

The Moral Dimension: Problems in Christian Leadership

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Abstract

Morality in leadership is essential for effective governance in the church. The decline of morality is a trend within the church and without, impacting not only the organization but also its members. The article argues that the moral compass of church leaders is lacking and that biblical principles regarding morality have not been consistently applied in the lives of leaders and members. It reveals how morality has diminished in the church and ways to improve.

Keywords: Morality, Moral Dimension, Ethics, Moral Practice, Biblical Morality

Introduction Overview

The salient issue and/or concept that needs to be addressed is the morality in Christian leadership. Morality is an informal ability in leadership. It involves understanding and applying the principles of fairness and goodness versus evil and unfairness in one's life. It is a skill necessary for governing properly and effectively within the body of Christ (the church). Sampson (2011) describes "the moral ability as an attribute of knowing and applying the principle of fairness and goodness versus evil and unfairness in how one conducts his or her life" (p.7). The modern church, like the world, is affected by the multitude of religions and differing interpretations of moral thought and actions. This variety often complicates the definition and application of morality.

The lack of morality is a trend and an issue in leadership and in the church. The lack of morality can affect not only leadership but also the church's organization. If a leader is lacking morals in any area, it will eventually affect the members. The modern church is no different than the world. This could be a result of religious practices. In other words, "the variety of religions in the world and varying interpretations of moral thought and actions often convolute its definition and applications" (Sampson, 2011, p.8). Practicing biblical morality in leadership and among members is crucial for a successful and enduring organization and church ministry.

The Significance of that Problem

Many leaders do not teach their members the importance of applying God's Word in their lives. Therefore, "human interpretation of and application utilizing religious doctrine is what needs to be addressed" (Sampson, 2011, p.8). The lack of morality is not only affecting the world but the church as well. Many individuals have used "religion in ways that advocated immoral behaviors" (Sampson, 2011, p.8). As a result, the church has become ineffective and is lacking power and authority. The church has become a mockery to the world due to its lack of stance and its "lukewarm" approach. Leaders must emulate the characteristics and qualities described in 1 Timothy 3, Titus 1:6-9, Isaiah 40, Daniel 2:2:21, 1 Corinthians 13:12, Daniel 4:31-35, and 1 Samuel 16:1-7. These Scriptures speak about the attributes of a great leader.

The church has lost its effectiveness while conforming to the world in order to be accepted by the world. The leaders are worrying more about keeping members instead of attracting new ones. This writer blamed this salient issue on the leaders because the leaders are the shepherds, and they are supposed to be watching over the sheep. The church has conformed to the world, and it does not operate according to Romans 12:2 in the NIV, which states, "Do not conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then

you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will”.

Leaders must model intellectual, physical, social, emotional, and personable leadership skills in order to lead effectively. “Moral development has historically been aligned with spirituality or religion” (Sampson, 2011, p.7). The significance of this salient issue or problem for Christian leaders is the fact that leaders who do not model morality can destroy a company/ church organization and the lives of people who work and worship there.

Leaders must understand that not only is heaven watching, but the world is watching as well. Christian leaders are representing God and the church (body of Christ). When they fail, the entire church organization fails, and a mockery is made of God, proving and stressing to the world God's ineffectiveness in society, and it also supports the reason why unbelievers do not go to church or see its importance. Moreover, it supports why the practice of atheism has become so popular, especially among young adults and teens. It is up to leaders to walk in the authority God has given them, displaying the power of God and manifesting to the world and their congregation the benefits of serving God.

Testimonial sessions should be encouraged, and stress to display the power of salvation and the conversion journey. Preaching and given testimonies are beneficial because they prove to the unbelievers and believers alike that God's Word, when applied properly in one's life, has the ability to change that life for the better. Leaders should not only teach the Word but also be a doer of the Word as well (James 1:22). Salvation is the initial process; however, after salvation, the conversion process begins. It is a journey that does not happen overnight. However, as the believer continues to walk with Christ, the tangible conversion and changes start to manifest, where believer and unbeliever alike see the reality of God's power. There is power in testimonies. In Revelation 12:11, the KJV

states, “And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.” Before the morality model can be developed, the most important thing that needs to take place in a person's life is salvation. Without salvation, changes cannot occur, and the spiritual formation (conversion) becomes impossible.

Three to Five Research Questions

The following five research questions are research problems that were identified for the

Current research study:

1. To what degree, if any, does a leader possess the level five leadership attributes, and how does that leader use those skills to lead effectively and grow the church spiritually while making disciples for Christ in an immoral society?
2. How can the church lead and be effective without it becoming intertwined with worldly pleasures?
3. To what degree, if any, is leadership meaningful and effective?
4. To what degree, if any, can leaders lead effectively with morality without leading with a self-righteous spirit?
5. What is the relationship between the perceived worldly moral dimension and biblical morality, and how does it accurately manifest in leadership?

The summary of these questions is simple. It is a matter of the heart. Many writers have written books on leadership and how one leads effectively, or describe leadership in steps. There are even guidebooks on leadership. God, the master of the universe, simply describes the quality of a leader and success in two words: “the heart.” “From out of the heart flows the issues of life.” Proverbs 4:23 in the NIV states, “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.” The condition of a

leader's heart is very important. Throughout the Bible, God always selects leaders who are after His heart. For example, when God was looking for someone to replace Saul after Saul sinned. God selected David. For 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." It is apparent what God's qualification is when selecting leaders. He looks at the condition of their heart. In Jeremiah 3:15 in the NIV, it states, "Then I will give you shepherds after my own heart, who will lead you with knowledge and understanding."

Potential Research Objectives

The objective of researching this problem from a moral perspective is to address the pastoral credibility crisis. "Just one in five U.S. adults (19%) believes Christian ministers are very influential in their community, according to Barna research in partnership with Pepperdine University. One-quarter says pastors' influence is minimal (24% "not very" + "not at all" influential) while a lukewarm plurality (40%) says they are somewhat influential (Barna Group, 2018, p.58). "Not surprisingly, church leaders' more captive audiences—such as practicing Christians (44%), evangelicals (42%), and weekly churchgoers (37%)—are more apt to esteem them as very influential" (Barna Group, 2018, p.58). Those of no faith are most likely to believe pastors hold negligible local influence (44%)...One-third of the religiously unaffiliated (33%) admit they are "not sure" whether clergy play an influential role in their community, which is twice the national average (17%) (Barna Group, 2018, p.58). Fast forward four years, Barna Group (2022) conducted a similar study, revealing that one in every five Christians admits to being unclear about whether pastors are trustworthy (24% of all adults, 21% of Christians, and 31% of non-Christians). However, when this question was asked to pastors, the answers were different. Pastors think that they are more influential and credible than they actually are. Four out of five pastors (82%) believe their local community regards them as a trustworthy source of wisdom "somewhat". Pastors believe their congregations see them as a reliable source

of wisdom, with 67 percent strongly agreeing (Barna Group, 2022).

Additionally, according to a recent Gallup poll, less than one-third of Americans believe that clergy members are very honest and moral, marking a record low in the nation's opinion of them. Compared to their religious leaders, people are more inclined to believe in the moral principles upheld by nurses, police officers, and chiropractors (Gallup, 2024). More suspicion of professions (and organizations) in general is associated with the continued deterioration in pastors' reputation, which has dropped from 40% to 32% in the last four years (Shellnutt, 2020).

Leadership Skills

Collins (2001) views great leaders as having the level five leadership skills. Level five leaders are leaders who possess personal humility and professional will. They are meek and mild. They have great character, integrity, discipline, bravery, and are not afraid to tell the truth in love, regardless of the circumstances.

They believe in the moral code, which is, “if you have the right executives on the bus, they will do everything within their power to build a great company, not because of what they will ‘get’ for it, but because they simply cannot imagine settling for anything less” (Collins, 2011, p.48). Their moral code “requires building excellence for its own sake, and you’re no more likely to change that with a compensation package than you’re likely to affect whether they breathe. The good-to-great companies understood a simple truth: The right people will do the right things and deliver the best results they’re capable of, regardless of the incentive system” (Collins, 2001, p.48).

Christian leaders should apply and live their lives according to the Golden Rule, which is found in Matthew 7:12 in the NIV, and it states, “So in everything, do to others what you would

have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.” Morality, just like the Golden Rule, is concerned with the goodness or badness of human behavior (Sampson, 2011). In other words, it is knowing right from wrong (Sampson, 2011). Just as humans are innately selfish, the Golden Rule is hardwired in everyone because most people know right from wrong in their guts, even if they do not have a law/rule written against it (Sampson, 2011). Humans are wired for good behavior as well as bad behavior; therefore, the good or moral thing to do is there as well, when there are no rules. Rules are there for people who do not understand appropriate behavior unless there are rules (Sampson, 2011).

The work of the Christian leader “involves formation of self, of congregation, and of the members of that congregation. This formative work shapes person and character through preaching, teaching, giving counsel, and being present in the community” (Sajdak, 2018, p.520). “It includes the whole person—the mind (knowledge, wisdom), the body (work, worship, rest), the heart (loves, desires), and the soul (awareness of self, of God). For a Christian minister, this work is empowered by the Holy Spirit who forms people in the image of Christ” (Sajdak, 2018, p.520). Therefore, ethical behavior must always be in practice. Moreover, the congregation is also a moral community. It is where “spiritual formation occurs through a common commitment to follow Christ, which requires encouragement, rebuke, and guidance. The minister serves in this context as a moral theologian, teacher, and guide” (Sajdak, 2018, p.521). Since Christian leaders are the moral teachers. They must use wisdom and scriptural knowledge to teach on moral issues and difficult messages.

Scriptural wisdom is offered in the Bible to teach leaders how to preach and teach the congregation the moral stance while avoiding common pitfalls. Sampson (2011) added, “it is obvious that the more complex our world becomes, the broader are our possibilities of immorality and how they are defined” (p.179). For example, “some actions show up on our internal radars as

immoral, but no laws have been established that define them as illegal. It often takes time for laws to catch up with certain immoral behaviors” (Sampson, 2011, p.179). Sampson (2011) also argues that “morality is a constantly evolving phenomenon that is affected by social changes” (p.178). However, the Bible never changes. Jesus Christ (The WORD) is the same yesterday and today and forever (Heb.13:8 NIV).

God’s Word has remained the same and has proven the test of time. Leaders and believers alike must study and read the Bible to show themselves approved to know what it says regarding certain moral issues. 2 Timothy 2:15 in the NIV says, “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” The Bible may not explicitly cover a certain moral issue, but the Holy Spirit is always there to reveal the hidden messages, and the Holy Spirit speaks and reveals to the reader the answer needed regarding that specific moral issue that concerns the reader. Sampson (2011) says, “Some people respond to society’s inability to keep up with immoral but not illegal behavior with the Golden Rule” (p.179).

Since the “Golden Rule refers to the philosophy of ‘treat others only as you consent to being treated in the same situation,’ it requires that we be consistent in behaving or acting toward others in ways that are in harmony with our desires” (Sampson, 2011, p.179). The church is at a crossroads, and its desire to make a difference in the world is being tested. The world does not take the church seriously. The modern church at large does not look like the early church mentioned in the book of Acts. The early church in the book of Acts is a great model for what a growing church looks like. For in Acts 2:47 (NIV) says, “The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” The church grew daily with new members, and they ministered under the power of the Holy Spirit. They were spirit-led believers who made Jesus Christ the Lord of their lives; therefore, the Holy Spirit was able to shape and guide their lives. They were in one accord. Acts 2:42-43 says in the NIV, “They devoted

themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayer.

Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles." They worshipped together in warm fellowship. "All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need" (Acts 2: 44-45). They used the concept of small groups wisely and to their advantage, gathering from house to house and from temple to temple, growing in number.

The early church relied solemnly on the power of the Holy Spirit. They believed God's Word and obeyed it. They were doers of the Word, not just hearers. They had operated in wonders, and many miracles happened in the early church. For Christian leaders to have their churches mimic the early church described in the Book of Acts, Christian leaders and their congregant members must go on a spiritual cleansing fast. The church needs to be clean, and it begins with leaders activating that cleanliness. "The place to begin a cleansing of the moral wells of our national life is with the church itself. If there is moral pollution in this country, it may be because the mother of moral virtue has been unfaithful to her bridegroom" (Simmons, 1976, p.133). Simmons (1976) further added, "This does not mean that gross immoralities as such could be catalogued as a telling indictment of the contemporary church. To be sure, there are moral issues raised by certain policies and practices on the part of the organizations that call themselves "Christian" (p.133). The point is that the church may well share the blame with the government for the present plague that has struck the U.S and the world (Simmons, 1976).

Conclusion

Morality is not just about sinful actions, but it also covers moral issues such as accountability, courage, ethics, character, and integrity. Since Christian leaders are held to higher standards, accountability is an important ability to have as a leader.

“Accountability is the ability to be liable, responsible, or answerable” (Sampson, 2011, p.182). It requires leaders to realize that their actions have to be taken into account and that they cannot avoid their responsibility in any situation (Sampson, 2011).

Principled ability is defined as a fundamental truth or law that is determined by reason or action is another moral action (Sampson, 2011). Leaders must have great integrity, which is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles; moral uprightness. Leaders must possess good moral character. Character is what makes a person who they are. Character is what defines a person. A great leader practices these and walks in personal humility and great professional will (Collins, 2001). In addition to being a place of worship, the church is a community that requires leaders who can guide and motivate the members to keep growing in their faith and remain relevant in the face of changing times (Kesumawati et al., 2025). Accordingly, establishing a vibrant and mission-driven church requires strong pastoral leadership.

Biblical spirituality ought to serve as the foundation for Christian leadership. The congregation's pastor is in charge of leading, counseling, and fostering the group's spiritual development (Kesumawati et al., 2025). According to Dr. Packiam, "credibility is the result of the good and right stewardship of power." When you act modestly and understand the boundaries of your power and the goal of your influence, you gain credibility and trust (Barna, 2022).

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