I. EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, designed to be completed over five days. All three sections must be answered. Section I has four required responses, one of which will instruct the candidate to choose between an option “A” or “B.” A single evaluation of either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U) must be given on the examination as a whole. If any required response is omitted from a section, then the examination must receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

OVERALL EVALUATION

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY (CHECK IF APPLICABLE).

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context [600 words/response]

1. Language of the Text — First Required Response
   The response demonstrates an understanding of the language within ancient Greek literature. Preference for translation is provided.

2. Historical Situation — Second Required Response
   The paper notes a variety of contexts with arguments for and against “not working.” A preference position is provided and supported.

3. Scriptural and Theological Context
   Third Required Response
   The response provides description and delineation of the Paul vs. James perspectives within the Christian community and outside the community, bringing together Paul’s command and James’ vision.
4. Scriptural and Theological Context—continued

Fourth Required Response (A or B) A

This response builds on the prior responses and identifies similarities and differences between teachings of Jesus and Paul.

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation

1. Focus Statement [50 words]

The first sentence is the premise and the second sentence is a clear focus.

2. Supporting the Interpretation [1200 words]

The essay stays true to the focus statement and uses a faithful interpretation.

Section III: Application [2 pages]

This response allows stewardship to sneak into the sermon outline application, without ever using the word stewardship. The response acknowledges the difficulty of hearing the harsh words of the command, and yet is quick to not pass judgement on the listeners. This response turns harsh words into a message of hope and community (team effort) and draws the listener to the present and the future with support for ministry and for each other. The response would be stronger if a more obvious connection to stewardship was made so that there is not guessing about the purpose of this study of 2 Thessalonians and the sermon application. The closing prayer is the AMEN of this application outline and was appreciated by the reader.

Summary Statement (why exam is satisfactory or unsatisfactory)

This response is satisfactory in all sections. Appropriate resources were used, with agreements and disagreements stated, and the paper’s position on the questions provided. To strengthen the response to the context of the exam, there could be an addition of explaining stewardship and “stewardship Sunday.” The reader assumes that the other parts of worship will place the theme of stewardship “front and center” and allow the pastor to use the scripture for reminding the congregation of multiple facets of stewardship.

Comments for CPM:
4. Scriptural and Theological Context --continued

Fourth Required Response (A or B)  A

The paper adequately discusses Jesus' and Paul's messages concerning support for those who are preaching the gospel and discusses how these teachings may be used to support something like a 21st century tent-making ministry. The paper would be stronger if it specifically related these messages to the ministry context of a stewardship campaign.

Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation

1. Focus Statement [50 words]

The focus statement is grounded in the preceding exegetical work, however it lacks a clear statement of how this passage could be used in the ministry context of a stewardship campaign.

2. Supporting the Interpretation [1200 words]

The essay adequately presents an interpretation of the passage which is sufficiently grounded in the previous exegetical work.

Section III: Application [2 pages]

In the first required response - Language of the text – the paper chooses "idleness" as the best translation for ἀτακτέω, however the application outline first develops the interpretation as a military term for soldiers who are undisciplined. The application would be stronger if the current stewardship campaign were more clearly expounded in terms of what this passage is saying about those who decline to faithfully support ministry today.

Summary Statement (why exam is satisfactory or unsatisfactory)

While the paper could more fully develop the relationship between the discoveries from the exegetical work and the current ministry context of stewardship campaign, it does adequately answer the questions posed.

Comments for CPM:
I. EVALUATION OF THIS EXAMINATION. The examination consists of three sections, designed to be completed over five days. All three sections must be answered. Section I has four required responses, one of which will instruct the candidate to choose between an option “A” or “B.” A single evaluation of either “Satisfactory” (S) or “Unsatisfactory” (U) must be given on the examination as a whole. If any required response is omitted from a section, then the examination must receive an overall evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.”

Each examination will be evaluated independently by two readers. If both overall evaluations are “S,” the conveners will record a final evaluation of “Satisfactory.” If both readers evaluate the exam overall as “U,” the exam receives a final evaluation of “Unsatisfactory.” If the two readers disagree in their overall evaluations, the exam will be given to a third reader. The conveners will record the final evaluation based on the two concurring overall evaluations.

II. THIS EVALUATION SHEET GOES TO THE CANDIDATE. Each reader’s comments should represent his or her considered appraisal of the paper. These comments are read by the candidate and the candidate’s Committee on Preparation for Ministry.

S OVERALL EVALUATION

Helen Collins

Reader’s Name (print)

Reader’s Signature

NOTE: COMMENTS INCLUDE A MESSAGE FOR COMMITTEE ON PREPARATION FOR MINISTRY (CHECK IF APPLICABLE).

Section I: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context [600 words/response]

1. Language of the Text -- First Required Response
The paper adequately discusses the possible translations of the term ἀτακτέω and ἀτάκτως, gives supporting evidence and makes a choice of definition based on appropriate criteria. The paper would be stronger if it discussed how the various definitions would apply to the ministry context of a stewardship campaign.

2. Historical Situation -- Second Required Response
The paper does a good job of discussing the issues concerning why some of the people were refusing to work and adequately defends the position that their not working was likely tied to a belief in Christ's imminent return.

3. Scriptural and Theological Context
Third Required Response
The paper does a good job of discussing the differences between responding to those who refuse to work, and caring for the poor and identifies the traditional Jewish context of caring for the 'widows and orphans.'
2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Section 1: Language, Historical Situation, Scriptural and Theological Context

1. First Required Response: Language of the Text

Modern English translations of 2 Thessalonians 3 verses 7 and 11 offer a variety of related interpretations of the Greek words ἀταχτῶ and ἀταχτος: “idleness” (RSV), “undisciplined” (NASB), and “disorderly” (NKJV). The connotations of these words are somewhat similar (both of the Greek words are related to τασσω, a verb meaning “to appoint” or “to order”) but while the choices of “undisciplined” and “disorderly” primarily reflect usages in ancient Greek texts, “idleness” adds to these a decisive meaning taken from the context of 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13.

The choice of “undisciplined” reflects usage of the verb ἀταχτῶ in military contexts, i.e. “to act without discipline” as well as similar usage of the adverb ἀταχτος to describe a “disorderly retreat.” We find both usages in Antiquities of the Jews by Jewish historian and former military commander Flavius Josephus. Although 2 Thessalonians is not written to or written about a military unit, there are aspects of the passage that commend this military metaphor. Like a military commander, Paul appeals to his “rights” (v. 9) and authority as an apostle to indicate that readers should follow his command (v. 6) as though on a (spiritual) battlefield under the apostolic authority of his command.

The choice of “disordered” reflects usage of the adverb ἀταχτος in religious contexts. For example, the Jewish philosopher Philo used it to describe the matter that existed before God.

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1 Kittel, 27.
2 Ibid., 47.
3 Ibid.
spoke and ordered creation.\textsuperscript{4} Similarly, the adjective \textit{ατακτος} appeared in the post-apostolic fathers to indicate that “up to the event of salvation in Christ God permitted men to be driven about in disorderly movement.”\textsuperscript{5} Shifting focus from the disorder of the material world to the interior disorder of the human psyche, the Greek philosopher Plutarch located the source of unrest in the fact that “one part of man’s soul is irrational, subject to passions and errors.”\textsuperscript{6} In both Jewish and Greek conceptions of the world the proper order of human conduct was recognized as divinely appointed. Conversely, human misbehavior was understood as disorder. Thus Demosthenes used the verb \textit{ατακτω} to mean “to set oneself outside the order,” or “to evade one’s obligations.”\textsuperscript{7} The context of 2 Thessalonians 3, then, commends the translation of “disordered” when we read of the obligation of the believers to “work quietly and to earn their own living” and to not “be weary in doing what is right” (2 Thess. 3:12-13).

Perhaps Paul wanted to add the gravity of these military and religious metaphors to his instructions to the believers at Thessalonica. But his ultimate purpose was not simply to criticize them for being generally undisciplined or disordered. Instead, his command was primarily aimed at those who were choosing not to work. This is implied when Paul contrasts the behavior of his missionary band with that of the loafing believers: “we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked day and night, so that we might not burden any of you” (2 Thess 3:7-8). More explicitly, he complains that “some of you are...mere busybodies, not doing any work” (2 Thess 3:11). For this reason, the translation of “idleness” is superior to the rest because it takes into account Paul’s specific critique of the believers at Thessalonica.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{4} Ibid.
\footnote{5} Ibid., 48.
\footnote{6} Ibid., 47.
\footnote{7} Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
2. Second Required Response: Historical Situation

Many interpreters of 2 Thessalonians have connected the expectation of the return of Jesus with the idlers, finding the expectation of the eschaton to be the reason for their idleness. It does stand to reason that if a new heaven and new earth were imminent, or already here, that working would seem like an unnecessary waste of time. Still, commentators have considered other explanations that the idlers were simply lazy, held Hellenistic views about work, or were religious enthusiasts.

The explanation that the idlers were just lazy is appealing because it is simpler than establishing a connection between their eschatological expectation and their refusal to work. In support of this theory, Best offers the observation that already “‘loafing’ was a problem at the time of 1 Th. (cf. 5:14), if not during Paul’s original visit (2 Th. 3:10), before there was any mention of the strange idea of 2:2.”8 Perhaps, as Marshall suggests, the wealthier believers at Thessalonica felt obligated to care for the poor (as happened at Jerusalem), and the poorer believers took advantage of this generosity. Marshall finds this argument appealing because it “explains why the disciplinary measure proposed involves the depriving of such people from food provided by the church.”9 However, this explanation does not take into account the fact that Paul bookended his commands to the Thessalonians with appeals to the authority of Christ (v. 6 and v. 12). If there were no theological or philosophical misinterpretations of Christ underpinning the refusal to work, appeal to the example of Paul’s missionary band would have been sufficient.

If there were philosophical justification for the refusal to work, it might have been grounded in the Hellenistic disdain for manual work. Observing that Paul also defended labor in

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8 Best, 335.
his first letter to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 2:9), Best observes that “unlike the Greeks and Romans the Jews did not look down on working with the hands.”11 However, this is an assumption drawn from a generalization about the culture without anything in the text of 2 Thessalonians to indicate its relevance for this context.

A theological justification for the refusal to work that is not eschatological is Schmithals’ proposal that the idlers were religious enthusiasts more concerned with worshipping in the Spirit than living in the mundane world. According to Best, Schmithals’ argument runs that if the idlers “had been excited by the proximity of the End Paul would have said something about this in vv.6-15 and told them that despite its nearness men must still work.”11 However, as Best is quick to point out, Paul does not mention the Spirit in vv.6-15, either, and thus Schmithals’ proposal is refuted by his own reasoning.

Arguments in favor of the eschatological connection are the strongest, and begin with the bookended appeals to Christ which clearly cast the entire passage on the idlers in theological terms. In addition, Bruce finds an implicit connection between the two themes of the letter in the phrase “for we hear” in v. 11. According to Bruce, the reports of idleness “presumably came to them together with the news about the misunderstanding with regard to the Day of the Lord”12 and thus in Paul’s mind the two problems were connected. Finally, several commentators have observed similarity between the situation in Thessalonica and that in Corinth for which Paul had rebuked “some Corinthians who believed they had reached some kind of eschatological fulfillment and in opposition to them he emphasizes how he worked to support himself.”13

10 Best, 103.
11 Ibid., 335.
12 Bruce, 207.
13 Best, 334-335.
Although this connection is not explicit in 2 Thessalonians, this explanation makes the most sense out of the most information.

3. Third Required Response: Scriptural and Theological Context

Continuing centuries of Jewish concern for the poor, the letter of James declares that pure religion is “to care for orphans and widows in their distress” (James 1:27). Meanwhile, Paul commands that everyone should “earn their own living” (2 Thess 3:10). Otherwise, they “should not eat” (2 Thess 2:10). James and Paul seem as if they might be in contradiction. However, a comparison of the contexts of James and 2 Thessalonians — particularly the wording of 2 Thess 3:10 — reveals that these passages are not really in contradiction and, in fact, together point to a clearer understanding of Christian responsibility for the poor and disadvantaged.

James is probably writing from a Jewish perspective, and widows and orphans are often linked in the Hebrew Scriptures (e.g. Is. 1:17 and Zcch 7:10) as objects of compassion. In Deuteronomy 10:18 Yahweh himself is said to defend the orphans and widows (and even strangers). Perhaps because of the frequent repetition, the phrase “widows and orphans” is sometimes taken as a general designation for “the poor.” James adds a distinctive qualifier, ἐν τῇ δολῇ αὐτῶν, meaning “in their affliction” or “in their tribulation.” By doing so, he draws particular attention to the circumstances that have contributed to poverty; in the case of widows and orphans, the loss of a provider. When James exhorts believers to care for widows and orphans, he is talking about poverty that is due to circumstances beyond the control of the person.

Paul does not disagree with James about this, and his commands in 2 Thessalonians should not be interpreted to mean that Christians should ignore those who are poor. Instead, Paul
adds an important qualifier to the category of person who should not receive food: “anyone unwilling to work” (emphasis added). The Greek word translated as “unwilling” is θέλω meaning “to have something in mind for oneself, to purpose, resolve, will, wish, want, be ready.”\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, Paul is singling out believers who could work but are choosing not to, thus unfairly obliging more industrious members to take care of them and probably causing division and resentment within the community. He is not forbidding widows and orphans – or other poor people – from receiving support from the community.

It is important to observe that Paul is giving instructions about how to act and treat others within a particular Christian community. While he draws a distinction between those who actually deserve support from the community and those who should be working instead, he does not necessarily apply this distinction to the poor in society beyond the bounds of the Christian community. Paul is not suggesting here that Christians, when serving the poor in society, are equipped to make judgments about who is worthy of care and who is not, though such decisions may be possible and even necessary to maintain harmony within an intimate community.

Finally, those who choose not to work are not simply causing an unnecessary burden on the rest of the community; they are actively interfering with the mission of the church. Paul indicates this when he describes them as being περιεργάζομαι or “busybodies.” The full meaning of the Greek is “to be intrusively busy, be a busybody, meddler.”\textsuperscript{15} Thus in addition to draining the community’s resources they are also failing to do anything constructive to contribute to the church’s mission and are then limiting the church’s ability to minister to, among others, the widows and orphans. By heading Paul’s command they will not only provide for

\textsuperscript{14} Baur, 447.
\textsuperscript{15} Baur, 800.
themselves but also make more resources available for helping others and pursuing James’ vision of pure religion.

4. Fourth Required Response: A

In 2 Thess 3:7-9 Paul reminds the believers that his missionary hand had the right to accept bread without paying for it but did not do so and instead worked day and night so as not to be a burden, and that they chose to do this to be an example for the Thessalonians to imitate. Similar principles are found elsewhere in the New Testament, particularly in Jesus’ instructions to the disciples in Matthew 10:8b-10 and in another letter from Paul, 1 Corinthians 9:8-18. An interesting dialogue is created by comparing these ancient passages to each other and to the modern institutional church, in which pastors are often full-time employees with minimum salaries and benefits mandated by the denomination.

Like Paul at Thessalonica, Jesus instructs the disciples against “acquiring gold, silver, or copper for your money belts” (Matt 10:9) because “you received without paying; give without pay” (Matt 10:8). Similarly to Paul, Jesus is talking about imitation – in this case that they should treat others the way God has treated them. In addition, the disciples are also forbidden from bringing necessary supplies, not even a bag, an extra tunic, sandals, or a staff (Matt 10:10). The reason for this is that “the worker is worthy of his support” (Matt 10:10). Thus, Jesus does not mean that they should not have these basic necessities; instead he implies that they should receive them from the people they are serving – which stands in contrast to Paul’s refusal to accept support of any kind.

Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, goes to great rhetorical lengths to justify the right of apostles to be supported by the community. To this extent Paul echoes Jesus’ statement
that "the worker is worthy of his support." After establishing this right, though, Paul declines to act on it. His reasons for this are different than they were at Thessalonica, however. First, Paul is concerned that accepting support will hinder the acceptance and spread of the gospel (1 Cor 9:12) presumably because burdening them in this way would raise questions about Paul’s motive. Second, Paul aims to acquire more heavenly glory by fulfilling his obligation to the gospel – which he is required to do anyway – without accepting payment – which he could accept if he so chose (1 Cor 9:16).

Returning to 2 Thess 3:7-9, we can now see more clearly that Paul’s decision not to accept any support is a valid choice but not an obligation – even Jesus thinks it is good for the disciples to accept support as long as they are not acquiring wealth from those they are serving. Paul chooses to forgo this benefit in exchange for greater glory. The fact that he does not direct the Corinthians to imitate him as he does the Thessalonians implies that this motivation was circumstantial due to the presence of idlers at Thessalonica. He does not on principle expect all ministers to follow this example.

Turning now to contemporary models for supporting Christian ministry, we see that "tent-making"\(^{16}\) models for pastors who work full-time or part-time while pastoring part-time is once again becoming a viable model for some. However, this is not always practical given the expectations on pastors in the modern institutional church to be well-educated managers of the entire organization. Furthermore, they are not itinerant like Paul and must have the resources to maintain some stability. But whatever the model, a theme common to the practice of the apostles in these passages is that while congregations have a responsibility to financially support mission, ministers must be careful to avoid certain consequences. It is difficult to separate money from its

\(^{16}\) A reference to Paul’s occupation as a maker of tents.
power to influence and to protect the independence and integrity of the free gospel of grace from a *quid pro quo* mentality.

**Section II: Presenting a Faithful Interpretation**

1. *Focus Statement*

God's gift of grace is free but it does place obligations on us to ensure that the gospel is preached and that our sisters and brothers are cared for. This means working while we are able to support those who are not as we anticipate the promised return of Christ.

2. *Supporting the Interpretation*

As an ambassador of the kingdom of God, Paul brought the good news of God’s free grace through faith in his Son, Jesus Christ, to the gentiles at Thessalonica. After founding this church, Paul continued to correspond with them and in the second letter he reminded them of this original message with the prayer “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word” (2 Thess 2:16-17). In this letter, he brought the implications of God’s free grace to bear on the daily life of the believers in that community, highlighting in particular the disruption created in the community by certain people. These people were not allowing their hearts to be strengthened in every good work and were, in fact, refusing to work at all.

The words that Paul used to describe these loafers – ατακτω and ατακτος – emphasized the communal nature of the responsibility that they were shirking. These words had military connotations and thus conjured both the urgency and comradery of combat and therefore
encouraged readers and hearers of the letter to reconsider what they were putting at stake by acting as undisciplined as they were. These words are multivalent and in addition to the military context were also associated with various religious reflections on God’s ordering of the universe, what constituted right human conduct within that order, how the disorder of the human soul subverted that divine order. This religious association also served Paul’s purposes by subtly supporting the implication that their particular disorder was grounded in theological error—in this case, in the unjustified expectation that Christ was about to return, or had already returned, to establish a new heaven and new earth in which work was no longer necessary.

In contrast to this view, Paul offered up himself as a counter-example as he often did when encouraging the churches to adopt certain attitudes and behaviors. Paul, of course, saw his primary calling and occupation as an apostle of the gospel and he did not hesitate to claim the right that as such apostles deserved to be compensated for their work as anyone else would be paid for their work. In a separate letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:8-18) he went to great lengths to support this right, citing the Law, appealing to common sense, comparing the work of the apostles to that of the temple priests, and slyly observing the spiritual debt owed to him by the Corinthians. In spite of all this, though, Paul declined to act on this right at Thessalonica in order to also uphold the principle that he should not be a burden to others, and thus suggesting that the same principle should apply to the idlers at Thessalonica. By comparing his own decision to essentially work two jobs he cast in a shameful light their own decision against working at all. Perhaps even more importantly, he established the preaching of the gospel as a legitimate form of work that should be supported by the community.

Another form of support that should be offered by the community is care for the poor. This is not immediately obvious from the passage because Paul is in the process of issuing
commands that certain people should not eat and that the rest of the community should shun them. But Paul does not criticize the act of supporting disadvantaged members of the community on principle. Quite the opposite. He is careful to emphasize that these commands apply only to those who are unwilling or refuse to work (a negative form of the verb ἀλοω - "to will" - is used as a qualifier to describe those who should be denied food). This does not contradict the longstanding Jewish tradition of concern for the poor, which often takes the form of care for widows and orphans. In fact, if Paul’s commands are followed it will actually increase the resources that are available to support those who cannot support themselves. When the idlers are supporting themselves and no longer obliging the rest of the community to feed them there will be more available to help the widows and orphans and other poor people at Thessalonica.

In this way, Paul raised significant challenges to the Thessalonians in the way they were living out the gospel as it relates to the concrete situations of work, reliance upon the community for support, and financial support for those engaged in ministry to the church. In fact, he clearly establishes the necessity of members of the community to accumulate resources by working so that the community can take responsibility for ensuring that those engaged in ministry to the church receive what is due to them, and that the needy among them can be cared for. In other words, the entire community is responsible for ensuring that the mission of the church continues.

Moreover, Paul indicates that these obligations are grounded in what the Thessalonians have received through Christ by bracketing his commands with appeals to the authority of Christ. In verse 6, Paul commands them “in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” and in verse 12 he writes “we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ.” This is one of the strongest indicators that a primary reason for the idlers’ decision not to work was a misinterpretation about Christ; in
particular, the mistaken belief that Christ was about to return or already had done so. We can sympathize with the idlers for their eagerness to participate in the “new heavens and a new earth” in which “the former things shall not be remembered or come to mind” (Is. 65:17). One of the former things to be forgotten, presumably, will be the difficulty of labor. Perhaps not, though, for when we read further in that particular vision of the new earth we find that the people are promised that “they shall not build an another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Is. 65:22). In other words, Christians are not to expect an end to labor itself, but only an end to injustice and exploitation related to labor. It seems, then, that the idlers not only had the timing of the eschaton wrong, but also the content of it. And when Paul instructs them to “work quietly and to earn their own living” this instruction is actually a way of living into the new earth they are waiting for.
Section III: Application

I. Opening
   A. Paul’s command that “anyone unwilling to work should not eat” is a difficult word to hear in our current economic climate.
      a. Many people have been laid off.
      b. Many people are having difficulty finding work.
      c. Many people who never thought they would need to ask friends or family, non-profit organizations, or even the government for financial support must do so in order to provide for their families.
      d. Non-profits are receiving fewer contributions, limiting their ability to carry out their mission.
   B. Fortunately for us, I don’t know of any ‘loafers’ or ‘idlers’ in our church.
      a. Paul was specifically referring to people who were unwilling or refused to work.
   C. But like the Thessalonians, we are also facing the challenge of supporting the mission of our church and supporting each other.
      a. Our food pantry is being utilized more than ever.
      b. More and more folks are visiting our soup kitchen each week.
      c. We are trying to raise funds to repair the roof.
      d. We are obligated to pay for utilities and salaries of our staff.

II. Paul’s message of hope
   A. Despite Paul’s seemingly harsh words, the message of his letter really is one of hope – even though our ministry requires money to operate the gift of God’s grace doesn’t cost anything.
      a. He prays for the Thessalonians: “May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and through grace gave us eternal comfort and good hope, comfort your hearts and strengthen them in every good work and word” (2 Thess 2:16-17).
      b. However, there is an obligation inherent to receiving this grace that we grow in every good work and part of that means growing in our commitment to support each other and our ministry together – especially when times are difficult.
      c. Paul wrote his letter because some believers at Thessalonica were not doing their part.
   B. Paul underscores the fact that this is a team effort.
      a. The Greek words he uses to describe the people who aren’t pitching in are ἀπάκτω and ἀπάκτως. These are military terms to describe soldiers who are undisciplined.
b. We are a “band of brothers” and sisters whose commitment to each other is strengthened by the urgency of the battlefield.

c. We have mutual goals of seeing the gospel preached and of supporting each other. There is something kind of exciting about having this common purpose in the face of adversity.

III. Wishful thinking

A. In the face of financial challenges facing their community, it was tempting for some of the Thessalonians to engage in a bit of “wishful thinking.”

   d. We know from the first part of this letter that some of the Thessalonians believed that Christ had already returned, or that he would return soon.

   e. Based on this thinking, they figured that they didn’t need to work anymore and their needs would still be taken care of.

   f. Paul calls these folks “idlers” and “busybodies.”

B. Paul proves that their timing is all wrong.

IV. But there is a promise for the future

A. Even though their timing was wrong, they were right to hope in a better future.

B. Isaiah give us this promise of the new heavens and earth. God’s people “shall not build an another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands” (Isa. 65:22).

C. This doesn’t mean there won’t be work in the new earth, only an end to anxiety about work, and end to injustice and exploitation.

D. Until that time, Paul’s instruction to “work quietly and to earn their own living” as we support our ministry and each other is a way of living into the new earth we are waiting for.

E. We will continue to preach the good news and care for the “widow and orphan” until that time.

Closing Prayer

Almighty God, your Son Jesus Christ dignified our labor by sharing our toil. Be with your people where they work; make those who carry on the industries and commerce of this land responsive to your will; and to all of us, give pride in what we do and a just return for our labor; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

Righteous God, you have taught us that the poor shall have your kingdom, and that the gentle-minded shall inherit the earth. Keep the church poor enough to preach to poor people, and humble enough to walk with the despised. Never weigh us down with property or accumulated funds. Save your church from vain display or lavish comforts, so that we may travel light and move through the world showing your generous love made known in Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.17

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17 Adapted from Book of Common Worship, Daily Prayer, pgs. 424 and 436.
Works Cited


Works Consulted


