

Pulpit Ministry And Integrity: A Contextual Analysis Of Titus 2:7-8

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Abstract

Integrity has become a topic with more prominence in research on personality and leadership in both secular and religious organizations. It is a fundamental virtue necessary for an understanding of leadership in both dimensions. Today, integrity crisis is perhaps one of the major challenges facing pulpit ministry. This has brought the church under serious tests especially in the present day Nigerian society. It seems immorality has reached a *pan-epidemic* level in the Nigerian church both among the clergy and the laity and consequently, respect for pastors has come to an all-time low level. While undertaking an examination of pulpit ministry and integrity in Titus 2:7-8 vis-a vis the Nigerian society, the historical-critical approach and a contextual analysis of the text was done to bring out its relevance to the contemporary situation. The result indicates that while some contemporary Nigerian church pastors preach and teach good sermons with emphasis, at times, on prosperity; it seems many do not model what they preach. One of the implications of this is a mere religiosity without serious impacts in the society. This paper recommends the need for leaders in the Nigerian church to go back to the Bible and practice what they teach.

Key words: Integrity, Pulpit ministry, Nigerian church, Immorality, Titus 2:7-8.

Introduction

In Nigeria today, there is an increasing need for integrity in the pulpit ministry and the church in general. This is because “we are facing an integrity crisis, not only in the conduct of the church in question, but also in the very character of the church.”¹ Pastors in Nigeria are constantly facing integrity crisis. Integrity crisis has reached a frightening level in the Nigerian church community particularly in the pulpit ministry. Respect for pastors and pastoral office seems to have drastically reduced. In the olden days, law enforcement agents would rarely bother to scrutinize any pastor driving on the Nigerian road. They were accorded honour, respected and regarded as ‘men of God.’ But today, such privilege has been abused by the few ones who fail to show integrity as demanded by their calling.

The Pulpit ministry is thrown into a state of confusion and distrust whenever pastors are exposed in immorality and diabolism. Secular media often exploit these sinful acts and the man in the street depicts such church leaders as interested only in money, women and power. The situation puts the church ministry in a serious dilemma and therefore calls for urgent attention in order to restore it to a position of honour and dignity. When pastors do not show integrity, they are indirectly sending conflicting messages to the followers and the society at large and this may further encourage higher level of immorality in the society. Many church members have discovered that their pastors have no clear standard of what integrity is. The responsibility of teaching church members the positive moral values and living a life of integrity is primarily that of the pastor (Titus 2:7-8). The impact of a pastor’s integrity will help to add values to his teaching in the lives of the followers. Virtually all followers will expect their leaders to be above board when it comes to integrity among religious leaders. They will expect these leaders to be models in practice of virtue. In the epistle of Paul to Titus, Paul reiterated the need for Titus and all church leaders by implication, to show integrity as they discharge their spiritual duties. The instruction of Paul to Titus (Titus 2:7-8) on this subject is very important and its relevance in the context of the prevailing corruption, lawlessness, dishonesty, deceit and immorality in Nigeria cannot be overemphasised. This paper examines the text of Titus 2:7-8 using the historical-critical approach to bring out its relevance to

the contemporary situation of the pulpit ministry and the need for the Nigerian church leaders to model what they teach. It is believed that if pastors as well as other leaders in the Nigerian church would follow this instruction to “show integrity in all things,” the lives of their followers will improve and the society will be impacted positively thereby guaranteeing the future of the nation.

Historical and Literary Context

The book of Titus is one of the Pauline epistles addressed to Titus who was a Greek Gentile convert from Antioch and one of the most trusted and best loved members of the little band of Paul’s friends and followers. Since Paul brought him to the Lord, the relationship between the two of them was more tender and affectionate. This is clearly demonstrated in 1:4 where Paul refers to Titus as “my true son in our common faith”. Although, Titus was not a Jew, Paul did not have him circumcised as that might assume a concession to Jewish legalism. “The choice of Titus reflects the wisdom of Paul’s ministry. It served as a powerful witness that a Gentile could participate in God’s salvation without accepting the prescription of the Torah on circumcision (Galatians 2:3).”² For a number of years, he ministered alongside Paul and Barnabas. Titus was also with them when they travelled to the Jerusalem council – Acts 15:2; Galatians 2:1-3. At a time, he was detailed to give guidance and prepare the believers in their offering for the church in Jerusalem Acts 11:27-30; Galatians 2:13. Furthermore, Titus visited Corinth as Paul’s representative to put right the problems in the Corinthian Church (2 Corinthians 8:17& 7:13-15).³ Although, Paul and Titus had little time to minister at Crete, yet Paul saw the deplorable conditions of churches in this region and the need for someone to teach and organise them. This is why Paul asked Titus to stay behind, while he continued his journey to other churches. By the time this letter was written, however, Titus was on the Mediterranean Island of Crete where Paul had left him (1:5) to organise believers into churches and to oversee all the churches there. As these churches were grappling with numerous problems, Paul wrote this letter to charge Titus to be a good and responsible leader who will always show integrity in all things.

“Crete is a mountainous Island found in the Mediterranean lying across the south end of the Aegean, about 250 km long and between 11 and 56

km wide.”⁴ Douglas and Tenney claim that despite its enviable geographical position, “Crete has never attained a prominent place in history, partly because of internal dissensions, and in modern times, because of its acceptance of Turkish rule and the Islamic Faith until AD1913, when it was formally incorporated into Greece in which the Orthodox church predominates.”⁵ Although, Crete is rarely referred to in the Old Testament, Cretans are mentioned at Pentecost in Acts 2:11. After Paul had completed his jail term in Rome, he obviously re-visited Crete and quoted the Cretan poet, Epimenides, who made an unflattering description of the Cretans in Titus 1:12; (see also Acts.17:28a). “Crete began to decline after the peak of its civilization was attained early in the late Bronze Age (c. 1600-1400BC).”⁶ Crete is said to have been colonised by the Dorians who came from Peloponnesus. Knossos excavated Gortyna and Cydonia which were the most important of the ancient cities of Crete.⁷ “The Island was divided among feuding city-states until the Romans subdued it in 67 B.C.”⁸ It also became part of its (Roman) province with a mixed population of Roman officials, native Cretans and a great number of Jewish traders.⁹ Having different people of all ages in the church will surely make the church stronger and more robust, but not without its own potential problems. Added to that is the deplorable condition in which the church in Crete was. Paul described the Cretans, including the Christians there as people of low moral character. According to him, “Cretans are always liars...” (Titus 1:12). Laziness and gluttony were also part of them. Titus was to minister in such a situation as this. Part of his task include appointing church elders (1:5-9), rebuking false teachers (Titus 1:10-16) as well as teaching sound doctrine (Titus 2:1-15). These became necessary as he would have to be dealing with different people in the church, particularly the Judaizers who were misleading people and speaking evil about the gospel. Such Judaizers constituted dangers to the ministry of the gospel in Crete.

A minister of the gospel who would want to have a successful ministry in such a heterogeneous and treacherous environment must therefore live a life of integrity. This will also be one of the ways to silent false teachers that were present in the Cretan church. The Challenges in the church and the larger society of Crete were that of lack of integrity and lack of respect for moral values which might have influenced the character of the people

including the Cretan Christians. Hence, the need for a church leader who would minister with absolute integrity in order to make the gospel relevant and bring a positive change in the lives of the church members and the Cretans at large. Paul charged Titus that his life should be consistent with his message. His message must match his character. This would serve as a testimony to those who are outside the church. Paul gave specific instructions on how Titus should carry out this noble assignment. He must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine (2:1) and encourage the youths to be self-controlled (2:6). More importantly, Paul also emphasized the significance of integrity and exemplary life to Titus. His ministry would only be in vain if he taught a sound doctrine and failed to match it with a personal life of integrity. Titus was instructed to show himself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in his teaching, to show integrity, gravity, and sound speech that cannot be censured (Titus 2:7,8). The aim of the charge is to put to shame those who opposed Titus and his message such that they would have nothing bad to say to him and Paul himself (Titus2:18).

The Text of Titus 2:7-8

7. *περὶ πάντα σεαυτὸν παρεχόμενος τύπον καλῶν ἔργων, ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀφθορίαν, σεμνότητα, ἀφθορίαν, 8. λόγον ὑγιῆ ἀκατάγνωστον, ἵνα ὁ ἐξ ἐναντίας ἐντραπῆ, μηδὲν ἔχων περὶ ἡμῶν λέγειν φαῦλον* (The Greek Text).

7. Show yourself in all respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity, 8. and sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us (RSV).

Paul wrote more extensively on Titus as a model than he did about him as a preacher. He advised Titus on how to help different categories of people in the church based on the challenges facing each category. But Titus himself was not left out in the counsel. Paul charged him on setting personal example for those in the church and those outside the church. As a young man in the ministry, Titus received some direct advice from the apostle.

7. *περὶ πάντα σεαυτὸν παρεχόμενος τύπον καλῶν ἔργων, ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀδιαφθορίαν, σεμνότητα, ἀφθορίαν* (Show yourself in all

respects a model of good deeds, and in your teaching show integrity, gravity).

Titus was instructed to provide a model for the Cretan believers as a good minister should. “Not merely teaching others, but showing them by example how they ought to live.”¹⁰ ‘In everything’ (verse 7) is an indication of the comprehensive nature of Titus ministry. It seems that the Greek words, *περὶ πάντα* in this verse do not belong to the preceding sentence but begin a new one, and are put first for emphasis. *Πάντα* is not masculine: ‘towards every one,’ but neuter: ‘in regard to all things, in all points.’ *σεαυτὸν παρεχόμενος τύπον καλῶν ἔργων*.¹¹ He must struggle to ‘show himself’ an example (*typo*, ‘pattern’) to all in every good work. The English word ‘type’ or ‘pattern’ is a translation of the Greek *τύπος* (*typos*) and originally referred to an impression made by a die as that which is struck.”¹² It portrays the idea of a model. Hence, in a metaphorical sense, it means an example.¹³ It is only found here with the genitive of the thing. “Titus was to live so that his life would be like a “spiritual die” that would impress itself on others. This involved good works, sound doctrine, a seriousness of attitude, and sound speech that no one - not even the enemy could condemn.”¹⁴ As an antitype, the word is generally used to describe a relationship between something present and something for the future. *Καλῶν ἔργων* (*καλὰ ἔργα* as in 1 Timothy 5:10) is an expression that is common in the Pastoral Epistles. The Greek words, *ἐν τῇ διδασκαλίᾳ ἀφθορίαν* and the following accusatives are dependent on *παρεχόμενος*.

The word ‘integrity’ employed here does not occur elsewhere in the New Testament. It comes from the Latin *integritas*, which means ‘wholeness,’ ‘completeness’. The root, *integer*, means ‘untouched,’ ‘intact,’ or ‘entire.’ “It means, here, the same as purity - that which is not erroneous, and which does not tend to corrupt or vitiate the morals of others, or to endanger their salvation. Everything in his teaching was to be such as to make men purer and better.”¹⁵ Therefore, it can be inferred that a person with integrity has nothing to hide and nothing to fear and neither show duplicity nor exhibit hypocrisy. He or she is ‘whole’; life is ‘put together,’ and things are working together harmoniously. His or her life is an open book. He is called an integer.¹⁶ In the same manner, the word ‘gravity’ is

rendered ‘honesty;’ in 1 Timothy 2:2 and ‘gravity’ in 1 Timothy 3:4. According to Metzger, “the Committee preferred the reading ἀφθορίαν (“incorruption”) because it is supported by good representatives of both the Alexandrian and Western types of text (ⲛ* A C D* 33 al), and because its rarity explains the origin of the other readings: ἀφθονίαν (“freedom from envy”) ρ³² F^{gr} G^{gr} 88 915 cop^{sa}, ἀδιαφθορίαν (“sincerity”) ⲛ^c D^c L most minuscule arm (followed by the Textus Receptus), and ἀδιαφορίαν (“indifference”) 35^c 205 1905 Theodoret^{ms}. The last reading is an obvious transcriptional error; all four words are *hapax legomena* in the New Testament.”¹⁷ However, according to Barnes, the word, ἀφθορίαν which does not occur elsewhere, “properly means ‘venerableness;’ then, whatever will insure respect in character, opinions, deportment. This means, a preacher gives his message in a way that it will command respect.”¹⁸

8. λόγον ὑγιῆ ἀκατάγνωστον, ἵνα ὁ ἐξ ἐναντίας ἐντραπῆ, μηδὲν ἔχων περὶ ἡμῶν λέγειν φαῦλον. (sound speech that cannot be censured, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say of us).

In the above verse, the Greek words *λόγον ὑγιῆ ἀκατάγνωστον* (ἄπ. λεγ.) refer to the doctrine that is ‘sound, unblameable’ and not the corrupt words made by the heretics. The purpose of such doctrine is given here: (ἵνα ὁ ἐξ ἐναντίας ἐντραπῆ) ὁ ἐξ ἐναντίας (ἄπ. λεγ.), ὁ διάβολος καὶ πᾶς ὁ ἐκείνῳ διακονούμενος; but the next words seem to be against this interpretation. According to Titus 2:5 and 1 Timothy 6:1, it refers to the non-Christian opponent of the gospel, and not the Christian heretic.¹⁹ Church leaders need to watch out for their lives in everything they do: if it is in actions and in words; at home and in the society; in the church and outside the church. Paul later gave clarifications in the words that follow: ‘By doing what is good,’ and this refers to Titus’ conduct. Personal example characterised by integrity and seriousness must precede effective teaching. Great responsibility is placed on every Christian to show integrity especially in the manner of speech and action. The demands on Christian leaders are all-inclusive, involving not only their words but also their conducts which are a reflection of their integrity. Therefore, considering the nature of heresies in the Cretan church, Paul strongly emphasizes the importance of “doing what is good: (Titus 1:16; 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8, 14).

Pulpit ministry is more than preaching on Sundays. It entails preaching and living by the word. According to Solomon Andria, “in Africa, we have many teachers who possess impressive diplomas but what we need are models that Christians can imitate.”²⁰ A leader in the church must set a model for those he leads. The first thing that a pastor must attend to is his own integrity. A minister needs to live a life of integrity that can be emulated by others. The message of Titus as a minister will be meaningless if such message is not consistent with his conduct. As a matter of fact, it is the conduct of a preacher that determines to a large extent, the acceptability of the message. The message of Titus and any minister of God must show incorruptness. The content of the word *aphthorian* carries the idea of purity or untaintedness in teaching. This word is not found elsewhere in the New Testament. Furthermore, the word *semnoteta* implies purity and seriousness (of language), logicity of arguments and truth in the teachings which one upholds. A pastor must be careful to practice what he preaches; he must be the same man whether on the pulpit or not. Hypocrisy in speech or conduct will ruin a man's ministry. No pastor is perfect, just as no church member is perfect; but he must strive to be the best example possible. A church will never rise any higher than its leadership. The word *ἐντραπή*, (1 Corinthians 4:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:14) means ‘to be ashamed to take shame to oneself.’ The reason for the shame is contained in the words: *μηδὲν ἔχων περὶ ἡμῶν* (or *ὕμῶν*) *λέγειν φαῦλον* which means ‘having nothing wicked to say of us.’ If *περὶ ἡμῶν* is taken to be the correct reading, it is not to be limited to Titus and Paul, but should be taken more generally. However, with the word *ὕμῶν*, on the other hand, the apostle's words refer to Titus and the churches that follow his example.²¹

The importance of Titus' personal conduct was to confirm what he taught. This sounds more applicable to the ministers in an environment like Crete. The doctrinal pollution by the false teachers and the moral laxity were very prevalent at the time Titus was sent there. Religion without emphasis on moral integrity was very common. Exhortation and exemplary life were to be his tools for building them up in the faith (Titus 2:6-7). He was to exhort them to be self-controlled, for there were many temptations to sin. Apostle Paul's charge to Titus is summarily given in two sentences – “In everything, set an example by doing what is good. In

your teaching, show integrity.” (Titus 2:7). He is admonished to be a model for everyone. As a minister, it is not enough to teach or preach to the church members. Such teaching or preaching must be exemplified in one’s lifestyle. Titus was to live so that his life would be like a "spiritual die" that would impress itself on others. This attitude involved good works, sound doctrine, a seriousness of attitude, and sound speech that no one - not even the enemy could rebuke. In using this statement, “Paul hints at the picture of a courtroom where the judge can find no basis for the accusation of the plaintiff.”²²

Titus 2:7-8 in the Nigerian Context

By October 1st 2020, Nigeria will be celebrating her 60th independence anniversary from British colonial rule. At such historical junctures, it is always good to reflect back so that we may see what is ahead. In this case, this paper briefly reflects on the church in Nigeria with some specific emphasis on the pulpit ministry and integrity in the 21st century Nigeria. For almost one hundred and seventy years of Christian flourish in Nigeria, there has been a remarkable progress which has taken firm root in the country, having survived threats of hostility. There are also glaring evidences of fruitful results especially in the areas of evangelism and structural expansion. What is amazing is that as at the time of her independence in 1960, it seemed that the numbers of churches, pastors, seminaries and theological institutions were relatively fewer in the nation. Copies of the Bible, no doubt, were also few and not many people were theologically trained to read their Bible in Hebrew and Greek. It is also true that relatively little noise about miracles and prosperity was heard. Yet, the few ministers of God that were available then, showed integrity and the result cannot be overemphasised; for instance, Christianity became a major religion in Nigeria. It is not an overstatement to say that it has attained the level of indigenous religion in the nation. The reason for this exponential increase was not hidden. The church leaders showed integrity and were dedicated to the course of the pulpit ministry. Integrity was never compromised. Evangelism campaign and undiluted messages of God’s word were the order of the day until probably late 21st century when it appears that there has been a remarkable paradigm shift from what pulpit ministry used to be and what it is now. Recent development in the contemporary pulpit ministry is a regrettable tale of contradictions

and degenerating spiritual fervor. There are identifiable teething challenges to the pulpit ministry. In the first place, there is unprecedented proliferation of churches, with characteristic features of small scale industries; vending of religious services on commercial terms. Also, recent trend in its manifest and latent practices on the pulpit show signs of contradistinction leading to significant reduction in practical living and sanctity of its teachings. Some of the effects of this are specifically observed in the recent alarming commercialization of the gospel, immoral behaviours, church politics and corruption. Therefore, examining the book of Titus in relation to the Nigerian context is a worthwhile adventure. Recently, the United Nations Population Fund reported that Nigeria's population has hit a new high of 201 milion,²³ making it the most populous nation in Africa. It is possible to identify some similarities between this country (Nigeria) and the ancient Crete. Nigeria is characterised with many religious activities with numerous church founders, general overseers, superintendents, presidents, prophets and evangelists. Churches are established in every corner of our cities and villages. Yet, there are a lot of ugly practices in some of these churches that are disturbing and therefore call for concern. The lifestyles of many pastors in these churches are not such that can be emulated because they are not consistent with the standard of the Bible. Among the Nigerian pastors, there are cases of sexual immorality, misappropriation and embezzlement of church money, polygamy, divorce, etc.

Ministers who formulate false stories on the pulpit, sleep with young ladies and wives of church members, manipulate and arrange miracles, are teaching their members and the entire society that integrity does not matter and should not be pursued. This is a projection of a sick and immoral image to those outside the church. The implication of this trend is that the followers will become a confused generation of men and women who have little or no regard for integrity or any sense of values but are after the pursuit of illicit fulfillment and miracles with minimal efforts. Therefore, living a life of integrity through a disciplined lifestyle of the ministers is quite important and relevant in Nigeria today. With the level of poverty in Nigeria and in Africa in general which has reduced the dignity of human beings, many Nigerian clerics are using this opportunity to exploit members in so many ways. Many members have become

victims of circumstance through the pastor's lack of integrity. Many lives have been ruined and many homes destroyed because their clerics lack integrity. Many people in Nigeria have fallen into the hands of these so-called ministers who exploit their gullibility and deceive them with fake miracles. This is one of the issues that is currently trending in the society. Today, it is unfortunate that the ministry of a "man of God" is adjudged successful by the number of miracles he can perform. This is often mistakenly used to confirm his level of anointing. The Nigerian society is now characterized with lack of personal integrity and respect for societal moral values that there is the need for self-control, a sound mind and moral training for one to remain focused. It is dangerous now-a-days to copy anything from the life of a preacher especially those who may have some questionable characters. The present day moral standard contradicts the principles of the Bible which teaches and upholds integrity. With the advancement in science and technology, man and many organizations including churches have explored the Bible and a lot of opportunities in the Biblical world. However, this has also been abused as members of the church, particularly the youths, are getting involved in pornography and internet scams that may destroy their future. The effect of this on the society and the church cannot be overemphasized. The church which exists to guide the morality in the society is now found wanting because the leaders lack integrity. To this end, there is the need for the Nigerian church leaders like Titus to 'show integrity in all things' so that their message will be meaningful and impactful to the society. They must be ready to impart good character in the lives of the followers both in words and in action.

Conclusion

Pulpit ministry in Nigeria is faced with the challenge of a lack of integrity. Proliferation of churches without a corresponding integrity in this part of the world is increasingly worrisome. The rate at which people are going into the church ministry is also alarming. But the most unfortunate aspect of this phenomenon is that many of those who are engaging themselves in pulpit ministry do not give proper consideration to the issue of integrity. This is gradually leading to decrease in moral values. The followers and the society in general look up to church leaders for guide but find instead deceit, sexual immorality, embezzlement of church funds

and corruption. What the followers see in the lives of the leaders is not consistent with what those church leaders teach them. Indeed, there is a wide gap between what the society conceived a pulpit ministry to be and what the pulpit ministers are doing. The scenario only leaves the followers in a state of confusion. The church leaders must rise up to this challenge in order to make Christianity relevant in the society. The followers should be guided about moral values and what constitute integrity. The double standard lives of the leaders depict a lack of integrity and this is not helping the predicaments of their followers. Thus, the admonition by Paul to Titus is very relevant to the Nigerian church leaders who minister to the congregation on daily basis. It is imperative for the Nigerian pastors as church leaders to show integrity in the discharge of their spiritual responsibilities. They must do this by living an exemplary life. The visibly good and attractive lives of God's household are a revelation to the world of the blessing that the crucified savior has in store for those who put their faith in Him.²⁴ Church members build their lives on what they see and hear from their leaders. Therefore, Church leaders must be above reproach in integrity and moral values.

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