

Samuel's Farewell Address in 1 Samuel 12:1-5 As a Resource for Integrity in Leadership

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Abstract

Integrity has been cited as a major ethical behaviour required in every context of leadership. It also has been observed to be of intrinsic value. Leaders appear deficient in integrity as corruption cases against them appear to be on the rise. As such, integrity in leadership looks unattainable. Studies have shown the necessity of integrity in leadership at all levels of society. However, little attention has been paid to Prophet Samuel being a resource for integrity in leadership. This paper examines Prophet Samuel's farewell speech in 1 Samuel 12:1-5, intending to show the resourcefulness of his life for integrity in leadership. The study uses the documentation method of data gathering. Primary data was sourced from the Bible, and secondary data was from published works on integrity and leadership, while collected data is textually analysed. In the position of Samuel as the political and religious leader of Israel, he epitomised integrity. This was affirmed by the Israelites. Though not flawless, Samuel's role as a political and religious leader was characterised by integrity. Integrity in any leadership position is attainable. Samuel esteemed highly the word of God as a mark of his reverence to God in all he did and said. Political and religious leaders today can become better in integrity by following Samuel's example.

Keywords: Old Testament Prophets, Integrity, Samuel, leadership, Ministry.

INTRODUCTION

Integrity is an indispensable but rare virtue. It is a key component of ethical leadership,¹ and has a positive relationship with employee trust for the leadership.² Political leadership at both National, State, Local Government³ levels, Business and Religious leadership require integrity in their actions to succeed; not only because “integrity is a business asset, but it is intrinsically valuable”⁴. Bill George remarked:

“We need new leadership. We need authentic leaders, people of the highest integrity, committed to building enduring organizations. We need leaders who have a deep sense of purpose and are true to their core values. We need leaders who dare to build their companies to meet the needs of all their stakeholders, and who recognize the importance of their service to society.”⁵

According to Robert H. Moorman and Steven Grover, leader integrity matters to followers because of the information it communicates to followers;... that leader integrity attributions also serve as a useful substitute for elusive information about the results of a leadership effort;...an attribution of leader integrity will help them (followers) feel much more comfortable,... and attributions of leader integrity lend confidence that everything will turn out alright.⁶

Despite the need for integrity in leadership as emphasised by scholars, information on different world leaders (political, business and religious leaders) with allegations of one form of fraud or corruption or the other is available in the public domain.^{7,8,9} It thus appears that integrity is more about the talk and not attainable. Often, “breaches of integrity are achieved through some kind of compartmentalisation, and in the case of religion by reducing one’s faith to certain religious activities, ignoring the fact that faith should encompass all areas of life.”¹⁰

The life and ministry of prophet Samuel are x-rayed in this paper with a special focus on his farewell speech in 1 Samuel 12:1-5. This is to validate that leaders can serve with integrity over the long term, and portray Samuel as a resource for contemporary leaders. The documentation method of data gathering is used in this paper. Primary data is sourced from the Bible and secondary data from relevant published work on integrity. Data will be textually analysed within the ambit of the behavioural theory of leadership, which focuses exclusively on what

leaders do and how they act.¹¹ It has been expanded to include ‘leaders’ action towards followers in various contexts¹². Most discussion on integrity in leadership has not considered Prophet Samuel as a resource for integrity in contemporary leadership. This paper seeks to contribute in this regard. Samuel did not present himself as flawless. However, he submitted himself for scrutiny by the people whom he has led for decades. No doubt, the character of Prophet Samuel has much to benefit contemporary leaders in the area of integrity.

THE CONCEPT OF INTEGRITY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The word *integrity* is derived from the Latin *integritas*, meaning "wholeness and completeness, being indivisible and inviolable." It is one of the most important moral qualities of a person's character, particularly in a leader. Persons of integrity do not compromise their virtue whatever the coercion.¹³ It is also referred to as Honesty, sincerity, and singleness of purpose. It is found to be the most cited trait of a good leader.¹⁴ Lorin Woolfe noted that “It doesn’t matter how noble or worthwhile your cause; if you haven’t earned people’s trust by *constantly keeping your word and being true to your values*, (italics added) people won’t follow you too far. They may follow you to a point, but when the going gets tough, they’ll start to hang back or look around for another leader.”¹⁵

In the Old Testament, integrity is an indispensable virtue that is required of everyone – the leaders and the led; the priests and the people. Integrity is “soundness of character and adherence to moral principle...in Proverbs integrity is seen as an essential characteristic of the upright life: Yahweh will protect those who walk in it (Proverbs 2:7); their security is assured (Proverbs 2:21; 10:9; 20:7; 28:18); it is a trustworthy guide for a living (11:3), and better than wealth (19:1; 28:6).”¹⁶ It is expressed by the word group *tmm* (concept of perfection). This word group denotes characteristics of unity, wholeness, completeness, blamelessness, purity, sincerity, honesty, and consistency, which reflect authenticity and trustworthiness.¹⁷ Persons of integrity are loyal to their promises and genuinely honest in their dealings with others. They are consistent not only in fulfilling their role entrusted to them by society but also between their values and conduct. They are whole and trustworthy.¹⁸ This is the form of integrity applied in this work.

SURVEY OF THE LIFE AND MINISTRY OF PROPHET SAMUEL

The ministry of Samuel began at a time when Israel was in crisis. This was both an internal and external crisis. The internal crisis involved the corruption of the priesthood by the sons of Eli, the high priest at Shiloh, where the Ark of the Covenant was kept and the religious tradition of Israel were preserved (1 Samuel 2:11-17). Eli was powerless to change the corrupt behaviour of his sons and this led to God's judgment. Also, during this time, the word of the LORD was said to be rare (1 Samuel. 3:1). Frank S. Frick is quoted as noting that "there were growing pressures on the tribal groups of early Israel toward centralization even before the events of 1 Samuel. These probably included increased population, incorporation of diverse cultural groups, and the agricultural limitations of the hill country."¹⁹ The external crisis came from the activities of the Philistines who had subjected them since the death of Samson.

In the early stage, Samuels' "ministry consisted of such duties in or about the sanctuary as were suited to his age, which is supposed to have been about twelve years."²⁰ Eli kept him also as his immediate attendant."²¹ Samuel likely lived in one of the tents around the temple. It was in this temple environment, after the days' work, and Samuel was about to sleep that God called out to him. At this point in Israel's history, the integrity of the priesthood and leadership of Israel under Eli the high priest was grossly damaged. This was due to the attitude of Elis' sons who were wicked, with no regard for the Lord, and treating the Lord's offering with contempt (1 Samuel. 2:12,17). As sons of the high priest, one of them would have succeeded Eli as a High Priest. But their lack of integrity robbed them of this and brought judgment on them. The judgment on Eli and his household demonstrates that a lack of integrity in leadership is a grievous sin before God. (1 Samuel. 2:24-25, NIV). Due to his children's obstinacy and Eli's inability to call them to order, God sent a man of God to pronounce Gods' judgment on Eli and his house (1 Samuel 2:30-36, NIV).

The ministry of Samuel as a Prophet began with this message for the house of Eli. The Bible said of Samuel thereafter:

The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of his words falls to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to

appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel's word came to all Israel (1 Samuel 3:19-4:1).

These scriptures attest to the integrity of the life and ministry of Prophet Samuel. This brought hope to the people of Israel who would come to Shiloh to consult Samuel to receive a divine command or be informed on what was the mind of God for them. At this point in their history, Israel was under the subjection of the philistines since after the death of Samson. But the status of Samuel was already on the rise and this no doubt was a threat to the Philistines. As observed by Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, the rising influence of the young prophet had alarmed the jealous fears of the Philistines,... who was determined, by further crushing, to prevent the possibility of their being trained by the counsels, and under the leadership, of Samuel to reassert their national independence.²²

Over twenty years elapsed after the ark of God was captured by the Philistines. Through the influence of Samuel's exhortation, the people were brought to renounce idolatry and to return to the national worship of the true God (1 Samuel. 7:3-4). "Disgusted with their foreign servitude, and panting for the restoration of liberty and independence, they were open to salutary impression; and, convinced of their errors, they renounced idolatry"²³ The demonstration of their repentance and moral purification was their gathering at Mizpah by the instruction of Samuel who said he was going to intercede for them there. On hearing of the gathering of the Israelites at Mizpah, the Philistines came to war against them. But by their repentance and the intercession of Samuel, the Philistines were defeated (1 Samuel 7:10-16).

When the elders of the people gathered together and requested that Samuel should give them a king to lead them since he was now old, he took the request of the people to God through it was displeasing to him (1 Samuel 8:7-9). The prophet Samuel made the people know what the king they're requesting will do to them according to the word of God. "What Samuel seeks to clarify for them is that their problem is not political but spiritual. Their political solution will solve nothing unless it is accompanied by a spiritual solution."²⁴ But with the peoples' insistence, Samuel, under God's instruction agreed and gave the people a king in the person of Saul the son of Kish from the tribe of Benjamin.

ANALYSIS OF SAMUEL'S INTEGRITY AS A PROPHET IN HIS FAREWELL SPEECH (1 SAMUEL 12:1-5)

1. CONTEXT OF SAMUELS' FAREWELL SPEECH

Saul was already anointed as king, and "Samuel no longer was judge over Israel, but he was a priest and a prophet. As such, he led the people in a covenant renewal ritual whereby they reaffirmed their allegiance to God, the heavenly king, even though they now had an earthly king"²⁵. At this meeting which Prophet Samuel invited all the people to in Gilgal, Samuels' opinion of the peoples' problem requiring a spiritual solution more than a political one became apparent to the people. It was here that Samuel invited the people to scrutinize his leadership tenure and come up with an accusation against him. "Before leaving office as a judge, Samuel had to set the record straight and bear witness that his hands were clean and they could find no fault in him"²⁶

TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF SAMUEL'S FAREWELL SPEECH IN 1 SAMUEL 12:1-5

1. Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you.
2. Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day.
3. Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right."
4. "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand."
5. Samuel said to them, "The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand." "He is witness," they said (1 Samuel 12 1-5; NIV).

In verse one, the first thing that jumps at us is that prophet Samuel was a listening leader. Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you." The word translated I have

listened is the Hebrew verb, *shama*. It implies ‘to hear intelligently often with implication of attention, and obedience’²⁷. It carries the idea of hearing and acting appropriately with due diligence. Prophet Samuel, after hearing the request of the people, acted on it appropriately and selflessly.

This leaves us with a question: do leaders listen to the complaints of their followers and act appropriately and selflessly? Are we not rather prone to act in self-defence of our leadership? In Prophet Samuels’ case, he reported the matter to God who is the higher authority above him. In a democratic situation, the grievances of the people should be adequately discussed in the House of Representatives and Senate, and reasonable decisions taken and passed on to the executive for appropriate action. In a church setting, the leader has God and the church elders as those he can present the issues confronting the people to. It is a matter of integrity to follow the appropriate channels in dealing with the peoples’ needs satisfactorily.

Prophet Samuel in verse two reminds them that he was already old and grey-headed, and his sons are with them. He also points out that he has been their leader since his youth. The Hebrew verb *halak* is used in the *hitpael* and presents Samuel as saying that the people are fully aware of how he has conducted his life affairs since he was a youth. No aspect of his life is shrouded in secrecy; and if there has been any form of a misdemeanour in his living, the people would have known. His life has been lived before them and they should be able to judge whether he led them in integrity or not. As leaders, how well acquainted are we with the situation of those we lead? How much of us do they know? Are we in constant touch with the realities of their daily lives? It is a matter of integrity to understand the daily reality is faced by our followers.

Samuel challenges the people: “Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these, I will make it right.” (1 Samuel 12:3; NIV).” The word translated ‘testify’ is the Hebrew ‘*anuw* and it’s from ‘*anah* which is an invitation to shout, announce to make public or specifically to sing.²⁸ He presents himself for public testimony about his long years of leadership in the nation. In today’s parlance, he let go of his immunity

and asked that he should be publicly accused of any act of oppression, corruption, bribery and perversion of justice to suit himself or his family. According to John H. Walton *et al*,

It is common for a ruler to blame the country's problems on a previous administration. It was also not uncommon in the ancient world for charges to be trumped up against anyone who might be seen as a threat to the power of the ruler currently in power. It was therefore understandable that Samuel would want to take steps to procure an affirmation of his innocence in matters of government.²⁹

He needed to verify that he had not been accused of any injustice. How does this play out in our present context and country? The words of Adams Clarke are very vital to this action of Prophet Samuel. He says,

"Did ever a minister of state, in any part of the world, resign his office with so much self-consciousness of integrity, backed with the universal approbation of the public? No man was oppressed under his government, no man defrauded! He had accumulated no riches for himself; he had procured none for his friends; nor had one needy dependent been provided for out of the public purse. He might have pardoned his sons, who had acted improperly before he quitted the government; but though he was the most tender of parents, he would not, but abandoned them to national justice, with only a tacit solicitation of mercy: Behold, my sons are with you! They have acted improperly; I deprived them of their authority; they are amenable to you for their past conduct; I have walked uprightly and disinterestedly among you; they have not followed my steps: but can you forgive them for their father's sake? As a minister of justice, he abandons them to their fate; as a tender father, he indirectly and modestly pleads for them on the ground of his services. Had he not acted thus in both these relations, he would have been unworthy of that character which he so deservedly bears."³⁰

Lorin Woolfe said of Samuel, "Samuel didn't passively respond or react to an investigation of his possessions. He initiated it himself! He *invited* investigation of his honesty and integrity, down to the last ox and donkey, promising to return anything that might have been immorally appropriated, no matter how insignificant. And he promised to rectify the least evidence of impropriety or dishonest gain."³¹ This is very unlikely today. An action

that could be said to be close to that of the prophet Samuel was when the vice president of Nigeria offered to waive his immunity to pave way for proper investigation and court process to hold when he was accused of misappropriating N90b.³² It is a matter of integrity for leaders to see themselves as accountable to the people they lead.

The peoples' verdict is a testimony that a public office holder can serve with integrity. "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand", v. 4. The people assert that Samuel has not forcefully taken anything from them. Neither has he coerced them into giving him anything, nor oppressed them or deprived them of what they should have benefitted from his leadership. Can this be said of any minister or governor of any nation today in Africa or the world as a whole? It is a matter of integrity to have the people we lead acquit us of any wrongdoings while in office.

Samuel's reply to the people is significant. "The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand;" (v. 5). And the people replied that the LORD is witness. God, other leaders and the people are witnesses to our actions in public and private. The thought that God is the principal witness is something that should make any public office holder, especially religious leaders at whatever level to serve with fear and integrity.

SAMUEL'S LEADERSHIP INTEGRITY AS A RESOURCE FOR CONTEMPORARY LEADERS

Several lessons can be gleaned from the life and ministry of Samuel. In the first instance, he was a good and honest follower. Though not the only youth in the temple premises, he chose to be obedient and honest to Eli the high priest. An obedient and honest follower usually end up as a leader with integrity. Secondly, he was a listening and responsive leader. Listening and responding properly to those we lead in any context is the first step to achieving integrity in any leadership position. Thirdly, he had a pedigree of integrity from his childhood. This must have been due to the religious ideals imbibed from his parents. This also must have deepened his religious conviction was deep.

In the fourth place, he feared God and consistently acted in line with the word of God. The place God occupies in a leaders' heart and life is important in determining his/her integrity. This would have prompted

him to present himself for public scrutiny. He didn't have to wait for accusations to start defending himself. He had to clear himself with the people, in readiness to make right any wrong he may be accused of.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cheung notes that "God is the only one who is fully self-integrated, whose intentions and actions perfectly correspond. God can vow by his name, showing his promises to humans to be doubly certain (Hebrews.6:13–18)".³³ Leaders need to see themselves as Gods' representatives before their followers. It is therefore recommended that:

1. Leaders should always have the fear of God. It is God who has allowed them to be leading others (Romans 13:1). Understanding this, leaders in every area should endeavour to appropriately represent God before their followers.
2. Leaders need to constantly submit themselves for appraisal either privately or through random sampling of their followers' perceptions of them.
3. Followers should endeavour to hold their leaders accountable. This they can achieve by attending to their responsibilities as required.
4. The institutional framework that would make it difficult for people to practice dishonesty should be put in place both in every organisation where such already exist; they should be allowed to function as they should.
4. Also, it is important that men and women who aspire to be leaders both in the churches and secular society be properly scrutinized before they're given such responsibilities. For the churches, they would need to go beyond the requirements in 1 Timothy 3. An inquiry should be made to ascertain the background of the person and his pedigree. Information about his parental background would not be out of place.

CONCLUSION

Samuels' ministry, especially his farewell speech has been examined in this paper. While describing integrity as an attitude of honesty, completeness, and trustworthiness, it is obvious that a major challenge to integrity in leadership lies in the compartmentalisation of our lives. Samuels' integrity stemmed from his intrinsic belief in God and

adherence to the teachings of the scriptures. It is evident that if leaders have true reverence for God and hold on to biblical injunctions, they can serve with integrity in any leadership position. This is irrespective of their frailty as humans.

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