



DO GOOD WORKERS DO “GOOD WORKS” ? A BIBLICAL REVIEW OF THE MEANING OF “GOOD WORKS” IN NEW TESTAMENT MARKETPLACE CONTEXTS

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INTRODUCTION

According to the Apostle Paul, Christians are “created in Christ Jesus for good works” (Ephesians 2:10). The church has historically understood such good works as acts of charity, volunteer service, mercy ministries, and working for nonprofit organizations.¹ While the concept of good works in the New Testament can include such work, several New Testament texts demonstrate that Christians also fulfill the call to good works in other venues, such as in the marketplace and even in the home. In the marketplace, the New Testament—especially Paul—clearly links the concept of good works with doing good and honest work for wages or profits. Such work is pleasing to the Lord in and of itself, and thus honest wages or profits are a sign of obedience to the Lord and do not undermine but rather undergird generosity and other acts of charity. Further, the New Testament also indicates that Christians who do good work in the context of the home fulfill the good works for which they were created. Following the lead of the wise woman in Proverbs 31, the New Testament portrays several women in the early church (e.g., Tabitha, Lydia) who perform good works that support generosity within the context of the marketplace and the home. In line with this, in Titus 2, Paul urges young women to work well in the context of the home so that the word of God is not reviled. Such texts indicate that Christians fulfill the call of good works in the context of home.

In order to demonstrate our thesis, we will briefly survey texts that point toward good works as acts of charity, as it is important to recognize the validity of the church's interpretation concerning good works. The remainder of the paper will point to select New Testament evidence that supports the concept of good works in the marketplace and in the home. In the conclusion we will discuss various implications for our study, and it will be suggested that the many New Testament texts that are ambiguous about the context for good works should no longer be restricted in their application to acts of charity but should include Christian good works in the marketplace and the home.²

GOOD WORKS AS CHARITABLE ACTIVITIES

With many interpreters throughout the history of the church, we agree that many New Testament texts portray good works as charitable activities or self-sacrifice. One such text is found in the story of the woman who anointed Jesus with very expensive perfume just a few days before his death (Matthew 26:6-13). After the woman broke the alabaster jar and poured out its precious ointment, the disciples queried why the woman had seemingly wasted on Jesus what could have been used to profit many poor people. Jesus responded to the query by asserting that the woman “did a beautiful thing for me.” Literally, she “worked a good work for me” (Matthew 26:10; cf. Mark 14:6). Her radical act of love for Jesus, which symbolically prepared him for his burial, is portrayed as a good work.

Another New Testament text that shows good works as acts of charity is John 10:32-33, in which Jesus called his miracles “good works.” After Jesus described his unique position of unity with his father (John 10:30), the Jews picked up stones to stone him for blasphemy. Jesus responded by asking which of his many “good works” done in the presence of the Jews were the cause of his stoning. As evidenced throughout John's Gospel and more specifically in John 10, the “works” Jesus accomplished in his earthly ministry were his miracles that testified to his identity (John 10:25, 37-38; cf. John 5:17, 36; 7:21). Such miracles of healing, feeding thousands, and raising the dead were good precisely because they benefited the recipients.

Yet another example from the New Testament that good works are acts of charity is 1 Timothy 5:10, in which Paul instructed Timothy concerning the eligibility of widows to be enrolled for support by the church. After stipulating how old a widow must be and how faithful she was to her husband, Paul listed several virtues for eligibility, bracketed by a reference to “good works.” The structure of 1 Timothy 5:10 is as follows:

- Has a reputation for good works
 - Brought up children
 - Showed hospitality
 - Washed saints' feet
 - Cared for afflicted
- Is devoted to every good work

Although the two adjectives for “good” are different, the two references are synonymous and bracket the virtues. The first points forward to the following list, and the second points backward to summarize the devotion that an eligible widow should have to do good work.³ With this structure in mind, the “good

works” Paul had in mind are the works mentioned between the brackets, such as childrearing, hospitality, and other acts of self-sacrifice. The list is not exhaustive but is illustrative of the types of works God considers good.

Even though the phrase “good works” does not occur in the story, the quintessential example of self-sacrificial good works in the New Testament is the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. In this well-known story, a man going from Jerusalem to Jericho was ambushed by robbers, beaten, and left for dead. After some time, a priest and a Levite passed by the man but decided not to give assistance. Finally, a Samaritan stopped and had compassion on the man, binding his wounds and paying the charges needed to ensure his recovery (Luke 10:33-35). This act of mercy and self-sacrifice is Jesus’ definition of what it means to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Luke 10:26, 36-37). The story is powerful in part because the Samaritan gave of his own time and resources for the good of another with seemingly no thought for his own interests or concerns. Hence, it has been understood as the quintessential illustration of the essence of Christian good works.⁴

Other New Testament texts show good works as acts of charity and ministries of mercy (e.g., 1 Timothy 2:10), but the texts surveyed thus far demonstrate a broad New Testament understanding of the concept of good works as acts of self-sacrificial charity or goodwill. Hence, while our thesis maintains that some New Testament references to good works are rightly understood in the context of the marketplace, we recognize, appreciate, and agree with the understanding of the church throughout the ages that often interprets good works as acts of charity.

GOOD WORKS AS MARKETPLACE ACTIVITIES

Although many New Testament texts describe good works as acts of charity, several others reflect a different perspective on the nature of a Christian’s good works. In these “good works” texts, one finds either an underlying assumption or an outright assertion that the works a Christian is called to perform are good if they are done within the context of the marketplace and are characterized by honesty, integrity, and hard work. As such, these texts—without negating the rest of the biblical witness—broaden our understanding of what God considers “good work.”

Titus 3:8-14

Titus 3:8-14 shows Paul’s underlying assumption that it was fundamentally good for Christians to engage in marketplace activities. Paul began a new section of this letter by urging Titus to speak the gospel confidently so that believers will engage in good works. Reminding Titus that “the word is faithful” (3:8)—hearkening back to the gospel as explained in 3:4-7—Paul shared his desire that Titus speak of the gospel with confidence. The “word” of the gospel contains the message that by the power of the Holy Spirit people are made new. This rebirth is not wrought of their own righteous works but is owing to God’s mercy through Christ (3:5). Indeed, Jesus died in order to free people from their sin and to transform them into a people of God who are “zealous for good works” (2:14). In light of this “faithful word,” Titus must remind believers “to be ready for every good work” (3:1); he must speak boldly of the gospel in his ministry, so believers will pay close attention to “engaging” in “good works.” As the natural outflow of the gospel, these “good works” are fundamentally “good” and “profitable” to people (3:8).

What is the nature of the works Paul had in mind? Is this one of Paul's general calls for Christian ministers to engage in right behavior, or did he mean something more specific? There is a hint in 3:9 that those who engage in good works should "avoid" foolish controversies because they are not only foolish but also "unprofitable." Such divisive people are not genuine believers if they do not respond to warnings for peace (3:10-11). A parallel text to 3:8 is 3:14, where after relaying to Titus his travel plans, Paul again commanded believers to "engage in good works" so that they might meet "pressing needs,"⁵ in order that they might not be "unfruitful." The following table shows the parallel phrases in 3:8-14.

The Nature of Good Works in Titus 3:8-14

Text	Nature of Works	Reason/Purpose
3:8	Engage in good works	Because they are good and profitable
3:9-11	Avoid controversies and divisions	Because they are foolish and unprofitable
3:14	Engage in good works	So that a person might not be unfruitful

This table shows that the works Paul commended are "good" and "profitable" rather than "foolish," "unprofitable," or "unfruitful." But what is the nature of the "profit" or "fruit" Paul expected?⁶ One might argue from the context that what is profitable and beneficial for the church is the maintenance of peace in the community instead of division, for sandwiched between the commands to do good works is the command to avoid controversies and divisive people. Although the theme of unity was certainly central to the life of the early church,⁷ the "pressing needs" in 3:14 indicates more than a need for unity. While the term *χρεία* may indicate a general need, it is often used to describe a lack of physical livelihood (Mark 2:25; Acts 2:45; 4:35; 1 John 3:17), especially when used in the plural (Acts 28:10; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 13.225).⁸ Paul himself used the plural elsewhere to describe the basic necessities of life (Acts 20:34; Romans 12:13), and he praised the Philippians for providing for his own needs by virtue of their generosity, which he called their "fruit" (Philippians 4:14-20). Hence, the "profit" or "fruit" Paul expected to flow from believers is the ability to meet the most basic necessities of life within the church. In other words, for the believers to devote themselves to good works, it was not enough merely to refrain from entering into divisive activities. Believers were also to engage in and be devoted to those activities that prove useful or beneficial in meeting the needs of one another. To put it another way, Paul's underlying assumption in this text was that believers should work hard in the marketplace context in order to earn a living and thus obtain what was necessary to meet the needs of others. Far from being motivated by greed, these money-making endeavors are fundamentally good and pleasing to the Lord and are a natural outflow of hearts changed by the gospel.

Ephesians 4:28

Ephesians 4:28 also includes honest marketplace activity as good work. As is often noted, the last three chapters of Ephesians primarily address Paul's ethical expectations for the Ephesians. The believers were no longer part of the kingdom of darkness but had been made new in Christ (4:17-24). As a result, they were to put off their old way of life and begin living in a new way by the power of the Spirit (4:22-24). A detailed exposition of this new way of life begins in 4:25 and continues through the conclusion of the household code in 6:9.

More specifically, 4:25-32 is carefully constructed, consisting of five sections featuring positive and negative commands. Each section has a negative and positive command followed by a causal or purpose clause that

provides motivation for the command. In 4:28 this pattern finds expression as the thief is urged to no longer steal but to work hard so that he can share with others.

The structure of Ephesians 4:28:

Negative: Let the thief no longer steal

Positive: Let him work hard with his hands what is good

Purpose: So that he may share with the needy

The negative command demonstrates that believers were no longer to live as they once did. In a manner similar to the Decalogue (cf. Exodus 20:15), Paul urged the protection and preservation of the right to personal property.⁹ But it was not enough for believers merely to preserve the property of others; they were also to work hard in the marketplace. The verb “to work hard” is a vivid term describing hard work or exertion (Acts 20:35; 1 Corinthians 4:12).¹⁰ Even though the term can refer to labor without reference to the marketplace (1 Timothy 5:17; *Epistle of Barnabas* 19.10), in Ephesians 4:28 honest work in the marketplace is clearly in view, for the term is contrasted with the wrongful acquisition of property.¹¹ Further, Paul clarified in the succeeding phrase that the means by which believers should work was with their own hands, a probable reference to manual labor (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:12; 1 Thessalonians 4:11).¹² This is a striking command, for in the Greco-Roman world, to work with one’s hands was seen as demeaning and associated with a lower socioeconomic status (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:12). Nevertheless, despite the opinion of the culture, Paul saw such work as fundamentally good, for by means of it one may produce “what is good.”

Although it is difficult to precisely identify what Paul had in mind by “what is good,” it is likely that the phrase referred to honest and upright marketplace endeavors. It is also possible for the phrase to indicate generosity, for generous giving is the purpose of “what is good” in the next phrase. Indeed, the purpose of generous giving is arguably the climax of the verse—it explains why it is necessary no longer to steal but to work hard—but to argue that it exhausts the concept of “what is good” is to confuse the purpose of the concept with the concept itself.¹³ Further, the phrase “what is good” cannot be minimized to include merely preservation of private property, even though such is an entailment of the initial negative command not to steal from others. Rather, the positive command to work hard with one’s own hands quite clearly included gainful employment in the marketplace and was what enabled one to give generously.

Hence, Paul’s definition of “what is good” in 4:28 is the acquisition of wealth by means of hard work characterized by integrity.¹⁴ Even though the culture may frown upon such work, it is morally good in the eyes of God. In fact, the phrase “to work what is good” recalls Ephesians 2:10, which affirms that God prepares ahead of time “good works” for believers to do. The phrase “good works” in 2:10 thus foreshadows the ethical section of the letter and emphasizes that in contrast to their old lifestyle of unfruitful “works” (4:19; 5:11), now by the power of the Spirit believers do works that are fundamentally good and pleasing to the Lord when they work hard and earn an honest living in the marketplace (cf. 5:10).

2 Thessalonians 3:6-16

In 2 Thessalonians 3:6-16, Paul emphasized the intrinsic goodness of work. Having prayed in 2:17 that Jesus might strengthen the Thessalonians “in every good work and word,” Paul directed his attention in 3:6-16 to those within the church who were walking in a disorderly way (3:6; cf. 1 Thessalonians 5:14). In

Greek literature, the term used in 3:6 for disorderly behavior often described soldiers who were undisciplined or behaved out of line, and by extension this word group came to describe anyone who lived in an irregular or abnormal way in distinction from the norms of society.¹⁵ In the same way, Paul perceived that “some” (3:11) in the church were disorderly out of narcissism, choosing not to live with the interests of the group in mind. Instead, they considered only their own interests, which led them to refrain from working and to meddle in the affairs of others (3:11).¹⁶

Paul urged the believers not to associate with such people (3:6, 14), since such disorderly conduct flies in the face of the apostolic tradition and Paul’s own exemplary lifestyle (3:7-10). The apostolic tradition Paul handed down when he first planted the church at Thessalonica included instruction concerning hard work. As 3:10 indicates, it was Paul’s custom to include in his instruction the idea that “if anyone does not want to work, then let him not eat.”¹⁷ Paul himself exemplified this way of life, “working night and day with labor and toil” (3:8), not out of necessity but in order to set an example for the Thessalonians to imitate. Like Paul, they were to work “quietly” (μετὰ ἡσυχίας, 3:12), tending to their own affairs. This work evidently entailed marketplace activity, for by means of such work Paul was able to provide for himself so as not to put an undue burden on anyone else (3:8; cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12).¹⁸ It is difficult to overestimate the significance of Paul’s instruction at this point, since it reflected his customary teaching, was undergirded by his exemplary lifestyle of labor, and was issued with the authority of Jesus himself (3:6, 12).

It comes in this context that Paul directs his attention specifically to the Thessalonian believers and urges them, “Do not grow weary in doing good” (3:13). This command, which conceptually is found elsewhere in Paul’s literature (cf. Galatians 6:10), must be interpreted in light of the immediately preceding context concerning the significance of work.¹⁹ The good Paul had in mind that believers should not grow weary of doing is precisely the quiet work called for in 3:6-12. While the act of “doing good” may certainly have broader application, in this context it specifically applies to work in the marketplace. Hence, according to Paul, hard and honest work in the marketplace is fundamentally good in the eyes of God, not only because it keeps believers from idleness and meddling, but also because such a lifestyle is orderly and conforms to the norms set in place for society by God.

GOOD WORKS AS ACTIVITIES IN THE HOME

Thus far we have argued that the text of the New Testament indicates that the notion of good works cannot be limited to charitable activities and mercy ministries but includes fair and honest work in the marketplace. In this section we hope to show that the New Testament teaches that faithful, God-honoring work in the home is also a good work in the eyes of God. Even if such work does not include remuneration—in many cases it does not—such work is pleasing to the Lord and thus is a “good work.”

Acts 9:36-43

Acts 9:36-43 is an example of how good works can function at the nexus of the home and marketplace, and how such good works naturally beget acts of charity. The passage is a miracle story demonstrating the power of God: a believer named Tabitha (Greek, “Dorcas”) dies and subsequently is raised from the dead by the hand of Peter. In the midst of this miracle story, we find out who Tabitha was and why she was so beloved. In 9:36 she is described as a disciple who was “full of good works and charity.” From 9:39 we learn

that her good works included the manufacture of various items of clothing—inner and outer garments—which she had generously given to some poor widows. Although we are not told many details of Tabitha’s work, it is likely that she made the garments from her own home.²⁰ What sort of profit she acquired we can only speculate, although many commentators suggest that she was a woman of some wealth; her ability to provide a variety of clothing to a number of widows supports such a notion.²¹ In any case, that she was “full of good works and charity” is Luke’s shorthand for commending Tabitha as a model of discipleship (cf. Acts 6:3-8; 7:55; 11:24). Far from being synonymous, the twin activities of “good works” and “charity” together describe what a Christian is called to do: work and give. Hence, it is too restrictive to limit Tabitha’s work merely to the religious sphere, although such a sphere is certainly emphasized.²² Rather, her “good works” refer broadly to the entirety of her commercial and domestic activities that issued in generosity toward widows.²³ Her “good works and charity,” then, describe the interplay or relationship between her marketplace and domestic activities on the one hand and her generosity on the other. As seen in many cases above, the former precedes and undergirds the latter, for without the hard work of manufacturing clothes, Tabitha would have been unable to give generously to the poor and needy widows. Hence, the phrase “good works and charity” in 9:36 aptly summarizes Tabitha’s activities along the axes of marketplace and domestic activities (“good works”) and acts of generosity (“charity”).

Titus 2:5

Titus 2:5 also demonstrates that good works are to be done in the context of the home. In Titus 2, Paul provided instruction for various groups within the early church. He instructed the older men (2:2), the older women (2:3-4), the younger women (2:4-5), the younger men (2:6), Titus (2:7-8), and servants (2:9-10). In his instruction to the younger women, he called them to be “lovers of their husbands and children, sensible, pure, workers at home, good, and submissive to their own husbands, so that the word of God might not be blasphemed.” Among these seven characteristics of Christian young women is the call to work at home.²⁴ Intriguingly, the term Paul used for work in the home has been found nowhere else in extant Greek literature predating the letter to Titus, which suggests that Paul may have coined the term. Paul may have coined the word as a word play on the term for “homemaker,” which dates to the fifth century B.C. and differs from the term “home-worker” by only a letter. It would have been more expected for Paul to use the term “homemaker” in a list of instructions for Christian young women. It was not only the more familiar but also the more culturally acceptable term, since women by and large were not viewed as workers in society. So why did Paul unexpectedly call young women to “work at home”? Far from challenging existing social structures, Paul was reinterpreting what women do at home *as work*. The typical domestic activities expected for young women were being cast in a different light. Women who functioned in God-honoring ways in the context of the home were not merely *staying at home* but *working at home*. Even though in many cases the domestic responsibilities of young women did not earn a financial profit for the family, these responsibilities were to be recognized as real and valuable work that fulfills God’s original creative intent that mankind exercise dominion over the earth (Genesis 1:28).

Proverbs 31:10-31

Although not a New Testament text, Proverbs 31:10-31 forms a crucial literary and theological backdrop to many of the “good works” texts in the New Testament, particularly those that call for good works in the home. One could even say that the domestic work of the wise woman in Proverbs 31:10-31 serves as a commentary on what good work in the home should entail. Indeed, the wise woman of Proverbs 31

engages in domestic activities that are multi-faceted and profitable in various ways and to various people. Especially of note for our purposes is 31:18, where the woman works well, for she “perceives that her merchandise is profitable” (ESV). The term translated “merchandise” regularly describes business or commercial transactions. The type of commerce she engages in is variegated: she provides food for the household (31:15), purchases land and engages in gardening (31:16), and works with fabrics and sells them (31:13, 19, 21-22, 24). Indeed, she is recognized as a hard worker, for she “does not eat the bread of idleness” (31:27, ESV). In short, the wise woman brings profit to her family—whether directly or indirectly—by means of hard work, and she does so from within a domestic context (cf. 31:27-28). At the same time, the profit she acquires does not lead her to selfishness and miserliness, for she is generous toward the poor and needy (31:20). Hence, this woman serves as a good example of how works within the home are rightly seen as good and valuable. Rightly does the chapter end by describing the value of her works: “Let her works praise her in the gates” (31:31).

IMPLICATIONS AND THEOLOGICAL REFLECTIONS

This brief review of several “good works” texts indicates that the concept of good works is sufficiently broad within the New Testament to include good and honest work in the marketplace and the home. Although many New Testament texts describe good works as acts of charity, many others reflect a different perspective on the nature of a Christian’s good works. In these “good works” texts, one finds either an underlying assumption or an assertion that the works a Christian is called to perform are good if they are done within the context of the marketplace or the home and are characterized by honesty, integrity, and hard work. These texts—without negating the rest of the biblical witness—broaden our understanding of what God considers “good work.”

In conclusion, we will suggest some implications of our study. First, such a broad perspective on the value of work is not surprising, given the canonical context of good work. Even in the creation account of Genesis 1–2, we find God working and pronouncing that the result of his work was “good” (LXX καλός, Genesis 1:4, 8, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31).²⁵ The trees he made were good (Genesis 2:9; cf. 3:6), and even the gold of Havilah is called good (Genesis 2:12). Further, since he is made in God’s image, mankind is called to work. The expectation that people would work is portrayed even before Adam was made, for one reason God created humanity was because “there was no person to work the ground” (Genesis 2:5).²⁶ Once Adam was created, he was given the twofold purpose “to work and to keep” the ground (Genesis 2:15), language that still applies even after sin brought the curse upon the ground (Genesis 3:23).²⁷ Hence, it comes as no surprise that we find an expectation in the New Testament that believers—those who are members of the new creation order (2 Corinthians 5:17)—should engage in good work in the marketplace and home; it is the natural outflow of God’s original creative design. These good works have been long prepared for believers to accomplish and through Christ are the fulfillment of God’s creation mandate (Ephesians 2:10).

Second, God commands and empowers Christians to do work in every sphere of life, and such work is rightly seen as intrinsically valuable and good in his sight. This entails that all kinds of marketplace activities are fundamentally good, as long as they are done with honesty and integrity. Whether a Christian works as a janitor, launches an entrepreneurial enterprise, or leads a Fortune 500 company, God is well-pleased with such work, provided it is done out of heart of faith and love. Similarly, work within the home is fundamentally good and valuable in God’s sight. Whether a Christian is a stay-at-home parent or a person

who works from home, such work is pleasing to the Lord. Indeed, Titus 2:5 even suggests that such God-honoring work is necessary for the cause of the gospel.

Third, Christians should not portray the acquisition of wealth as an indisputable sign of God's disfavor. Rather, if a person is paid for honest work, the wage or salary that person earns is a sign of what is valuable not only to the market but also to God. Of course, the New Testament is clear that Christians should not love money or set their hope on it (cf. 1 Timothy 6:10, 17-19). The acquisition of wealth can serve as a snare, which is why Agur prays that the Lord not give him too much wealth, lest he forsake the Lord (Proverbs 30:7-9). But this caution does not mitigate the fundamental goodness of wealth, as long as it is obtained by right means and used for right purposes.

Fourth, readers of Scripture should view the ambiguous "good works" texts in the New Testament as having a broad application so as to include good work in the marketplace and good work at home. For instance, when Matthew 5:16 enjoins believers to "let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven" (ESV; cf. 1 Peter 2:12), believers should apply this command to all areas of life, including the marketplace and the home. Again, when Paul urges the Galatians to "work what is good to all people, especially to those of the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10), this is a call for believers to engage in good works of all kinds toward all people. Even though 1 Corinthians 15:58 is not a text with the phrase "good works," nevertheless it carries a similar application. When Paul urges the Corinthians to "abound in the work of the Lord always because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain," believers should hear this as a reminder that the new creation order that has begun in the resurrection of Christ affects every area of a Christian's life and calls for a renewed sense of Christian "work" or "labor" in all areas of life, whether in the church, the marketplace, or the home. These few New Testament texts are but a sampling of the "good works" texts that do not allow for a specific context and thus are rightly interpreted to apply to all kinds of good work God calls believers to do.²⁸

Finally, the Christian mandate for generosity is not undermined but enabled by a robust theology of good works in the marketplace. Paul's call for generosity in Ephesians 4:28, for instance, was founded upon the believer's ability to "work what is good," i.e., make a profit. This principle is true even in cases of extreme poverty, such as the Macedonians in 2 Corinthians 8:1-5, who out of their extreme poverty gave willingly to the cause of the poor saints in Jerusalem. They were enabled by God's grace to give above and beyond what Paul expected, yet even in their case the funds raised for the Jerusalem collection issued from their own meager earnings. The point is clear: the foundation of generosity is good and honest work in the marketplace, for such work obtains the time and money needed to overflow in generosity towards others.

In conclusion, the many New Testament texts that are ambiguous about the context for good works should no longer be restricted in their application to acts of charity but should include Christian good works in the marketplace and the home.

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¹ For instance, see John Y. H. Yieh, "Good," *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 2007), 2:627; Johannes B. Bauer, "Work," *Encyclopedia of Biblical Theology*, ed. Johannes B. Bauer (London: Sheed and Ward, 1970), 3:996-97: "Properly speaking the work of Christians consists in promoting the gospel and helping to further the salvation willed by God." Recently Ron Sider has advocated for what he calls "a theology for the whole gospel" in which Christian good works are equated with acts of social justice (see Ronald J. Sider, *Good News and Good Works: A Theology for the Whole Gospel* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993]; Ronald J. Sider, Philip N. Olson, and Heidi Rolland Unruh, *Churches That Make a Difference: Reaching Your Community with Good News and Good Works* [Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002]).

² Our method in this paper has been based on an analysis of every form of the word ἔργον ("work") within 5 words (before or after) of any form of the adjective καλός (17x) or ἀγαθός (16x) in the New Testament and Septuagint. Further, any form of the verbal form ἐργάζομαι was similarly reviewed with the same criteria (7x). A similar analysis included the use of the κοπιᾶω word group in the New Testament and Septuagint as it relates to marketplace or domestic activities.

³ The first adjective is καλός and the second ἀγαθός.

⁴ For example, see David Lyle Jeffrey, *Luke*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2012), 150-51.

⁵ Walter Bauer, Frederick William Danker, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilber Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* [BDAG], 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), ἀναγκαῖος, 60.

⁶ The term ὠφέλιμα describes what is useful, beneficial, or helpful to someone (BDAG, s.v.). It is not a technical term for profit in the economic sense of the word, although it may be used in this way.

⁷ For example, see Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 15:25; Ephesians 4:3-6.

⁸ William L. Lane, "χρεία," *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, MI: Regency Reference Library, 1986), 3:957-58.

⁹ Similarly Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2002), 626; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 343.

¹⁰ See BDAG, s.v.; Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* [LSJ], 9th ed., rev. Henry Stuart Jones (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996), κόπος/κόπτω, 978-79.

¹¹ Rightly Moule, Handly C. G. Moule, *The Epistle to the Ephesians*, Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914), 123.

¹² The phrase ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶν τὸ ἀγαθόν has a variety of readings in the manuscripts, both in the sequence of the words and in the possible omission of ἰδίαις. Probably the sequence in which τὸ ἀγαθόν concludes the phrase is correct, for a scribe would more naturally place the direct object immediately following the participle ἐργαζόμενος. Further, ἰδίαις may be a harmonization to 1 Corinthians 4:12 or it may have been omitted due to parablepsis (ΤΑΙΣΙΔΙΑΙΣΧΕΡΣΙΝ). In either case the meaning is clear, for even if ἰδίαις is not original, it is implied, for "to work with the hands" is naturally self-referential. For a discussion of the issue see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 4th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2002), 537-38.

¹³ One could argue that the ἵνα clause is exegetical, explaining further what is τὸ ἀγαθόν, but it is more likely from the parallel structure of the paranesis of 4:25-32 (i.e., negative clause + positive clause + purpose clause) that it introduces a purpose clause.

¹⁴ This point shows the difference between Paul and Aristotle, the latter of whom contends that no one is or should be praised for simply receiving what is justly his due (see Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, 4.10).

¹⁵ See LSJ, s.v.; Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities* 17.10.10. While some scholars understand ἄτακτος as describing disorderly or irresponsible members of the church (see, for example, the entry in Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000]), George Milligan (*St. Paul's Epistles to the Thessalonians: The Greek Text, with Introduction and Notes* [London: Macmillan, 1908], 153-54) provides a more definitive word study. While he notes usages of the word from military contexts for a soldier who is out of step or for a formation of soldiers disorderly in retreat, this is not consistent with the context of Paul's usage of this lexeme. He provides two striking examples of the use of the cognate ἀτακτέω from the first century A.D. The first occurs in P.Oxy. 275 (A.D. 66) in a contract of apprenticeship, according to which a father binds himself not to take away his son during a certain specified period, with the further condition that if there are days on which the boy "fails to attend," or "plays the truant," (ὅσας δ' ἔαν ἐν τούτῳ ἀτακτῆσθαι ἡμέρας, 24ff.), he is to produce him for an equivalent number of days after the period is over. The second also comes from Oxyrhynchus in a similar contract, dated about 120 years later, P.Oxy. 725, according to which a weaver's apprentice is allowed 20 holidays in the year, "but if he exceeds this number of days from idleness or ill-health or any other reason" (ἔαν δὲ πλείονας τούτων ἀργήσῃ [ἢ ἀσθενήσῃ ἢ δι' ἄλλην τινα]

αἰ]τίαν), he has to make his absences good without wages. If Paul's usage of ἄτακτος is consistent with these marketplace contractual examples, then his focus likely is on idleness and lack of work for any reason, making it unnecessary to speculate about whether the Thessalonians were overzealous in their expectations for the second coming of Christ.

¹⁶ The participles ἐργαζομένους and περιεργαζομένους in 3:11b are construed as participles of means and thus shed light on what it means to walk in a disorderly way in 3:11a.

¹⁷ That such was Paul's custom is indicated by the iterative use of the imperfect tense παρηγγέλλομεν.

¹⁸ Similar language is used in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12, where Paul explicitly links working quietly (ἡσυχάζειν) with the marketplace activity of working with one's hands (ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσίν) so as not to be dependent on anyone. Perhaps in the social background of the text is Aristotle's ethical perspective that a generous person will not ask for favors but will only draw from his own possessions (see *Nichomachean Ethics*, 4.15-17).

¹⁹ Even though Paul can use the familial term ἀδελφοί to indicate the beginning of a new section (see 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2:1; 3:1; etc.), it is not always used in this way. Indeed, the link between 3:13-15 with 3:6-12 is evident in the command to keep away from disorderly or insubordinate believers (3:6, 14).

²⁰ F. Scott Spencer, "Women of 'the Cloth' in Acts: Sewing the Word," in *The Feminist Companion to the Acts of the Apostles*, ed. Amy-Jill Levine, with Marianne Blickenstaff (Cleveland: Pilgrim, 2004), 144.

²¹ See the speculative but salient comments by James Malcolm Arlandson, *Women, Class, and Society in Early Christianity: Models from Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 143-44.

²² Contra Spencer, "Women of 'the Cloth,'" 144-46.

²³ That her "good works" include marketplace and domestic activities is supported by the parallel with the other Jewish-Christian women Luke commends, Lydia and Priscilla, who even more clearly engage in income-producing activities within the context of the home (see Acts 16:14-15; 18:2-3).

²⁴ If the adjective "good" modifies "home-worker," then Titus 2:5 is another example of a "good works" text. It is more likely, though, that it stands alone as a separate characteristic of godly young women, for the rest of the list—excepting the last one—describes each virtue with a single word.

²⁵ In Genesis 2:2-3, God's own works are seen as his "occupation" or "business" (עֲמָלָא), a term often used in regard to a person's business (Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906], s.v.).

²⁶ The link in the LXX between God's "works" (ἔργα) in Genesis 2:2 and the work (ἐργάζεσθαι) man is to do with regard to the earth in 2:5 shows man is called to do the same work as God in ruling, sustaining, preserving, subduing, and having dominion over the earth.

²⁷ This is why we find in Proverbs 31:13-18 that the wise wife works hard and produces profitable merchandise. Indeed, Prov-LXX 31:18 reads, "She perceives that to work is good" (ἐγέυσατο ὅτι καλόν ἐστιν τὸ ἐργάζεσθαι).

²⁸ For more "good works" texts in this category, see Romans 2:7, 10; 13:3; 2 Corinthians 9:8; Colossians 1:10; 1 Timothy 2:10; 5:24-25; 6:18; Titus 2:7, 14; Hebrews 10:24; James 3:13.