The Concept of Leadership in Pastoral Epistles: A Critical Examination

Kolawole Oladotun Paul¹ & Adelodun Jeremiah²

¹Kolawole Oladotun Paul & ²Adelodun Jeremiah
Department of Religious Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University
Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

Abstract: The concept of leadership is a universal phenomenon that cannot overemphasize; it is integral to any growing or developing society. It is disheartening today how leadership is done in both secular and Christian context. The phase of leadership has become an inherent divisive threat of dividing societies and even the church of God. It is adequately observed that the practical experience of leadership is on a coalition cause with what it actually stands for; this research therefore critically examines the concept of leadership in Pastoral Epistles.

Keyword: Leadership, Societies & Pastoral Epistles.

1. Introduction

The concept of leadership, the promises and failures that it hashed for humankind over the centuries is a well-researched area.¹ Lee Robertson's stipulated that “everything rises or falls on Leadership”² There is no pact as to what “leadership” means. Burns asserts that leadership is one of the most observed, but the least understood phenomena.³ Leadership is the ability to influence a group toward the achievement of goals. On this note, Northouse asserts that leadership is, “A process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve a common goal.”⁴

Dwight Eisenhower argued that leadership is an ability “to get people to work together, not only because you tell them to do so and enforce your orders but because they instinctively want to do it for

---

¹Stewardship As Leadership (Stewardship As Leadership.pdf, 2010), 52

²This statement was popularized through the lips of John Maxwell. But Dr. Elmer Towns gives Dr. Lee Robertson credit for it. See, Elmer Towns, The 8 Laws of Leadership: Making Extraordinary Leaders out of Ordinary Believers (Lynchburg V A: Church Growth Institute, 1992), 10.


you. You don’t lead by hitting people over the head; that’s assault, not leadership.”

Leadership implies the organization or mobilization of people and resources (economic, political and social) in pursuit of particular ends. Leadership is therefore said to be a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesive and coherent. Leaders carry out this process by applying their leadership attributes, such as beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge, and skills.

It is important to note that all Christians have a leadership role, regardless of their place in the organization. Everyone has a sphere of influence at work. Paul advised Timothy not to let his perceived lack of prominence prevent him from trying to make a difference. “Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12). This study explores the concept of leadership from the Pauline epistles, especially the pastoral letters to consider Paul’s theology of leadership.

2. Leadership: A Conceptual Understanding

According to Kenneth N. Thompson, “Leadership is a complex subject that is impacted by many variables.” Bass suggested that leadership was the ability to influence those you are leading towards the achievement of goals and objectives. Pierce & Newstrom (2006) defined a leader as one who exercised intentional authority over one or more other individuals, in an effort to guide actions toward the accomplishment of some mutual goal; such a goal requires mutually supporting actions among members of the group.

The concept of leadership is extensively and widely discussed both secularly and sacredly. As a matter of fact, there have been extant scholarly works on the subject of leadership both in the past and as it can be found now. This, of course, is not unconnected with the fact that “leadership plays a pivotal role in any organized human society. It is fundamental to the success of any human organization whether in a secular world or spiritual or (religious) setting”. There is no known organised society in the world without one form of leadership or the other.

Etymologically, the word, ‘lead’ comes from a common European root word which means, “a path, road or the course of a ship at sea”. Besides, it could also be seen in the sense of having the responsibility (ies) of conducting or directing people toward an achievement. In the context of Man’s sociological praxis, to lead is to provide direction, i.e. to guide others in working for a common goal in order to achieve a desired result. A leader therefore, is expected to exhibit true leadership traits. John Bisagno opines that, “each leader desire to be a true leader of God’s people”. Hence, leadership is expected to meet the people’s needs which include leading them in the way that God would be happy with the way and means of leadership.

Jemiriye in a rational expression in regards to leadership, expressing that leadership is of having influence and impact on others stated that: “Leadership is the art of managing the nature of man- be it physical, religious or other natures. Leadership is the power to direct, motivate and inspire others. It is

---


6Kenneth N. Thompson, Servant-Leadership: An Effective Model for Project Management (Capella: Capella University, 2010), 18.


the art of moulding, correcting, influencing or guiding human behaviour towards desired or designed goals and ends. Leadership therefore calls for obedience from the followers, while earns the people’s confidence, respect and submission.”

3. Who is a Leader?

One cannot talk about leadership without also discussing the principal actor of the act, that is, the one who provides the leading. It thus, dawn on this researcher to carefully explicate who a leader is. The word leader emanates from the Hebrew words ‘nagid’ and ‘sapat’ which is used in the context of warrior commander. Strong puts it as “a commander, civil or military or religious”. He stresses the fact that this is being used in the terms of honourable titles like, captain, chief, governor, leader, noble, prince among other positive aspect. This poses that a leader is supposed to be used in the aspect of positivity rather than negativity as it exist in the present world.

It could also be traced to the Greek words hegeomai and hedegos which are translated to mean a leader on the way, a commander in front, a chief ruler, a guide, a director and an advisor. T. Schramm in his view, presented in explaining the word, stated that, “it is used of the eschatological king and good shepherd who leads the people of God”.

In a Christian setting, the biblical and theological basis of leadership takes on a significantly different understanding from the expectations of the secular worldview. Even a cursory critique of the Gospels reveals that Jesus Christ “taught and embodied leadership as service”. Obviously Jesus concurred and occupied his life and ministry on his mission of service to humankind.

At all times, Jesus put aside power as a means through which he would lead his followers, placing their needs before his own: You know that those who are regarded rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant (diakonos), and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:42-45). But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first (Matt. 19:30). So, the last will be first, and the first will be last (Matt. 20:16).

4. The Pastoral Epistles: A Brief Overview

The Pastoral Epistles were written to leaders in the early church. The pastoral epistles are three books of the canonical New Testament: the First Epistle and Second Epistle to Timothy (1st and 2nd Timothy), and the Epistle to Titus. They are presented as letters from Paul the Apostle to Timothy and Titus. They are generally discussed as a group and are given the title pastoral because they are addressed to individuals with pastoral oversight of churches and discuss issues of Christian living, doctrine and leadership. The term “pastorals” was popularized in 1703 by D. N. Berdot and in 1726 by Paul Anton.

From ancient times, the epistles (1st and 2nd Timothy, and Titus) have been grouped together as the “Pastoral Epistles.” These letters outline the qualification, development, and promotion of leaders; organizational structures for the care, compensation, and discipline of members; and the setting and execution of individual and organizational goals.


13James Strong, “nagid” in Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible (Hendrickson Publishers, nd), 76.


5. Leadership in Pastoral Epistles

Apostle Paul’s chance to reflect and write on leadership was not a matter of ease or extravagance since in his view; it was a matter of urgency so long as the integrity of the Gospel and the faith of his fellow believers were at stake. For Paul, according to Andrew P. Clarke, “leadership” entailed “how to deal with the powerful and the weak, and how to nurture and rebuke.”18 Paul understood that it is the tasks of the leader that are important, not the leader’s status or title.19 For the apostle, leaders were to be task driven, not status driven.

However, there are some common important denominators found in the Pauline epistles about leadership. He used two words to describe leaders in local churches - bishop (episkopos) and elder (presbuteros). Bishop refers to an “overseer” or “the guardian of faith”, 20 Furthermore; a second leader in relation to the local church is a deacon (diakonos).

6. Overseer (Elder/ Bishop)

In New Testament times it is all but certain that episkopos (overseer or bishop) and presbuteros (presbyter or elder) were two titles of the same office. The evidence is compelling. First, Paul sent for the ‘elders’ of the Ephesian church, but in addressing them called them ‘overseers’ (Acts 20:17, 28). Paul instructed Titus to appoint ‘elders’, adding that ‘an overseer … must be blameless’ (Titus 1:5-7).21

In regard to the person of overseer (1 Timothy 3:1-7 cf. Titus 1:1-9; 2:1-13), more is written on the qualifications of such a leader than the ministry25: A person – must be above reproach; the husband of but one wife; temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?), He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil, He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil’s trap.

The emphasis in 1st Tim 3 falls on such qualities as reliability, dignity, temperance, helpfulness, proper relationship to one’s family, and to some extent, Christian experience. According to William Hendiksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, the list discloses two facts:

“On the one hand, the requirements for the office are high enough so that persons with outstanding moral defects are excluded from the office and in fact from any position of considerable responsibility in the church. Yet, on the other hand, these requirements are low enough so that almost any member in good standing and deserved reputation can qualify. Sinlessness, material riches, exception cultural attainment, these are not required.”23

In Paul’s epistle to Titus chapter, the requirements listed for a leadership occur in three groups24:

18 Andrew D. Clarke, A Pauline Theology of Church Leadership, (New York: T & T press, 2008), 4
24 Ibid, 346.
1. The person that is going to occupy an important office must be of deservedly high reputation and if married (which will generally be the case) a good family man (verse 6).
2. He must not be the type of person who in his desire to please himself has lost interest in the purpose (except to exasperate them!) and who, if entangled in a quarrel, is ever ready with his fists. Here a list of negative characteristics is given: qualities which the overseer (elder) must not have (verse 7).
3. All his actions must give evidence of the fact that both in deed and in doctrine he wishes to be a blessing to others. A list of positive characteristics is given: qualities which the overseer (elder) must have (verse 8 and 9).

The three groups of requirements apply to people who as to their age and dignity are called elders; and as to their task are called overseers.

7. Deacons
Deacons are those who “serve” in the Christian community where they assist the elders or overseers (bishops). The Greek word which the New International Version (NIV) translates four times as “deacons” occurs a further twenty-five times in the New Testament, where it is translated as “servant”. It seems that all Christians have a general servant role, whereas some, that is, deacons are called to a specific office within the church.25

In regard to the person of deacon (1 Timothy 3:8-12), the Pauline epistle says much about the personal qualifications. A person - men worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain, holding faith with a clear conscience, beyond reproach; their wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything, the husband of but one wife and must manage his children and his household well.

8. Integrity and Relational Ability: Observations from Leadership in Pastoral Epistles
First Timothy 3:1-13 is well known and finds a parallel in Titus 1:5-9. 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9 both outline qualifications for elders and overseers, whereas, 1 Timothy 3:8-13 states the qualifications for deacons. A range of qualifications is given, but the common phenomenon seems to be moral integrity and ability to relate well to people. In these lists, we notice the connection between the household and the church: managing one’s family well is viewed as indispensable experience for managing God’s household (1st Timothy 3:4-5, 12; Titus 3:6:1:6).26

9. Leadership Principles from the Pastoral Epistles: A Lucid Extraction
According to Chantel C. Upshur-Myles, “The Pastoral epistles depict lessons that Paul learned throughout his leadership journey. These lessons are timeless and applicable as leadership principles for today’s Christian leader. Paul’s leadership lessons include sacrificing self, leading by example, and valuing followers.”27

a. Leadership involves qualification
1st Timothy 3:1-13 and Titus 1:5-9 are passages that deal with qualification for leadership. In the context of these verses, specifically, Paul is speaking about qualification for pastors/elders/spiritual leadership/deacons and their immediate family. Not only should someone be qualified, but they must be proven! Therefore, a qualified leadership that is default of proof and evidence is tantamount to zero.


27 Alex Kirk, The Pastoral Epistles and Work: (TOW Bible Commentary), 6

28 Chantel C. Upshur-Myles, Organizational Leadership: Lessons Based on the Pauline Epistles, (Published by the School of Global Leadership & Entrepreneurship, Regent University, 2008), 1.

29 These principles were extracted from 8 Principles for Pastoral Leadership: The Working Pastor, theworkingpastorcomarchives151 (Accessed Dec 7, 2018).
b. Leadership involves obedience to God
   In the truest sense of the term, leadership implicates someone to be obedient to the leader. If someone is a spiritual leader, then they themselves must adhere to God’s Word themselves. How can they point others they way, if they are on the wrong path? Additionally, when studying Biblical leaders, one will find that their short comings and sins were paid for and it hurt their leadership capabilities.

c. Leadership involves discernment:
   Effective leadership hinges upon being able to know your limitations as well as being able to size up other people. No spiritual leader can discern effectively without being filled with the Holy Spirit! He leads into all truth!

d. Leadership involves temperance:
   Self-control is vital to having an even keel in leading others. Though the wind blows and waves rise high, pastors and other men of God must exercise self-control in their leadership. Many a pastor has lost his ministry in a fit of unbridled behaviour. King Saul is a prime example of someone who had no temperance.

e. Leadership involves communication:
   If a leader is to point the way, then they must convey the “what”, “where”, “when”, “why”, and especially the “how”! This principle is one of the first to go before trouble ensues. By definition, communication not only involves the proclamation, but the acceptance of the proclamation. People may not agree with what has been communicated, but they know what has been heralded.

f. Leadership involves example:
   A lady ones said, “I will rather see a sermon than hear one any day!” leadership without example is like being a mother and not caring for her children. Example is the fine tuning of the message from the pulpit and lectern. As one is encouraged to rise higher to the occasions of life, so must the leader be the example of that very admonishment.

g. Leadership involves motivation:
   The ability to communicate, evaluate and illustrate is one thing, but to motivate is quite another behemoth. Week after week, we invite people to the table. They are fed, and warmed, but few get up from the table and wash the dishes! Besides, fewer are inclined to get off of the front porch and labor in the field. Most would rather sit at the table, and relax on the porch than to allow a drop of sweat fall from their brow! In spite of this issue, an effective leader will motivate!

h. Leadership involves adjustment:
   Things will often change in the midst of any endeavour that you are leading people in. Being able to think on your feet is very important. Seeing the bigger picture helps to guide the way! Being able to take a moment, step back, looking for the bigger picture helps everyone.

10. Conclusion
   Leadership is an opportunity to serve. It is not a trumpet call to pompousitude. Leadership is based on God’s calling, God’s equipping, God’s vision and God’s formation of the person’s character. It is definite. Though the call may come in various ways under different circumstances, it is nonetheless distinct. Just like Tokumbo Adeyemo says, “Christ-like leadership is needed in both the church and the society at large. They will be known for their character, competency, courage, commitment and compassion.”30 In Pastoral epistles leadership is not all about power, but involve the use of power; as a consequence, contradicting those notions that Paul was caught up in the exercise of power and that in some fashion leadership does not involve efforts to influence or manipulate others.

11. References
