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AN EXEGESIS OF 1TIMOTHY 3:1-7 AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR GODLY LEADERSHIP IN THE AFRICAN CHURCH

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Abstract

The Church in Africa is characterized by ethical, theological, ecclesiastical and leadership controversies. These have become an embarrassment to the church and a thick veil to people beholding the beautiful face of Jesus Christ, the founder and head of the Church. Many church members as a result have backslidden and many outside the Church blackmail and blasphemy the Church. This paper argues that bad leadership accounts for many maladies of the church. There are many unqualified leaders in leadership positions in the church. This in itself contradicts biblical standards for leaders. This paper presents a set of leadership qualities prescribed in 1Timothy 3:1-9 not only for admiration but emulation of Africa Church leaders for promotion of godly leadership in the Church. Exegesis-descriptive method is adopted for this study in an attempt to discover the original intention of the author and thereafter apply its teaching in the context of African Church Leadership. It recommends the need for reputable church leaders charged with the responsibilities of selecting, training, regulating and disciplining of Church leaders in Africa. All aspiring for church leadership positions must endeavour to meet the qualifications of 1Timothy 3:1-7.

Keywords: Church, Righteousness, Leadership, Exegesis, Africa.

Introduction

Jesus Christ is the undisputed head of the Church. However, he sets human leaders in the Church for its proper functioning. The church, the body of the Holy and righteous Christ, is called to display Christlike life in this present life. For this reason, Church leadership more than any other calls for righteous men and women in the conduct of its affairs. Uprightness is an universal and timeless expectation of those who manage nations, corporate and public organizations. Where this is compromised failure or liquidation becomes inevitable. The church is ridiculed today because of unchristian words, walks and works of many a church leader. Church leaders expected to be exemplary in all facets of human life especially in morals is anything but a shining model of godly leadership.

The church leadership in Africa being occupied by many men and women of questionable characters and professional incompetence, the consequence is manifest unchristian conducts and practices such that the Apostle Paul cautioned should not be mentioned among Christians. Church leaders should conduct themselves and the affairs of the church righteously. Church leadership here includes denominational leaders, pastors of churches and para church leaders. The Bible clearly spells out qualifications for Christians aspiring to leadership positions in the Church. The New Testament abounds with such qualities that make for righteous church leadership. The pericope for this paper specifically addresses

aspiring church leaders on the necessity for godly leadership. The paper x-rays contemporary leadership, its challenges, the exegesis of the chosen text and its implications for Church leadership in Africa; and concludes with recommendations for raising righteous leadership in the African Church.

The Leadership in the African Church

One of the problems of the contemporary African church is lack of godly leadership. Primarily it borders on improper theology, lack of morals and trainings, professional incompetence and the like. It seems over the years the quality of church leadership is progressively being depreciated. Since the advent of the church in Africa, its moral integrity seems to be at its lowest ebb. "The gradual emergence of an increasingly self-centered quasi biblical and quasi – ethical Christianity was clearly evident as we moved into the 80's and 90's (Maxey- Ozodo 2017:59). This author has observed that "The church leaders before the advent of health and wealth gospel emphasized Biblical values of sacrificial living and holiness. Holiness was preferred over and above happiness and heaven over earthly material possession. (Orgu). The problem is not unconnected with the influx of men and women of questionable characters and theological illiterates who parade themselves as God's Ministers. The unrighteous church leadership has done more harm to the body of Christ. People still love God and want to associate with God but not the church. The church is seen as a failed institution. The term church connotes something negative to many. The negative attitude towards the church is because of the failure of church leadership.

The failure of leadership has led to many being disillusioned, discouraged and bitterly disappointed. Though the failure of leadership in Africa is not peculiar to church, many political, traditional and other carders of leaders are no exceptions. But the church's leadership is expected to be the beacon of light to the world and agent of its transformation. It is in the light of this that authors like Gary S. Maxey and Peter Ozodo blame the church for the national moral failure particularly of Nigeria (P 50). Today's church leadership is anything but true reflection of authentic ethical Christianity. The church leadership today is compromised, ethically and theologically and in dire need of restoration to Biblical intended path of godly leadership.

The church leadership has the lion share of the blame. It takes a godly leadership to raise godly people. This begins with the leadership of the church living worthy of its calling or vocation. It is a vocation requiring holistic living, a life of moral purity. Hence this paper stresses the necessity for Church leaders to come to terms with Biblical qualifications for church leadership as expelled out in 1Timothy. 3:1–7. The need for righteous church leadership in contemporary church is obvious and very urgent "The many distortion of the bible, deceitful and harmful doctrinal errors, nominalism and unethical practices in the contemporary church" (Orgu) calls for morally sound and competent leadership restore the church to Biblical Christianity. It is true that Christianity is authentic only when it is truly Biblical (Timothy Dudley – Smith, 1995:19). Hence the need for the understanding of and application of 1 timothy, 3;1-7 as the basis for selection of church leadership for the African Church.

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Exegesis of 1Timothy 3:1-7: Qualifications for Church Leaders

Background of 1Timothy

Timothy, the addressee of 1 and 2 Timothy, was a young Pastor. It is believed Paul wrote him these Epistles to instruct him on duties of a pastor. Among others, Timothy was to pay attention to matters of church leadership. In chapter three of 1Timothy, Paul detailed the qualifications for aspiring church leaders which Timothy should consider in appointing people in church leadership positions. The primary purpose is to safeguard the truth of God which the false teachers were subverting. The false teachers strayed from the truth or sound doctrine. Timothy had the mandate to command and teach the truth. With respect to chapter three those to be appointed as overseers who are to teach the truth and refute errors must themselves be sound in doctrine and worthy men.

1 and 11Timothy and Titus are classified as Pastoral Epistles. They deal with the qualifications and work of a pastor or one entrusted with the overseeing the church. In Ephesians the pastor is listed as one of the gifts to the body of Christ. In God's economy, the Pastoral work is essential for growth and health of the church. For this, Paul pays careful attention to the qualifications of the Pastors and other category of church leaders. In the third chapter of 1 Timothy Paul addresses two classes of church leaders. These are *episkopes* which is translated overseer (NIV) and *diakovous* (Deacon). That the two offices be taken as different from each other is underscored by the phrase "in the same way "(V8). The concern of this paper is the former which suggests the oversight of the churches. I Timothy 3:1-7 read:

> Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, **a**he desires a noble task. **2**Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, **3**not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. **4**He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. **5**(If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) **6**He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. **7**He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

The pericope is free of any significant variant reading. The only variant reading pisto\$ is most likely the original judging by the 'overwhelming weight and variety of witnesses' in its support.(Bruce M. Tetzger p572-573). With the words "a trustworthy saying" which means a popular saying (cf 1:15), Paul attests to the reliability what follows or what he was going to say. (Stott 1996:9)1. He endorses the thought of one aspiring to the noble task of pastoral work. The overseers had the responsibility of ruling and teaching God's people.(Philip Graham Rykem, 2007;108). Thus to aspire or desire such a noble task was a good work. People then needed encouragement to participate in Church leadership because of the risk involved and its non material inducements. The personal desire of the individual is however not sufficient for engagement in church leadership. As John Stott notes for Paul the selection of people for the pastorate in addition conscientious screening by the church, entails "the call of God, the inner aspiration and conviction of the individuals concerned (92). The following are

required of the church leaders. It is a life characterized by them that can be described as righteous or godly leadership.

1. The Greek *anepilempton* translated "above reproach" is used in the New testament only in this Epistle cfv:2; 5:7;6:14, (A. Duane Litfin, 1983:736). It means to be unblamable or above criticism. The basic idea is giving no occasion for blame. It means somebody who it will be difficult or impossible to level accusation or charges of any wrong in his words and deeds. Such a leader gives no grounds for accusation (Vincent, 228). It does not mean to be faultless for no one can claim moral perfection.

2. A husband of one wife translates *mias gunaikos andra.* Among the many alternative interpretations of this requirement, one accepts the view that Paul was commending monogamy and fidelity to one's wife.

3. The Greek word *nephion* is variously translated sober (KJV) temperate (NIV). It denotes the idea of holding or restraining one's self.

4. Self-control from the Greek *sophrova* means to be moderate (self-controlled) or sensible in manner of behavior

5. Respectable *kosmion* means to be respectable or honourable (Earle 364). Respectable unlike self-control, is outward expression of an inward control (Stott 95).

6. Hospitality, *aphilarguron* (cf Titus 1:8). It is a virtue well commended in the scripture (Heb 13). The practice was helpful especially to itinerant gospel preachers of those days. The host Christians opened their doors to such preachers.

7. Teaching ability *didaktikon* is translated "able to teach." Teaching is a prominent ministry in the New Testament (cf Eph 4: 11-12). It is required of pastors because of the prevalence of false teachings in those days as today. It is a primary responsibility of Church leaders to communicate sound doctrine.

8. The Greek words *me paroinon*is expressed as "not a given to too much wine." This should be understood to mean excessive wine. Generally in scripture wine was especially prohibited for certain notable personalities such as Kings, Prophets, Judges and Priests. It is capable of affecting their sense of judgment and their performance of other functions.

9. "Not violet but gentle" is English translation of the Greek words: *me plekten alla.* The church leader should not be a striker but a gentle person. To be gentle is a quality of being gracious and forbearing.

10 "Not quarrelsome" The Greek *amaxon*is used in a sense of not being contentious.(Ralph Earle 1978:365, M.R Vincent 230), It conveys the idea of being peaceful.

11 "Not lover of money" *aphilarguron better* still "not greedy for money" Paul had written much latter that the love of money is the root of all evils (2 Timothy 6:10). Money motif in ministry remains a basic problem and the cause of many unchristian practices.

12. The expression "manages his household well" translates *tou idiou oikou kalos.* Paul qualifies the management with the word 'well.' The obedience and respectful behaviour of Christian leaders' Children are stated as evidence of a well-managed home. Their success at home qualifies them or becomes the spring board for the successful management of the local church.

13. "Not a convert" *me neophuton* means not recent convert. The implication here is that the overseer must be a knowledgeable and mature person in doctrinal and spiritual matters. Paul desires to forestall a situation where the immature Church leader becomes proud which brings the same judgment as that of the Devil.

14. The "good reputation with outsiders" the Greek; *dei de kai marturian kalen* may simply mean to have good report (testimony) from non-Christians community. The reason Paul states is "so that he will not fall into disagreement and into the devil's trap". The Devil's trap here could mean the trap the devil sets for Christians. However, some believe it means the trap the Devil was caught.

This list (1Timothy 3: 1-7) is not exhaustive. There are other passages in the New Testament outlining other qualifications of a leader of the church. They point to the seriousness of the work to which men and women today aspire to and the model for those who are already doing them (Marshall 2004:403). The above cover the qualifications of the Church leaders morally, spiritually, socially and intellectually. These are applied below in relation to church leaders in Africa

The Implications of qualifications in 1 Timothy, 3:1-7 for Leadership in the Africa Church

This section is an application of the qualifications of church leaders in contemporary African Church. Its coverage includes the intending leaders and those already involved in ministry. The leaders are to model Christ likeness to Christians (1 Timothy 4:12) and non-Christians (1Timothy 3:7).

The salvation experience of leaders in the Africa Church

As already stated one of the problems is the influx of the unregenerated or unborn again into the leadership of the church. Paul took it for granted that those aspiring church leaders are themselves believers in Christ. Hence, the absence of any reference on the need of aspirants being regenerated. Today the story is different. The "Church industry" has attracted the unsaved, ungodly people into Church leadership. The menace of unconverted men and women "of God" has commercialized, corrupted and polluted the church with falsehood, sexual immorality, manipulations, witchcraft, priestcraft and the likes. Unfortunately, the general public cannot distinguish the true from the false, the righteous from the unrighteous. To them any one who bears the title pastor or tagged clergy is seen as one. They are unaware of the presence of wolves in sheep clothing. These unregenerated leaders are largely responsible for much pollution in the church. If the leaders experience salvation in Christ Jesus they will begin the inner renewal and transformation into the image of Christ.

The Personal life of godly leadership for the Church in Africa

Christian leadership is all about the person's whole life- his/her being and doing. It is erroneous to hold that Christian leadership is all about preaching, teaching, counselling with no importance attached to the preacher's life. This false dichotomy was what Jesus rebuked the religious leaders of his time. Their personal life contradicted their preaching/teaching (Matt 23: 1-3). Qualities such as temperate and self-control (I Tim 3:2) are inner qualities. Both are powerful forces or instincts. Many of the sexual immoralities rampart among Christian leaders are due to lack of self-control or restrain. The truth of the matter is that for one to effectively lead others he/she must first lead himself/herself. Simply put self control means to control yourself.

The Family Life of Righteous Leadership for the Church in Africa

Two aspects of the Church leader's family Life listed are fidelity to his wife and management of his household. Generally Bible interpreters do not agree on what Paul actually means by" the husband of one." However, most commentators accept that "this phrase prohibits both polygamy and promiscuity (Bible PC v5). A growing number of Christian leaders are violating this scriptural injunction. The number of serial monogamists is on the increase. Divorce and remarriage virtually on any ground have become the norm. This is mostly common among one man Churches where the leaders are laws to themselves, responsible and accountable to no else but themselves. The media is awash with endless stories of men and women of God living promiscuous life. The news of sexual immorality involving Christian leaders is no longer news to many.

The second aspect of the family life is parenting. The focus in verses 4 and 5 is the leadership of the church leaders in their homes especially to their children. Their leading their Children to the path of obedience and respect qualifies them for leadership in the church. (Orgu P2). Of a truth the married church leader is called to leadership in two families, his and God's and the former is to be the training- ground for the latter (Stott, 98). The trouble today is that some church leaders are ignorant that their primary responsibilities are to their family. They focus on their church responsibilities at the detriment of their family. Many families are hurting, separating, divorcing and producing wayward children because the church leaders- husband, father- are busy leading the church. One of the evidences Paul stated for the Christian leader's ability and skill to lead the church is that children of such a one are living in obedience to him with proper respect.

Professional Life

Money motif in ministry remains a basic problem and the cause of many unbiblical practices in the church. Today material prosperity is seen as evidence of spirituality and success in ministry. Maxey and Ozodo warn,

> Anyone who makes the pursuit of material things the basis of spiritual life has moved away from sound Bible teaching. A primary search for selfish material prosperity cannot co- exist with the drive towards serving God making wealth the primary focus of our teaching is fundamentally flawed and ultimately leads people away from God (Maxey and Ozodo 46-47).

Paul says that one's motivation in leadership should not be money – the overseer should not be a lover of money (1 Timothy3:3). As already noted, the time Paul was commending men of desiring the office of an overseer was when it was risky and dangerous. Today the reverse is the case. It is now lucrative and status quo symbol. It is to many a means of wealth creation and family business. It is now in Africa known as church industry. Ordinarily many unqualified and jobless are engaged in the Church industry. The inordinate desire to amass wealth leads to false doctrines and adoption of ungodly methods and means. Such leaders do a lot of proof- texting to support their teachings. Much of their practices are syncretic, and manipulative and the like. Church leaders who make material things a priority in ministry are misfits. They never last the distance and end well. Cases in point are Saul, the first king of Israel and Gehazi. He allowed material things to becloud his sense of judgment. He brought choice animals (in disobedience) in the pretence of offering them as sacrifice to God. The consequence was an abrupt and bad ending to his ministry. Gehazi, an assistant of Elisha, suffered the same fate because of greed for money and material things.

The Spiritual Life of Righteous Leaders in the Africa Church

Paul puts spiritual maturity as a necessary qualification for those inspiring to the office of overseer. To say that a Christian leader must not be a recent or new convert (I Tim, 3:6) is to say he/ she must be a mature Christian. The goal of spiritual maturity is to be Christ-like. This comes as one understands and lives by the word of God and depends on the power of the Holy Spirit for life and ministry. Christian spirituality abhors any other form of empowerment other than that of the Holy Spirit. Peter rebuked Simon, the sorcerer, who desired the power of the Holy Spirit in addition to the magical powers with which he deceived people Acts 8:18-24). Unfortunately today, it is not uncommon that church leaders turn to sorcerers and medicine men for assistance and power for Ministry.

The Social Life of Leaders of the Africa Church

Paul began the list of requirements for church leaders by stressing the need for leaders to live in such a way as not to give an occasion for accusation (I Tim 3:2). He ends the list by stating the need for good reputation before outsiders (I Tim 3:7). It may be that first, living above reproach, is before church membership. The word "outsiders" is a clear reference to non church members. The implication is, both are required of the ministers. Church leaders should be men of God and of the people. They serve as models to the society in which they live and serve. By this the earn the respect of those outside the Christian community. Otherwise such leaders will be spoken evil of or insulted. And such a leader so dispersed may not escape the Devil's trap.

The Intellectual Life of Leaders in Africa Church

The occasion of the epistle is the activities of false teachers. As would be expected they included church officers whose teachings negatively impacted the church. It necessitated the need for appointment of overseers and elders whose responsibility included refuting negative the teachings. It is almost certain the false teachers, probably of Jewish origin, preached the law, argued about sex (marriage) and food laws. Thus for a church leader to be in position to contend with falsehood, requires among others sound theological education and spiritual maturity which a recent convert is incapable of.

Teaching requires more than the skill or gift of teaching. Both are important for effective teaching of Christian doctrines for maturity of Christians. Equally important is the content of the teaching. What is to be taught is the word of God. And this is a serious problem in contemporary church. Many a church leader is ignorant of the word of God. Paul's instruction that the overseer must not be a recent convert vs 6 has to do with immaturity in Biblical teaching and spiritual growth. The recent convert has not fully understood the fundamental biblical truths. Today there are leaders who have not known ABC of Christian faith and lack basic skills and principles of Biblical interpretation. This brings to the fore the necessity of theological education. It is estimated that over 65% percent of African Pastors especially Pentecostals are theological illiterates. It is a fact that many leading Pentecostal general overseers and pastors lack theological education and do not to realize the need for same. The importance of theological education in the training of church leaders is expressed in the following words. Theological education prepares specialists (men and women called as pastors, evangelists, teachers, educators and others) for effective service to the church. It imparts academic ability and spiritual formation of the ministers recognizing these essential roles (Orgu 31). Stephen O.Asaju urges "theological Institutions to play their role by initiating innovative courses and programmes to achieve the production of competent and committed workers, specialists and pioneers in any area of witness, educational and service programmes of the church" (79). It is only Church leaders with academic ability, ministerial skill and spiritual formation that can communicate sound doctrines and perform other duties in the face of heresies in and oppositions and threats to the church in Africa.

Building Righteous Church Leaders for the Church in Africa

In the light of the above and in the quest for righteous church leaders for the church in Africa, this writer makes the following recommendations:

Duly established Churches should constitute committees saddled with the responsibility of enlisting men and women for Church leadership. The people to serve in such committees must be men and women of integrity who themselves are above reproach on matters of bribe, nepotism, tribalism, promotion by patronage prevalent among committees on recruitment, promotion or ordination of Church leaders in Africa. These high calibre committee members must insist on qualifications of 1Timothy 3: 1-7 are manifest in intending and already leaders

There is the Need for Theological training for Church Leadership. Sound theological education will eliminate many misinterpretations and misapplications of scriptures and falsifications of fundamental Christian beliefs There are so many immature and untrained overseers. Many of them do not see the need for the theological education. This attitude of theirs is born out of ignorance and arrogance. Unfortunately, in many African countries the clergy is the easiest profession to belong to and the church is the easiest institution to establish.

There is also need for national and state bodies charged with the responsibility of the disciplining of erring church leaders. One of the reasons for unrighteous church leadership in Africa is the absence of a reputable body of church leaders charged with the regulation and discipline of ministers. This is a difficult task in the light of the practice or advent of independent churches and ministers. In addition to disciplining of ministers which may not be easy the body can be saddled with the responsibility of refuting erroneous teachings and condemning bad or evil, unchristian practices.

Conclusion

This paper has highlighted the qualifications listed in 1Timothy 3:1-7 generally regarded as qualifications for Church leadership. These are broadly classified as spiritual, personal, family, social and intellectual lives. These qualities should be used as basis for appointment of leaders into offices. It is this type of leaders that will exercise godly leadership and produce righteous followers. In other words, they become role models. Another implication of the study is that a body(ies) of theologically sound, morally upright and experienced individuals be saddled with the responsibility of refuting erroneous teachings and sensitively condemning unchristian practices of church leaders. The individuals may not necessarily be appointees of the organization or government but are called of God into that office as the Old Testament Prophets who fearlessly confronted the false and unrighteous religious leaders of their time.

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