this exhortation to those he calls "brothers," he still utilizes strong language to emphasize that he is issuing a command and not merely giving a

⁴ Ernst Best, *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*: London: Billing and Sons, 1972, 332.

⁵ Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. The Anchor Bible. Doubleday: New York. 2000, 449.

suggestion.⁶*Parangellomen* (we command) which is used in the text, was also used in reference to military orders.⁷

Some scholars have raised the possibility that Paul is not addressing all of the Thessalonians in this section but is instead, by his use of *adelphoi* (brothers), addressing a particular sub-group of the Thessalonians – the Christian workers in the Church. These Christian workers would be the ones primarily responsible for handling the discipline of the Church and would also be the ones who could follow Paul's example of working to support himself rather than living off of the support of others (3:7-9).⁸ However, the term itself is often used to refer to all believers, and there is no indication here that Paul is using it in a more limited sense.⁹

The addition of *en onomati tou kuriou {hemon} Iesou Christou* (in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ) accentuates the high level of concern Paul had in regard to this matter. Paul elsewhere utilizes this phrase in conjunction with strong commands regarding the conduct of the community (cf. 1 Cor 5:4).¹⁰ The phrase also invokes the authority of the one named, reiterating that those who disobey this command are not simply ignoring what Paul thinks but are ignoring Jesus Christ Himself. Paul may have emphasized that disobeying him was the same as disobeying the Lord because he recognized that the Thessalonians might be hesitant to enact discipline against the disorderly brothers, perhaps even considering the offense to be insignificant.¹¹

The infinitive, *stellesthai* (keep away), follows a verb of communication and is an infinitive of indirect discourse. It provides the specific command that Paul issues in this verse. The word appears to convey the idea of withdrawal, avoidance, or

⁶ Morris 448.

⁷ Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*. Revised edition. The New International Commentary on the New Testament. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991, 252.

⁸ F.F Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary. Waco. TX: Word. 1982, 204.

⁹ Michael D. Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*. The New American Commentary, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995, 272

¹⁰ Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistle to the Thessalonians*. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990, 281.

¹¹ Colin R. Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica: Situating 1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Society for New Testament Studies Monograph Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 167.

keeping away. In the light of 3:14 and 15, Paul's concern is that the others in the community would not be contaminated by the disobedient brother's actions and that this erring brother would recognize that the level of fellowship among believers is linked to the level of harmony they enjoy.¹²

Paul identifies those from whom the Thessalonians are to withdraw fellowship with two descriptions at the end of the verse. His use of *pantos adelphou* (any brother) emphasizes that he is referring to fellow believers and also makes his statement inclusive. Paul describes the actions of these brothers with the phrase *ataktos periparountos* (who is walking in idleness). The exact meaning of *ataktos* (idleness) can be difficult to ascertain. It primarily carries the sense of disorderliness or a failure to fulfil one's duties. The use of *peripatountos* (who is walking) in the present tense indicates that this is not simply an occasional fault but an on-going practice.¹³ Paul continues to describe the conduct of these disorderly brothers by the phrase *me kata ten paradosin en parelabosan par hemon* (not in according with the tradition that you received from us). The singular of *paradosin* (tradition) appears to be a collective singular, with more than one teaching in view.¹⁴

Verses 7-9:

The *gar* (for) at the beginning of verse 7 introduces the first reason for the command to withdraw from the disorderly. Paul appeals to the readers' first-hand knowledge of what he is about to write by utilizing the emphatic pronoun *autoi* (yourselves) and *oidate* (you know). They had personally observed him and his missionary party and knew they had provided an example which the Thessalonian believers were obligated to follow. Paul's use of *ouk ētaktēsamen* (we were not idle) to describe their work is a clear contrast to the disorderly brothers mentioned in verse 6.

Paul clarifies how his company was not disorderly by reminding the Thessalonians that his party had laboured in order to provide for their needs. The phrase *arton ephagomen* (eat bread) is an idiom that refers to eating food in

¹² Morris, *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 253.

¹³ Morris, 253.

¹⁴ there is a textual variant related to *paralabosan* (They received).

general and does not necessarily include every aspect of a person's life.¹⁵ However, in this context, it must likely refer to the supply of needs in general. The LXX uses the same words in Gen 3:19 to indicate man's need to work hard in order to provide for his necessities.¹⁶

The grammatical construction of the beginning of verse 9 is elliptical, with the ESV supplying "it was" in order to give the proper sense in English. Paul first clarifies his purpose in working to support himself in Thessalonica with a denial. The phrase (not because we do not have that right) reflects Jesus' teaching in Matt 10:9 and Luke 10:7-8 as well as Paul's teaching in 1 Cor 9:14.¹⁷ As a minister of the gospel, Paul had a right to be supported by the Thessalonians for his spiritual service to them. However, Paul gave up that right in order to provide the Thessalonians with an example of hard work.

Verse 10:

Paul introduces the second reason for his command to withdraw from the disorderly brothers with another *gar* (for) in verse 10. Paul taught the necessity of working not only through his example but also through a specific command. The *hote* (when) introduces a temporal clause, showing that the command was given during Paul's time in Thessalonica. The verb *parēngelomen* (we would give this command) is imperfect, indicating that the command was given on more than one occasion. Thus, the disorderly were not simply ignorant but were wilfully disobedient.¹⁸

The command itself (if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat), is similar to other idioms of the day. However, its emphasis on a person's unwillingness to work and not simply whether or not a person does work seems to be unique to Paul.¹⁹ It is likely that Paul formed this command from the teaching in Gen 2:15-16 and 3:17-19 that emphasizes the necessity of working in order to provide for

¹⁵ Robert L. Thomas, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. In vol. 11 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin. Grand Rapids: Zondervan. 1981, 334.

¹⁶ Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 278.

¹⁷ Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 206.

¹⁸ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*. The pillar New Testament Commentary, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002, 349.

¹⁹ Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica*, 169.

one's needs.²⁰ Although refusing food to the wilfully unemployed may seem like an overly harsh punishment, the underlying purpose is less punitive and more motivational in nature. It was intended to be an incentive for believers to work.²¹

Verse 11:

The third reason for the command is introduced by another *gar* at the beginning of verse 11. Paul had received a report; perhaps from the bearer of 1 Thessalonians, that there were members of the Thessalonian congregation who were disorderly, indicated by his phrase *en humin* (among you). Therefore, Paul is not providing general instruction but is addressing a specific problem within the Church. Paul further identifies those who *peripatountas ataktōs* (walk in idleness) as *mēden ergazomenous alla periergazomenous*. The ESV tries to capture the play on words with its translation "not busy at work, but busy bodies." These disorderly brothers were not merely refusing to work but were also wrongfully interfering in the lives of others.

Verse 12:

Paul moves from the explanation for his command to his exhortation for the believers. The *de* marks this transition, and introduces his first instruction for those who were disorderly. The compounding of verbs with both *parangellomen* (we command) and *parakaloumen* (we encourage) is likely used to emphasize the importance of what Paul is saying, rather than issuing this instruction *en onomati tou kuriou Iesou Christou* (in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ). Thus, Paul points to the union they share in Jesus Christ instead of simply pushing his own apostolic authority on them. He reminds these disorderly individuals that they stand together as brothers in the Lord.²²

The *hina* (to) introduces the command itself which is similar to Paul's exhortation in 1 Thess 4:11, "to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with

²⁰ M.J.J. Menken, "Paradise Regained or Still Lost? Eschatology and Disorderly Behaviour in 2 Thessalonians." *New Testament Studies*, 38 (1992): 271-289.

²¹ Martin, 1, 2 Thessalonians, 281.

²² Green, 350.

your hands.” Paul answers both their failure to work and their meddling in the affairs of others with the instruction *meta ēsuchias ergazomenoi* (do their work quietly). The phrase *ton heauton arton esthiosin* (earn their own living), as in verse 8, is an idiom that refers to supplying one’s own needs, with the reflexive pronoun emphasizing that they should not be receiving these supplies as a gift. Based on their union with Christ, Paul instructs the disorderly to work to supply their own needs.²³

Verse 13:

With the adversative *de* (as for), emphatic pronoun *humeis* (you), and the vocative *adelphoi* (brothers), Paul moves from his instruction for the disorderly to the rest of the Church. Specifically, the orderly believers were to continue *kalopoiousantes* (doing good), a word that appears nowhere else in the New Testament. Paul could be referring specifically to treating the disorderly people well and at the same time, encouraging the believers to continue to help those in need who deserve it, rather than being discouraged because of the exploitation of the disorderly. It may even be that Paul did not want the Thessalonians to misunderstand his teaching in verses 6-12 and stop providing help to those in the Church who had genuine need.²⁴ The only problem with this interpretation is that Paul could have used *agathapoiountes* if he wanted or refer to works of benefaction. Perhaps the best explanation of the participle is that it refers to doing what is correct (cf. Gal 6:9; 3 John 6). Which “in this context the correct or noble thing would be to help those who had true need by means of benefaction”²⁵

Verses 14-15:

The *de* marks the transition from Paul’s instruction to the Church in relationship to doing good, specifically helping those with genuine need, to his instruction to the Church in relationship to the disorderly. The command is *semeiousthe* (take

²³ David J. Williams, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. New International Biblical Commentary, Peabody, MA: Hendrickson. 1992, 147.

²⁴ Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. The New Century Bible Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983, 226.

²⁵ Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 353.

note), which in the context, would imply that the congregation marks out these individuals in a public gathering (cf. Rom 16:17, where a similar command is issued).²⁶

The recipients of this public marking and disassociation are those who “do not obey what we say in this letter.” Some limit those who are disobedient to those who still refuse to work even after receiving this letter, specifically disobeying the instruction given in verse 12.²⁷ Though 3:14-15 are clearly tied to Paul’s preceding instruction regarding the disorderly, it does not seem necessary to exclude the rest of the letter, including the exhortations in 2:15 and 3:6. Paul’s “words are general enough to cover disobedience to anything he has said throughout the letter”²⁸

To be removed from the fellowship of the Church would have had a powerful effect upon the disorderly, especially since the believers had already become outcasts within the society at large (cf. 1:4).²⁹ Paul clarifies his command in verse 15 by emphasizing the necessary attitude for the believers as they carry out this discipline. The *kai* is mildly adversative, introducing an additional responsibility in order to avoid a faulty application of the previous instruction.³⁰ The disobedient were not to be treated as someone hostile or viewed with anger. The disobedient Thessalonians should be admonished, but they must still be viewed as fellow believers.³¹

However, shame does not necessarily lead to repentance, and it is improbably that Paul would have encouraged the Church to welcome back an unrepentant brother. This view also fails to explain why Paul would call on the Church to admonish this brother if he is to be treated as a regular member. (3) Another proposal is that the disobedient brothers were not actually to be put out of the Church. When Paul called for the expulsion of the sinning brother in 1 Corinthians 5, the offense was so great that it hurt the testimony of the Church in the community at large; but in Thessalonica the problem had not become that

²⁶ Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 458.

²⁷ Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, 285.

²⁸ Morris, *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 259.

²⁹ Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, 345.

³⁰ Daniel. B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar: Beyond the Basics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.1996, 671-672

³¹ Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica*, 167.

great.³² The reason probably reason for this difference is that the goal of the discipline given here is not as focused on the purity of the community as it is on the repentance of the disobedient.³³ Perhaps the best one can do is to agree with Marshall that “it may be adequate to say that the members of the Church were to avoid making social contacts, but that when contacts arose they were to make use of them for admonition”.³⁴

Reasons for the Refusal to Work

An issue that often arises in relationship to 2 Thess 3:6-15 is the reason the disorderly are refusing to work.

The Parousia: A common explanation is that the Thessalonians’ refusal to work stemmed from their faulty eschatology. There are only two main issues addressed in 2 Thessalonians, and it would be logical to assume that the two issues are connected with each other. These believers incorrectly assumed that the Day of the Lord had already come, or was about to come at any time, which meant work was unnecessary.³⁵ When Paul urges them to work *meta hesuchias* (work in quietness) he is seeking to counter the excitement that had arisen by the supposed nearness of the coming of Christ.³⁶

Paul’s use of *ataktos* indicates that these people were violating a specified “order”. This idea of “order” has ties to an Old Testament concept, so Paul was basing the passage on an Old Testament concept, most likely Gen 3:17-19.³⁷ Paul combats this false idea of the coming of the Day of the Lord by reminding the Thessalonians that certain events must occur before the Day of the Lord (2:3-12) and that he is still following the order of Gen 3:17-19.³⁸

Sociological Explanations: The problem in the Thessalonian Church was that there were certain individuals who were failing to contribute to the common

³² Thomas, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 336.

³³ Nicholl, *From Hope to Despair in Thessalonica*, 167.

³⁴ Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians* 288.

³⁵ Ernst Best, *The First and Second Epistle to the Thessalonians*, 331-335.

³⁶ Ernst Best, 341.

³⁷ Menken, “Paradise Regained or Still Lost? 276-77.

³⁸ Menken, 267.

meals.³⁹ Paul's command in 3:10 *mē de esthietō* (let him not eat) is in the absolute, which shows that it does not refer to a specific meal; and the command must be enforceable, which means the community must have power over the eating of the individuals. Paul's instruction could not be directed to slaves, since they had no choice about their work; would he be dealing with the rich, since they would be able to support themselves without working, so it must be have been manual labourers. Those who had wealth were expected to use it to minister to the need of their fellow believers (e.g. 3:13; Gal 2:10; Eph 4:28). However, some of the poor within the church were abusing this new relationship by refusing to support themselves when they had the ability to do so. Paul commands them to begin working to provide for their needs.

Prosperity Gospel and the Youths in Nigeria

Christianity is a catalyst of social change in any society of the world. It is a social institution that is impacting on the Nigerian society and polity spiritually, morally, socially, culturally, economically, educationally, politically and otherwise. Christianity exemplified in prosperity preaching which is a socio-religious phenomenon is effecting some noticeable changes which have become widespread and worthwhile in modern Nigeria.

Positive Impacts

Against the gloomy picture of the Nigerian economy, prosperity gospel offers the Nigerian masses the promise of quick intervention in human affairs. Prosperity gospel seems to encourage entrepreneurial development in Nigeria. Pentecostalism, over the years seems to have encouraged business enterprises in Nigeria. It has through the prosperity preachers propelled individual Christians as well as organizations to establish and run micro, small and medium size enterprises. By arousing people's consciousness in business through prosperity seminars, prosperity preachers in Nigeria have succeeded in inspiring people to aim higher in their businesses thereby helping in improving their businesses and standard of living.

³⁹ Jewett Robert. "Tenement Churches and Communal Meals in the early Church: The Implications of a Form-Critical Analysis of 2 Thessalonians 3:10." *Biblical Research* 38 (1993): 23-43.

The founding of Christian universities has remarkably contributed in the development of human capital in Nigeria. The provision of more manpower in Nigeria by Nigerian prosperity preachers is of great benefit to national development. As part of poverty alleviation strategy, these institutions have trained, graduated and absorbed many Nigerians already as computer engineers and analyst, cyber cafe managers and attendants, professional Christian drama artists and newscasters among several others in Nigeria.

Prosperity preachers use the language of transformation to drive home certain lessons which at the long run make people to be optimistic about any hopeless challenge in their lives. This language of transformation is what christens the language of faith which has creative power and ability to create and reproduce things after their kind. Prosperity gospel therefore probably responds significantly to African people's social, economic and emotional problems.

Negative Impacts

Despite the aforementioned, no one in the main stream Churches can deny the negative influences of prosperity gospel:

a. Prosperity Gospel Keeps the Youths Perpetually in Poverty

Paul commands the Thessalonian believers to withdraw from those who were not following the apostolic tradition by refusing to work. Some within the congregation had ignored Paul's example and verbal instruction to labour in order to supply for their own needs. They were not doing any work at all but were a disruption in the Church. Paul again urges them to work quietly and supply their own needs.

Some Youths appear to blindly continue to hope against hope, even in their hopelessness. And capitalizing on their hopelessness and sometimes their ignorance, it is noted that the propagators of this exploitative gospel continue to milk young people dry in their desperateness. The prosperity preachers, it is observed continue to use persuasive words to keep their victims imprisoned in their unrealizable dreams. When people fail to achieve their heart desires, they probably look gloomy and frustrated.

b. Prosperity Gospel Enslaves the Youths

The desire to become rich ensnare most youths who have all along been under the dungeon of unemployment, awful lack and suffering.. The way prosperity gospel is preached in Nigeria is indeed captivating but it is also very ensnaring.

Prosperity preachers carefully select their words and preach prosperity powerfully and persuasively.

Being very crafty, they easily convince young people with their well doctored principles of upliftment for the individual. They tend to introduce things which to their minds would be used by young people to be blessed. Because their chief target is getting money which is being eyed from the young people, preachers cash in on their gullibility.

c. Prosperity Gospel Encourages Laziness

Today in our society, prosperity preachers are perceived to encourage laziness among the youths who tend to believe that when they sow and are asked to receive in faith, a miracle of sort would lay prosperity on their laps without having to work.

d. Prosperity Gospel Promotes Materialism Among Youths

There is no denying the fact that prosperity gospel is not completely devoid of aspects which focus on hard work and self-improvement for the individual. But by and large, it seems that prosperity gospel also promotes materialism rather than the sort of fruitfulness described in Psalm 1 as the lot of those who walk in the counsel of the Lord. The negative effect of Pentecostal giving theology is that it promotes a spirit of materialism at the expense of spiritualism. If that is the case, it then means that money and the accumulation of wealth will ultimately preoccupies the attention of preachers and money making may eventually become the end rather than the means of preaching the gospel.

Hard Work: A Panacea for a Successful Life

Christianity is a religion that is heavily characterized with hard work and the same enhances economic and social development and such most probably explains why most Christian nations and states have always been economically and socially developed over ages. Paul in the text under study reinforced the tradition of the church (cf. Gen 3:19, 1 Thess 2:9-12) earlier made known to Thessalonians and commanded that if eventually any shuns to work, the same should be made to starve, that is, no one must be tempted to show him mercy by rendering him help of any sort because such would affect the society adversely in the long run. Idleness is an attitude or character which Christianity frowns at with passion. Citing his own example "while he was with them," he narrated "how he was not idle and earned his living through his own labour though he

had right to depend on them as those who benefited from his spiritual services (1 Cor. 9:8-15). The reason was simple; neither Paul nor his associates would want to be burdens to the new church that had just been established.

While recognizing that working for one's livelihood can be an exhausting proposition as a result of the Fall (Gen 3:17-19), the Old Testament does not portray manual labour/work as intrinsically demeaning, but as rooted in and reflective of God's own creative work. Rabbinic literature reflects a positive attitude toward the necessity of manual labour, even for those devoted to the study of Torah. Paul had already commanded the Thessalonians to work with their hands (1 Thess 4:11).⁴⁰

Conclusion

Today, prosperity gospel has become a major attraction to the youths because it appears to provide them with easy solutions to their problems. With eloquence garnished with emotions, the prosperity preaching pastors promise jobs, security, wealth, health, etc., to the youths and all they need is to have faith. This is a total corruption of the very essence of the gospel. It shifts focus from following Christ for salvation to following him for material blessings. Emphasis has shifted from living a life of virtue (hardwork) to living a life hinged on miracles and magic.

The text under study challenges the youths to work to the degree they are able. It is honourable, reflecting God's intent for humanity in creation. Nobody prospers without hardwork. 'Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall your poverty come like a robber; and your want like an armed man' (cf. Prov 24:33-34). The fact remains that luring people to Christ simply to get rich is both deceitful and deadly. The desire to be rich without having to work has plunged and is still plunging some Youths to ruin and destruction. Notwithstanding, Paul encourages us to continue to help meet the genuine needs of fellow believers and to discipline those who disobeyed his instruction.

⁴⁰ C. G. Montefiore and H. Loewe, *A Rabbinic Anthology*. New York: Schocken, 1974, 40-45.