

The Biblical Concept of Integrity in Pastoral Leadership: An Obligation for Religious Office Holders in Nigeria

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Abstract

The necessity of integrity cannot be over emphasized as far as Religious Office Holders and leadership is concerned in Nigeria. But many Nigerian leaders lack integrity and this has affected leadership badly. Many leaders do not assign responsibilities to their associates and subordinates due to fear of failure or distrust. The purpose of this work is to correct the misconceptions and call religious office holders to sit up and be faithful in their offices. The work is done by way of biblical methodology with literary and documentary analysis alongside the review of relevant literatures. In this work, the word Integrity and its derivatives are defined and its applications seen from the biblical point of view. Also, Integrity is portrayed as the most important quality of leadership that Nigerian Religious Office Holders must imbibe to make leadership more effective. Servant Leadership is discussed and applied to the Nigerian Religious Office Holders. The blessings of leading with integrity and the hazard of lack of integrity are also presented. More to this, the wrong motive of seeing leadership as the right to control and dominate is corrected. The work identified two bases of leadership development which are mostly ignored by most Religious Office Holders; these are mentorship and delegation. It is discussed that integrity is not the same as sinless perfection but to be blameless in the sight of God. Six points recommendation are proffered at the conclusion of the work.

Key Words: Integrity, Leadership, Mentorship and Delegation

Introduction

The Church in Nigeria has suffered lack of integrity in leadership over the years. Many leaders use the term “integrity” only to cover up their weaknesses and shame; but when they are properly observed, this quality of integrity is lacking. In this piece of work, I am determined to explore what the Bible really says about integrity and see if religious office holders are really doing their work with integrity. For this reason, I have delved into the Bible and other extra biblical materials to find the solutions to this challenge. The Bible has lots of sound instructions on the subject of integrity. When we lead in integrity, there shall be blessings for that as well. We also see the dangers of leaders without integrity. The basic issues in building integrity are also presented in this piece of work. I have explored the Bible and reviewed some relevant literatures on the topic of integrity and presented my findings. The perfect model of integrity is presented in the principle taught by the Lord Jesus himself. The bases of integrity are seen in two ways namely: Mentorship and delegation. When one leads with integrity, there are specific blessings that are involved.

Conceptual Definitions

The word integrity is one of the words that are seldom used in the Bible. The New International Version (NIV) for instance uses the word just about 22 times in both Testaments. The word integrity is rooted in the Hebrew **תָּוֶם** *tom* which means: simplicity, soundness, completeness, uprightness, blamelessness, innocence, honest, righteous, and perfection. Integrity means to live your life in honesty and having moral principles and moral uprightness.¹ Its original sense appears in the phrase **לֶתֶם** *letom* and in the plural **תְּמִים** *Tumim*. It is one of the words on the breast plate of the High Priest (Exod. 28:30; Deut. 33: 8; Ezra 2:63; Neh 7:65). It is the quality of correctness, completeness, wholeness, soundness and compliance with the intention of the Creator. This is a state of soundness from the Latin *integer* which also means whole, complete, steadfast adherence to a strict moral or ethical code, and it is the state of being unimpaired.²

The word integrity does not appear in the New Testament. However, its equivalent derivatives may be seen in words such as sincerity, truth, and the pure heart. In this sense of simplicity of intention, it is equivalent to

being honest, genuine, and it is fundamental to true character. The New Testament teaches us to live lives of integrity or blamelessness. In 2Peter 3:14 it states "...be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless." In the original Greek, the expression "be diligent" is a form of the word σπουδαζω *spoudazo*³ meaning to be eager or zealous to take pains, make every effort." In Greek, the expression 'without spot' is a form of the word ἀσπιλος - *aspilos* which means spotless, without blemish, or being without that which might mar one's moral character. Furthermore, the word blameless is rooted in ἀωμότης - *amometos* which means unblemished. And so, being unblemished means being without fault or blame in character and behaviour in God's view. Thus, integrity is the quality characterized by honesty, reliability and fairness developed in a relationship over time. It is the quality of honourableness, incorruptibility, and upstanding. It is also about being free from defects or flaws.⁴ John C. Maxwell refers to it as "the most important ingredient of leadership."⁵

Jesus' pattern of ministering follows the ancient Jewish example of a shepherd. He said, "I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know [sic] me... and I lay down my life for my sheep" (John 10:14-15). Kwame Bediako maintains that in translating this verse to leadership, the teaching and pattern of Jesus mean that:

Leaders are to feed and care for and look after the sheep of Jesus, not as professionals who know the problems of their client and seek to solve those problems – in our contemporary IT language, service providers who deliver solutions. Rather, the challenge is to serve and minister as vulnerable sisters and brothers who know and are known, who care and are cared for, who forgive and are forgiven, and who love and are being loved.⁶

Bauta D. Motty also reiterates that integrity is a concept of consistency of actions. In leadership ethics, integrity is regarded as sincerity or accuracy of one's actions. So, one may judge that others "have integrity" to the extent that they act according to the values, beliefs and principles they claim to hold.⁷

The Bible and Integrity

As mentioned earlier, the Bible is somewhat silent on the term “integrity.” There are a few proverbs that mention integrity in some translations (Prov 10:9; 11:3). Most of these usages are those that speak of the blessings of integrity because those without it are said to be wicked and will definitely suffer its consequences. However, the Bible is filled with passages urging integrity on believers. It frequently talks about integrity without necessarily using the term. The most famous New Testament command of Christian living – the fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-25) is a command to live a life of the highest integrity. So, biblical integrity is a life marked by love, compassion, mercy, justice, and honouring God’s call above everything else. This is the lifestyle that is spoken of in 1 Peter 3:10-12 saying:

Whoever would love life and see good days must keep his tongue from evil and his lips from deceitful speech. He must turn from evil and do good; he must seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their prayer, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

This definition of integrity calls us to walk in the path of Christ and to steer clear of inconsistency and hypocrisy.⁸ Mary Fairchild corroborates this when she states emphatically that: “The Bible has much to say about spiritual integrity, honesty, and living a blameless life. It also speaks of sincerity, loyalty, obedience, character, and maintaining consistency under pressure. These qualities are all prerequisites for Christian leadership.”⁹

It is worthy of note that children do not learn honesty and integrity from their peers and the society; they learn it from their parents. So the value of a clear conscience must be taught by all Christian parents (Prov. 20:7). In most cases, people fail to maintain their integrity due to their quest for wealth. It must be noted that any riches gained in a dishonest way are filth in the sight of God. So Christians must choose things with eternal value. In this light, the Bible says: “Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a rich man whose ways are perverse (Prov. 28:6).

Paul taught Titus to lead by setting good examples. Self-control shows spiritual maturity which manifests God's spirit in aspects of our daily living. A life of humble integrity is above criticism. It is in light of this that Paul also taught Titus to teach with good example and integrity in such a manner that he cannot be condemned; and the opposition group would lack bad things to say (Tit 2:7-8).

The Master's Principle of Leading with Integrity

In order to obtain competence and integrity in leadership of the church and the society, it is necessary to consider some basic principles that were used by Jesus our Lord. To begin with, it is worthy of note that the term "Leader" is also scarcely used in the Bible. The King James Version for instance uses the term only 6 times; though the New International Version uses it 79 times. Much more frequently, the role is called *Servant*. When we study the word of God, Moses is never referred to by God as 'my leader' but 'my servant.' And this is exactly what Jesus taught.¹⁰ John 13:4-5 shows the complete picture of Jesus' humility and the importance of the lesson he was teaching the disciples. Jesus was a revolutionary teacher of leadership. The term servant speaks everywhere of low prestige, low respect, and low honour. Most people are not attracted to such a low value role. When Jesus used the term "servant" it becomes the synonym for greatness. And that was a revolutionary idea.

The clearest of Jesus' revolutionary teaching on leadership with integrity is found in Mark 10:42-44 where he says: "...You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be the first must be slave of all." These two smart disciples took seriously Jesus' promise about sitting on glorious thrones and judging the tribes of Israel (Matt 19:28) but they misunderstood how to get there. Despite their intimacy, Jesus did not give an inch to their campaign for office. James and John only wanted the glory, but not the cup of shame, the crown, and the cross; they preferred the role of master but not servanthood

Joyce Wereko-Brobby comments on this when she says: "The Lord of lords condescends to perform the most menial of jobs. It is important to

remember that roads in Jesus' days were not paved; they were dusty in the dry season and very muddy in the wet season. Sandals of the day were leather to cover the soles... held together with leather straps. The technology for making them was lower than that of 'Charley Wote.'"¹¹ Peter also offered an example of servanthood by suffering (1Pet 2:21). So, serving and suffering are paired in the teaching and life of our Lord Jesus. One does not come without the other.

Integrity and Perfection

It is also worthy to consider integrity not as sinless perfection. Integrity is being blameless, and being blameless before God means He can find nothing to blame in our attitudes, plans, purposes and actions as Christians. When there is a liberal compromising attitude to known sin among many Christians; there is an urgent need for much preaching and teaching on integrity. Tragically, some Christians regard integrity as a form of legalism. They think integrity and God's grace are opposites or contradictory. They do not realize that these are paradoxes and God's grace leads to integrity. It is the will of God that we strive to be blameless in his sight and the sight of fellow men. Some people are so concerned about reputation; which is understood to be what others supposed we are. We ought to develop our character and integrity which is what we really are even as noticed by God.¹²

Bases of Leadership with Integrity

It is very evident that many religious leaders in Nigeria lack integrity. Many of these leaders are deficient of most of the issues discussed so far. Because of the lack of integrity and self-centeredness, religious leaders do not want to work with intelligent subordinates. They prefer to work with people who do not know their rights so that they can be easily controlled. For Nigerian leaders, leadership is all about control; but this is contrary to the biblical injunctions as demonstrated above. On leadership by control Maxwell contends that:

A person may be "in control" because he has been appointed to a position. In that position he may have authority. But real leadership is more than having authority; it is more than having the technical training and following the proper procedures. Real leadership is being the person

others will gladly and confidently follow. A real leader knows the difference between being the boss and being a leader....¹³

Basically, two aspects of leadership for the development and promotion of God's kingdom here on earth are briefly discussed. These are mentorship and delegation.

Mentorship:- This is the aspect of being a role model in order to develop character and integrity in a person. Reuben Kigame quotes *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary* which maintains that the term "Mentor" goes back to the name of a person in Greek mythology who provided instruction and counsel for a man known as Telemachus.¹⁴ George Renner also speaks in support of this fact when he says "Great leaders are distinguished by a few common characteristics. Raising up other leaders around them is one thing great leaders do, no matter what their context. Effective leaders transform others around them into leaders."¹⁵

In the traditional Nigerian society and Africa at large, a father mentored his son by fireside through evening or night narratives and wise sayings. Initiation rites then solidified most of what was learned as the boy grew to adulthood. Young girls learned domestic skills, home keeping, mothering, sanitation and character tips from their mothers. The home rather than the school was the centre of learning and the focus of spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical development. All these happened under strict mentorship. Thus Mentorship is not restricted to the Greek practice but could be found all over the world. This is why Kigame says:

But mentorship is not a Greek concept. People all over the world have practiced it as a medium of education and character development, leading to exceptional achievements. Notably, every major personality in the world had a mentor. In western philosophy, it is known that Socrates mentored Plato. Plato mentored Aristotle and Aristotle in turn mentored the great conquering ruler, Alexander the Great.¹⁶

Kigame further opines that in ancient universities too, a student learned at the house of a professor. In the royal courts, the knights passed on the warriors' skills to the novices by apprenticeship, and artists spent most of the time with students in their studios. This has been the trend throughout

history, including the church. Jonathan Edwards, the great pastor, teacher, and author and his wife – Sarah, usually had one or more Christians living at their house. These Christians learned by observing issues related to marriage, spiritual disciplines and the rigors of pastoral ministry.¹⁷

Obviously, mentorship is biblical. Moses is known to have mentored Joshua the son of Nun. Similarly, Naomi mentored Ruth and helped her cope with her youthful challenges. Prophet Nathan also mentored King David even as Samuel had mentored King Saul.¹⁸ Kigame also proffers the following solutions to the challenges: First of all, as shepherds, the Nigerian pastors need to create time for the flocks. Mentorship requires availability and pastoral visitations. Secondly, mentorship requires that the leader demonstrates or lives by what he/she teaches or preaches. Thirdly, integrity in how one manages his/her home, speech, attitude and general character is crucial. Great men of God live a life of accountability. Fourthly, the Nigerian mentor cannot go far without a firm foundation in spiritual disciplines. Lastly, the Nigerian leader must remember that a good mentor does not always look for mistakes. He/she does not only criticize but also commend where credit is due. He/she is to be a leader remembering the paradoxes of Jesus that in order to be first, you have to be last: to gain, you must lose: to be great; you have to be a servant. More to this, Dale Galloway emphasizes that effective Christian leads with love. He reiterates that: “President Eisenhower once said, ‘you do not lead by hitting people over the head. Any fool can do that, but it is usually called assault, not leadership... in mentoring your church staff, you earn the right to be followed...if they know you love them, they will follow you almost everywhere.’”¹⁹

Leadership and Delegation

Leaders in Nigerian church have difficulty in delegating responsibilities. Subordinate church workers are only sent on errands where the superior officer cannot reach or even sent to places of less significance. Associate pastors or second pastors are only sent to perform burials of some less privileged or low class members of the society. Reasons for the lack or reluctance to delegate are not farfetched. You may lack confidence in others or feel no one has the ability to do the job as you do it. This attitude is very wrong because you are not indispensable. If you make people over rely on you then you have become a peg that too many things hang upon

(Isa 22:23-25). The reasons behind slowness to delegate may be possessiveness and the fear of being displaced, both of which are unworthy feelings.²⁰

Then, your attitude may be expressed in the word: “if you want something done well, do it yourself.” However, this is not an acceptable principle of leadership. For it is first of all a form of pride, secondly, if that is your attitude, people will let you do the work and will never rise to it themselves. Jethro was found by Moses doing the work of a judge over the people of Israel from morning till night. Here Moses was taught the lesson of delegation of responsibility and to be an overseer (Exod 18.). Derek Prime quotes a report from the Church of Scotland on its corporate life which states: “Ministers must learn to devolve more tasks to their elders and to unleash the creative potential that is surely there in most congregations, dormant and untapped.”²¹

As a leader, it is your responsibility to recognize their potential and to see that it is developed and given scope. In recognizing the importance of delegation, Prime quotes John Mott who states that: “It is better to set ten men to work than to do the work of ten men even if one is able to do so.”²² Leaders are overseers (1Tim 3:1), their responsibility is to superintend rather than to do everything themselves. Not having any idea about how to go about delegation is a serious leadership disqualification and lack of integrity. As Barnabas had his eye on Paul from the onset, recognizing his potentials, we should be on the lookout for those who may carry responsibility.

“Leadership may be defined as the ability to train others to lead and to develop everyone’s highest potential; such a goal may be achieved only where delegation is deliberately practised.”²³

The Blessings of Integrity

It is worthy of note here that there are a lot of rewards and blessings for integrity. Few of them are as follows:

Firstly, integrity establishes our leadership: That is why God said to King Solomon: “If you walk before me in integrity of heart and uprightness...and do all I command and observe my decrees and laws, I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever...” (1 Kings 9:3-5). This biblical context portrays that if King Solomon obeyed God, his throne would be established but if he disobeyed, God would withdraw his

blessings and take the people away from their good land. This same principle runs through the Bible. Obedience leads to blessing and disobedience leads to chastening. It is very obvious from this biblical context that King Solomon gradually drifted from the Lord up till toward the end of his life he tried to kill an innocent man (1Kings 11:40).

Secondly, integrity guards our life. A man of integrity is one who makes it a point of duty to follow the road as a constant rule as the word of God and the voice of his conscience speaks to him. So, he remains the same every day and everywhere. Integrity guides our life and leadership. Thirdly, the man of integrity is guarded by righteousness. We read from the Bible that: “*righteousness guards* the man of integrity but wickedness overthrows the sinner” (Prov 13:6). Righteousness guards him whose way is upright: that is to say, righteousness as in Proverbs 10:2 and 11:4 refers to fairness, honesty, or goodness. The person whose way is “upright” is literally “the blameless way,” meaning a person whose way of living is upright.²⁴ This is also supported by Motty’s personal translation when he says; “but if you do evil things, you will destroy yourself.”²⁵

Fourthly, integrity grants security. The Bible says “The man of integrity walks securely, but he who takes crooked paths will be found out” (Prov 10:9). The biblical concept of “walk” refers to the manner of living (cf. Prov 2:7; 3:23). Here people of integrity walk securely and walk in integrity.

Conclusion

Integrity is a quality that is rooted in the Bible and a prerequisite for all Office Holders in Nigeria. It is discovered that the word is seldom mentioned in the Bible but its derivatives are numerous. It has to do with being faithful and sincere in our workplace. We also discovered that leadership is not all about control but all about service. Religious Office Holders are encouraged to mentor others by assigning duties and delegating them to certain functions where they can learn and develop their God given potentials.

Recommendations

Having discussed the concept of integrity at length and having come to the conclusion of the matter of integrity, I hereby proffer the following 6 points recommendations:

1. Religious Office Holders in Nigeria should be faithful in the discharge of their duties, be it in the Church or in the civil society; for both belong to God.
2. Pastors and Church Leaders should devote more time to the teaching and preaching on the topic of integrity so that the concept would be properly understood; and that church members will live their lives and do their work with integrity of heart. This will bring a lot of blessings to the family, the church, and the society at large.
3. Christian Religious Office Holders must consider themselves as servants and not rulers. They ought to follow the principles laid down by Christ in their leadership roles.
4. Religious Office Holders should imbibe the spirit of mentoring others so as to reproduce their types in leadership.
5. One of the best ways of learning is by practising. Religious Office Holders must assign responsibilities to their subordinates and delegate them to represent and perform certain functions. These would help the novice in leadership to develop his/her leadership potentials and grow to be a great leader.
6. Every leader in Nigeria ought to be a man of integrity in order to be blessed and to bring blessing upon the organisation, the church and the country at large.

Endnotes

1. James Orr et al, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 1484. Also see Edward W. Goodrick and John R. Kohlenberger III. *Zondervan NIV Exhaustive Concordance* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 1508.
2. Orr et al. *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1508.
3. This Greek word and the subsequent ones in this paragraph are obtained from W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger William White Jr. *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nasville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1996), 169, - See *aspilos* p. 596; *amametos* p. 68.
4. Noah Webster, *Webster's New International Dictionary* (Massachusetts: G&C Merriam Company, 1847), 1290.
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11. Joyce Wereko-Brobby, "Servant hood" in *Church Leaders Challenge – Book 1*. (Bukuru: Africa Christian TextbookS, 2011), 97.
12. Standley Frodsham, Smith Wigglesworth, *Apostle of Faith*, (London: Elim, 1949), 124.
13. Maxwell, *Developing the Leader Within You*, 5.
14. Reuben Kigame, "Mentoring" in *Church Leaders' Challenge –Book One* (Bukuru: Africa Christian TextbookS, 2011), 20.
15. George Renner, "Discipling Your Timothy" in *Church Leaders' Challenge – Book one* (Bukuru: Africa Christian TextbookS, 2011), 52.
16. Kigame, "Mentoring." 20-21.
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18. Kigame, "Mentoring." 23.
19. Dale Galloway with Warren Bird, *On Purpose Leadership*, (Kansas: Beacon Hill Press, 2001), 56.

20. Derek Prime, *A Christian's Guide to Leadership for the Whole Church* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2005),107.
21. Prime, *A Christian's Guide to Leadership*, 109.
22. Prime, *A Christian's Guide to Leadership*, 111.
23. Prime, *A Christian's Guide to Leadership*, 116.
24. In the Hebrew text, the wicked is an abstract noun and so this expression is alternatively rendered as “wickedness brings sinners down.” (REB)
25. Motty, *Leadership of Church and Missions* (Jos: Yakson Press, 2014), 256.

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