

ACCOUNTABILITY: CHARACTER FOR GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP IN AFRICA

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Abstract

Accountability as a character trait for governance reveals the accountable nature of both leaders and followers of nations and churches in Africa. The concept could be seen as a theological issue which has biblical foundational underpinning in the Old Testament (OT) and New Testament (NT), which should not be relegated in handling the day-to-day activities of the church. Biblical examples support the claim of accountability as accepted. Currently, accountable leaders are sought for since the characteristic of being accountable is vital in maintaining trustworthiness and efficient growth in the church in Africa. The import of the character trait as a requirement of God for every person in the body of Christ helps in this understanding. In the Scriptures, it is expressed in a variety of ways which starts and ends with God and His spiritual leading of His church. He is the supreme source of insightful issues of governance and leadership in Africa.

Keywords: Accountability, governance, church growth, Africa, biblical foundation.

1. Introduction

Accountability is said to be the responsibility one assumes in accepting the right to lead the community in one way or another, make decisions, and act in its behalf.¹ Therefore, when one is considered accountable, he/she is answerable for his/her actions.² In other words, accountability is accepting responsibility for the outcomes expected of a person, both good

¹Paul Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership: A Resource Guide for Sustaining Legal, Financial, and Ethical Integrity in Today's Congregation* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1997), 7.

²Ibid.

and bad. In this case, there is no blame game directed either to another individual or to the external environment. This quality is an integral element in leadership. It has to its advantage for growth and advancement while dishonesty and untrustworthiness is the reverse.

Accountability occurs everywhere (home, workplace, church, governance, etc.) making it universal, and Africa is not an exception. All creation will have the privilege of accounting to their Creator regarding their stewardship of the gifts, talents, and all that were entrusted to them in this life. Ellen G. White has pointed out that human beings will be “accountable to God for the light that He has given” to them.³ Accountability comes with all the roles in leadership. People who take up leadership roles embrace a responsibility of service to both God and humanity. In the church setting, the issue of accountability must be highly valued in leadership.⁴ Several leaders have led organizations and other establishments. Their achievements have earned them fame and prestige. The operational responsibilities on them have equally given them authority in many instances. They, directly or indirectly, expect their lives and actions to become openly discussed subjects for public enquiry. There is also the expectation of leaders to explain their actions and decisions if they are called upon to do so. However, some have fallen in the sin of dishonesty and abuse of authority. Leaders in Africa have to be accountable to the people, their organizations, and the general public by being transparent, embracing responsibility, and being answerable. In such a given context, accountability is seen as more than mere responsibility, because a leader can be responsible yet not accountable. Accountability is an individually held sense of duty to account to others for one’s assignments.⁵ This, in a way, has called for a critical look at the issue of accountability in leadership.

The leadership qualities of several people have engaged the attention of others over the years concerning their accountability. In view of the nature of the character trait expected of leaders, several questions emerge. Therefore, another look at this issue pervading leadership and governance

³Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3 (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press, 1998), 363.

⁴Dioi Cruz, class notes for the course LEAD 882 Management in the Church and Church Organizations, Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Silang, Cavite, Philippines, May, 2016.

⁵Benzion Barlev, “A Biblical statement of accountability,” *Accounting and Religion* 11, no. 2 (2006): 173-197. See also George Barna and Bill Dallas, *Master Leaders: Revealing Conversations With 30 Leadership Great* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2009), 153-158; John Townsend, *Leadership Beyond Reason: How Great Leaders Succeed by Harnessing the Power of their Values, Feelings, and Intuition* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 108.

in Africa is justified. Any meaningful study of accountability as a character trait in leadership must take the biblical foundation of the trait into consideration. Relevant questions in this direction includes the following: Is there a biblical foundation for accountability? What are some examples from Biblical characters? What are the importance of accountability? What is its relationship with leadership? How can accountability be implemented in governance and leadership in Africa? It is in search for satisfactory answers to this problem that this research is conducted.

2. Biblical Foundation for Accountability in Governance and Leadership

In understanding the issue of accountability with the view of enhancing the character of the leader for efficient and effective leadership and governance in Africa, there is a need to examine the biblical foundations for accountability in leadership. In doing this, the Bible becomes the most helpful and essential source for understanding accountability in leadership distinctively. It is therefore critical that leaders of organizations, including the church, get their minds guided by the revealed truth of God as found solely in His word and His creation. In the midst of confusing plurality of the theories that leadership is only concern about meeting goals and getting desired results coming-in in the current setting of the world, the study of the biblical foundations serve as a vital standard for measuring leadership in the perspective of accountability. The evidence of biblical record reveals that various kinds of accountability were instituted in leadership in Bible times. The Bible indicates clearly that God is concerned about proper accountability in leadership.

The scriptures (both OT and NT) provide several foundations that help our understanding of accountability. At a face-reading of the text, these scriptural sources offer supports that are crucial. The OT begins with the sense of accountability. Right from creation, God places accountability at the center of the duty of man. Genesis 1 gives the account of God's creation. After the creation of all things, God created man to provide leadership to the other creations (Gen 1:26-30). Man is to have dominion over all plants, animals, and heavenly bodies. He is to account to the Creator for his leadership. Thus, man is seen by God as a being for accountability in leadership. In this biblical narrative, the Hebrew word

רדה (*radah*) literally translated as “dominion” or “rule”, conveys the idea and understanding of accountability on the part of man.⁶ Man is empowered by God to lead and to be accountable to Him. Being a steward inversely means being accountable. God entrusting all His creation to man was to place the responsibility of all the creation to him. Human beings cannot go about their duties without any recourse towards accountability. When such a thing happens, then the purpose of God in entrusting His creation to man has not been reached or is defeated.

From the creation account, the Trinity gives indication of accountability. God the father invited the Son and the Holy Spirit to be active actors in the creation. Though the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are co-eternal and co-equal, the Bible provides evidence of an accountability that exists within them. As seen in the creation of man (Gen 1:26), God said “let us make man in our own image according to our likeness.” One is not inferior to the Other. Neither does One consider the Other irrelevant. Each has different roles, responsibilities, and things they are accountable for.

Adam and Eve were placed in leadership roles in the Garden of Eden. When failure came their way by virtue of the fall (Gen 3), they could not be accountable. Instead, they started to blame one another and tried to find excuses for their actions. This downplayed on the accountability to God. They could not render proper account to their Maker for what was given to them to rule or have dominion upon. This can be said as the first accountability crisis recorded in Scriptures.

The Pentateuch portrays a figure in leadership who showed great accountability. In the wilderness wandering, Moses proved to be an accountable leader. This helped him to efficiently and effectively lead the people of Israel throughout their sojourn from Egypt through the wilderness of Sinai to the plains of Moab. In Numbers 13, when God wanted to wipe out the people, Moses accounted for the people and interceded for their sins. God listened to him and pardoned the Israelites. This shows that when leaders are entrusted to lead an organization or people, they should be accountable to both the people and God—the Creator.

⁶Ernest Jenni, *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*, ed. Ernest Jenni and Claus Westermann, trans. Mark E. Biddle (1997), s.v. “רדה.” See also Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, “רדה,” *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, vols. 1-5 combined, translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson, rev. Walter Baumgartner and Johann Jakob Stamm (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1994-2000), 1:295-296.

Genesis 24 shows a servant who exhibited great accountability to the master. Abraham instructed Eliezer to get a wife for his son Isaac from his people. A leadership role was given to Eliezer when he was to lead other servants to undertake the assigned task (Gen 24:2). With a deep conviction about his calling and the job assigned him, he set out to execute the task. With a sense of responsibility and intelligence, he put his plans in God's hands (24:12-14). After accomplishing the task swiftly and promptly (24:56), he proceeded to account for his actions and leadership. He gave an accurate report to Abraham and equally brought Rebekah to Isaac as a wife (24:66). This shows a true sense of accountability in leadership.

In the NT, several examples of accountability in leadership are indicated. One example is what Paul portrayed about Timothy when he made Timothy in charge of the church in Ephesus. In 1 Timothy 2:2, Paul instructed Timothy to deliver to faithful men what he had learned. This instruction for the selection and training of only faithful men suggests or gives the understanding of accountability. Also, in 1 Timothy 3:1-5, Paul enumerates the qualifications for the office of the elder. At the core of these criteria is accountability on the part of the elder to his own self, his household, the church, and the general public. The import of the requirement is to assess their capacity to effectively promote accountability throughout the body of Christ.⁷ The need for accountability, as Paul indicates to the young man Timothy, goes beyond just occupying a leadership role in the church. All the members of the body of Christ are to emulate such a Christian character and this concept runs through the NT.

Ephesians 5 shows Paul's counsel to the church in Ephesus concerning their daily walk with Christ and how they should conduct themselves in their Christian lives. In verse 21, he admonished them to submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. The Greek term used here is *ὑποτασσόμενοι* which is derived from *ὑποτάσσω* which denotes "submitting or submission of oneself."⁸ The expression in its usage also gives the understanding of submitting to a superior in a military sense or a slave submitting to his or her master. It also carries the idea of

⁷Ajith Fernando, *Leadership Lifestyle: A Study of 1 Timothy* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1985), 59.

⁸Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1967), s.v. "ὑποτάσσω."

submitting voluntarily or subordinating oneself.⁹ In its usage in the context of Ephesians 5:21, it can be seen as a specific exaltation to accountability. In this case, *ὑποτάσσω* is applied in relation to accountability to God and by extension to one another. In a much broader sense, *ὑποτάσσω* relates to God (cf. 1 Cor 15:28; Heb 12:9; James 4:7), to Christ (cf. Eph 5:24), to wives (cf. Eph 5:22; Col 3:18; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet 3:1), to parents (cf. Luke 2:51), to masters (cf. Titus 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18), to secular authorities (cf. Rom 13:1), and in a general sense of a voluntary submission to others in the body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 16:16; 1 Pet 5:5; Eph 5:21).¹⁰ In all these, the word *ὑποτάσσω* has the ideas of accountability to another.

The life of Christ also shows the example of accountability needed by the leader. In leadership accountability must be allowed to take root in the leaders and followers lives. If people or the leaders themselves find it difficult to trust the words of leader, a bad situation and unworthy atmosphere in the organization is created. Jesus set the example of accountability for us to follow.¹¹ He constantly submitted to the will of the Father. Even before worldly rulers, He stood accountable to all that He taught and said. In John 18:20-21, before the high priest, He boldly accounted for all His sayings by answering him, "I spoke openly to the world. I always taught in synagogues and in the temple, where Jews always meet, and in secret I have said nothing. Why do you ask me? Ask those who heard Me what I said to them. Indeed they know what I said" (John 18:20-21). Here, Jesus accounted for all that He said and stood by His statements. He gives a good example for accountability. Leaders like Christ must accept accountability in all aspects of life as something which is necessary.¹²

Furthermore, the NT is strong on the concept of accountability. Romans 14:12 points out that "So then each one of us shall give account of himself to God." Although the implication here is for the eschatological coming of the Messiah or the second coming of Christ where all humanity will account for their stewardship, it gives an indication that God holds

⁹G. W. H. Lampe, ed., *A Patristic Greek Lexicon* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1976), s.v. "ὑποτάσσω."

¹⁰Ibid.

¹¹Tom Marshall, *Understanding Leadership: Fresh Perspectives on the Essentials of New Testament Leadership* (Chichester, UK: Sovereign World, 1991), 109-111.

¹²Michael Youssef, *The Leadership Style of Jesus: How to Develop the Leadership Qualities of the Good Shepherd* (Wheaton, IL: Victor, 1982), 79.

people, and for that matter, leaders accountable for their leadership. Whereas the effect of unfaithful accountability is what the apostle Luke portrays in Luke 12:47-48 that says "And that servant, who knew his lord's will, and made not ready, nor did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes; but he that knew not, and did things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes And to whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom they commit much, of him will they ask the more." Such fate will equally be meted out to unaccountable or unfaithful leaders at the glorious appearing of Christ. Jesus emphatically taught that a day of judgment is coming when every person will have to give an account for his/her stewardship.

These biblical expositions and foundations for accountability give a clear evidence and understanding that accountability in general and specifically in leadership was/is part of God's plan for His people and organizations, especially the church. Thus, the model for accountability should be based on the examples given in both the OT and the NT.

3. African Leaders' Relation and Actions Towards Accountability

In the leadership and governance in Africa today, there is a shift from a God-centered perspective of life and leadership to a man-centered perspective. This can be attributed to the attempt by leaders to do away with any form of accountability to God and the constituents they govern. The fact of the matter is that when leaders seek to ignore accountability to God and others, they leave themselves vulnerable to the distrust of the people and they will eventually become dictators due to the noncompliant attitude the followers will take to their directives. People in leadership and governance in Africa should, therefore, be committed to grappling with what it takes to be deeply ingrained with accountable characters relating to their relationship with God and humanity, what they value most in leadership and in life, and how they act in every aspect of life.¹³

Accountability to God and to one another according to Scripture is the foundation for growth and advancement in the Christian life and could be seen as the pattern for sustainable development. Such growth will equally manifest itself in the continent and its nations and organizations when

¹³Robert Banks and Bernice M. Ledbetter, *Reviewing Leadership: A Christian Evaluation of Current Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2004), 97.

leaders embrace the character of accounting to the people and followers, respectively. Holding a leadership role or position in Africa is not the right to do as one pleases as a little child. Leadership and governance mean having the capacity to exercise choice for the betterment of the people, but should not be considered as a position devoid of accountability. Leadership and governance are both the responsibility and the ability, by the grace of God, to do what is right according to the absolute and righteous standards of truth as given to us in God's Holy Word. Many see leadership and governance as the right to abandon accountability to God and men in order to do what they please in the promotion of self-gratification.¹⁴ As Paul Chaffee has pointed out "the touchstone of accountable leadership is trustworthiness, not success. The breakdown of accountable leadership is betrayal, not failure."¹⁵ When leaders possess the character of accountability, they will gain the trust of the people and will as well glorify God. The opposite of this is betrayal of the leader as Chaffee highlighted. Mostly it will be difficult to gain back the confidence and rediscover the trust other give you when the leader fails to be accountable. In the Bible, the Priest Eli suffered such a fate. He neglected the issue of authority and accountability of his children, and he lost the trustworthiness of the people and God. Authority that comes with leadership presents a slippery ground and every leader should tackle how he or she handle the issue of authority by moving from controlling the followers to building trust through proper accountability.

Also as Dioi Cruz points out accountable leaders are honest in admitting the wrongs and mistakes, going further to apologize for the impact of those mistakes on the lives of constituents, recognizing that sometimes the only justification is to recognize that there is none.¹⁶ This shows a true accountable leader. Cruz further posits that the nature of accountability assumes the potential for failure. This is because credible and accountable leaders are not flawless. They distinguish themselves, however, by their ability to respond to poor choices in ways that restore credibility and organizational strength.¹⁷

Paul Chaffee has suggested some standards that depicts the actions and character of a leader. When rightly followed will make a leader excel

¹⁴Bill Hull, *The Disciple Making Pastor* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell, 1988), 141.

¹⁵Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership*, 22.

¹⁶Cruz, class notes.

¹⁷Ibid.

in all his or her endeavours in leadership. These suggested standards include:

1. With dedication and faithfulness, an accountable leader holds up the best interests of the church, offering a level of trustworthiness and faithful care expected of spiritual leaders in similar circumstances.
2. An accountable leader is conscious of the power of the role, respecting and consistently living within the ethical boundaries that accompany such authority.
3. An accountable leader stays informed about the policies and doctrines that the church follows, the resources that may enrich it, and the requirements of the employing body.
4. An accountable leader create a safe environment and safe institutional habits for the benefit of members, guests, and friends.
5. An accountable leader tells the truth no matter the situation.
6. An accountable leader gives special attention to all financial matters, abstaining from personal gain in congregational affairs and advocating honesty.
7. An accountable leader oversees relationship, building and nurturing them both within the church and with community, guests, service providers, partner institutions, and the state/country.
8. An accountable leader leads, taking responsibility along with other leaders to move the church forward in glorifying God.
9. An accountable leader nurture self-respect in all, beginning with himself or herself, then help bring others to the agenda of God.¹⁸

These standards serves to guide leaders to a stage where they and their follower will enjoy the trust and belonging that comes in a church or any other organization. When this happen confidence will be restored and the integrity of the leader will be highly regarded. The leader will also be able to guard against temptation and be responsible for all his or her actions and inactions.

¹⁸These standards are modified to suit the need of an accountable leader in the church. See Chaffee, *Accountable Leadership*, 11.

4. Implementation of Accountability in Leadership and Governance in Africa

Accountability is an essential character needed to effectively and efficiently lead God's people to His agenda in Africa. This requires the help and assistance first and foremost from God Himself. He can, by the leader's relationship with Him, direct the leader's path and watch over the his/her being. Also, both the individual's effort and that of his/her peers in the governance processes are needed. Perry Pascarella has observed that personal and peer accountability works hand-in-hand. One cannot walk the path alone without checks and balances from others in leadership and governance. He posits that "personal accountability requires that you willingly give another person authority to hold you accountable for specific things in your life. We need accountability if we are going to run excellent companies for God."¹⁹ This helps to implement a good way to be accountable to the nations and the citizens. In the event of forgetfulness, colleagues will be able to prompt and question the decisions and actions of the leader. As the author of the book of Proverbs puts it, "iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another" (Prov 27:17). Thus, the African leader who strives for effective accountability has to place much emphasis on building quality and deep relationships with other that will help promote accountability.

As a way of implementing accountability in Africa, much time should be dedicated to the study and application of the Word of God in order to know the Will of God for the continent. Also through prayer and sharing of needs and concerns on a personal level as well as on corporate level, one can become accountable. Spending time in praying together in leadership and governance serves as a way of accounting for the deficiencies or short falls the leader pray on. Through this way, we become more alert to resist the devil and learn to commune with God more deeply so we can respond to God's principles thoroughly as we have others praying for us. It will help us to be conscious of shortfalls, and in a way we will be eager to overcome and to be on guard against our weaknesses and strengths. It will also help in developing coherence with others so we can communicate and be transparent to them without being defensive.

¹⁹Perry Pascarella, *Christ centered Leadership: Thriving in Business by Putting God in Charge* (Rocklin, CA: Prima, 1999), 248.

The use of time of a leader in Africa contributes to his/her accountability. Therefore, there is the need to develop a schedule or plan to give guidance in the use of time with God, family, the church, and other relations or endeavours. This will help minimize the misuse of our time that might have the tendency of leading us astray from God and His agenda. This time usage should be followed by a written report to account for the time and the activities we have carried out.

Furthermore, as leaders go through their duties in their countries, they should deliver what they promise, turn excuses into lessons learned, execute activities on time and within budget, take personal responsibility for the impact, focus attention on what they “can do”, take action, own up to everything they do, and emphasize effectiveness.²⁰ As leaders, leaders should be reminded that God is in control, and trusting and keeping His standards are the best forms of accountability. Accountability takes place in the crucible of a leader’s life and he/she cannot overcome the negative aspect unless God comes to the center of the leader’s life. The African leader’s knowledge of the need or accountability brings faith development and growth in God. This needs patience as accountability builds over time. As Jennifer S. Lerner and Philip E. Tetlock as observed,

Accountable leaders exhibit congruence between stated values and beliefs and demonstrated behavior (i.e., they ‘walk the talk’). They model the organization’s values and demonstrate the same commitment to the organization’s goals that they ask for from constituents. Accountable leaders communicate and make decisions with openness and straightforward disclosure, in contrast to unaccountable leaders’ use of ‘need-to-know’ communication (cf. Horton & Reid, 1991).²¹

Also, in the area to safeguard oneself not to get into the state of unaccountability, the leader needs to abide by the following principles:

1. The leader need to be honest and humble about struggles. He/she should watch and be careful on the tendency to protect comfort zones and layers of self-protection.
2. The leader must be patient and understanding. There is no need to come to a defensive position or equally condemn others of their actions. He/she should rather maintain a spirit of acceptance of the other person.

²⁰Cruz, class notes.

²¹Jennifer S. Lerner and Philip E. Tetlock, “Accounting for the Effects of Accountability,” *Psychological Bulletin* 125, no. 3 (1999): 255-275.

3. Though there will be challenges, exhortations, and even rebuke coming from leaders and even followers/members, they must be done in love and with patience and acceptance.
4. The leader should guard his/her tongue. In following the biblical principles, the leader should guard against gossip and being critical on issues of others. Information and other things expressed to the leader must be kept in strict confidence. Church members need to know that they can trust the pastor or leader so he or she must project him or herself as such (cf. Prov 16:27; 17:4, 27; 18:8, 21; 21:23; 26:30).
5. The leader must be faithful and dependable. The members must have faith in him/her and have the assurance of dependence on you for truth and sincerity.²²

Furthermore, in the quest to ensure accountability in governance, the following principles or ways are suggested to improve the accountability of leaders.

1. Legislate a limited term of office for executive leadership position in church and countries. In this regard, limitation of the number of terms of a leader should probably not be more than two terms in office.
2. Ensure proper and accurate assets declaration of the leader before and after leaving office.
3. Elect people on merit, and job prescription should precede elections.
4. Devise good ways of rendering account to the constituents.
5. Improve the selection of governance bodies (which should not be carried out at face value).

When these things are implemented in leadership and governance in Africa, accountability will be highly valued and the leader will be regarded for his or her sense of accountability. God will be glorified and the people of the African continent will feel the need to focus on the agenda of God which is what the leaders are presenting to them.

²²These principles are taken from Alexander Strauch. See Alexander Strauch, *Biblical Eldership: An Urgent Call to Restore Biblical Church Leadership* (Littleton, CO: Lewis & Roth, 1995), 43.

5. Conclusion

The foregoing discussion of accountability as a character for governance and leadership in Africa reveals the accountable nature of the leaders and citizens in the continent as a whole. The concept of accountability can be seen as a theological issue with a biblical foundation from both the OT and the NT, which should not be relegated in handling or running the daily affairs of Africa. Also, biblical examples have been highlighted to support the claim of biblically-accepted accountability. Accountable leaders are sought after, since accountability is a critical and vital character trait in maintaining trustworthiness and efficient growth in the continent. The Bible helps in understanding the import of accountability as a requirement of God from every person in the body of Christ. In the Scriptures, accountability is expressed in a variety of ways. Accountability of the leader, followers, and the nations in Africa do not occur in a vacuum. It starts and end with God and His spiritual leading of His creation/continent. He is the supreme source of insightful issues of accountability in governance and leadership.

God wants African leaders to accept responsibility for the outcomes expected of them—both good and bad. The leaders are not to blame external factors nor the actions of other. This is because accountability is not like responsibility that can be delegated. For God's people in Africa to progress in the governance and development assigned to them, there is the need to be always accountable to Him and to fellow constituents. It is hoped that African leaders may find this exposition on accountability in governance and leadership as well as other related issues worthy of study as accountability enables all to be "in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" (Rom 12:5).