

## EXEGESIS OF ACTS 20:33-35 ON PAUL'S FINANCIAL INTEGRITY IN HIS MISSION: A MODEL FOR THE CONTEMPORARY MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

Akintunde Felix Bamidele<sup>1</sup>

Olowoyeye Emmanuel Olurokan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The Redeemed Christian Bible College, An Affiliate of Redeemer's University, Main Campus, Redemption Camp, Mowe, Ogun State, Nigeria

<sup>2</sup>Gombe State University, Gombe State, Nigeria

\*Corresponding Email: fedak2011@yahoo.com

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### ABSTRACT

In recent times, news of financial misappropriations of some ministers of the gospel in some churches puts a question on the financial integrity of the 'holy men and women of God.' It is believed that the life of a minister is the life of his ministry. Integrity in the New Testament context means soundness, purity, honesty, and adherence to a pattern of good works. Integrity is a crucial matter especially, in these days when pastoral scandals seem to become rampant and some ministers of the gospel are abusing the true nature of the pulpit ministry through their lifestyle and messages. In the mission of Paul, he exhibited a good character of financial integrity which could be a good model for the contemporary ministers of the gospel. Therefore, the crux of this paper is to appraise the financial integrity of Paul in his mission as a model for contemporary gospel ministers. The paper makes use of exegetical and historical-critical methods in order to have a holistic understanding of Paul's financial integrity in his mission. The paper concludes with useful lessons for contemporary gospel ministers.

**Keywords:** Paul's Mission, Acts 20: 33-35, Financial integrity, Misappropriations of funds and Contemporary ministers.

### INTRODUCTION

In recent times, there are so many scandals in the church and it seems that immorality is becoming prevalent both in the pulpit and in the pew. Many people look down on the ministers of the Gospel and the respect for them seems to be ebbing low, because some of them are driven by gold not by God. The craving for materialism among the Gospel ministers coupled with the allegation of sexual immorality suggests an integrity crisis in

the pulpit and thus calls for scholarly debate. Pulpit ministry is a ministry of proclamation and pastoral care which demands a high level of both personal and moral integrity. However, it is alarming that some Gospel ministers in contemporary society contradict their messages by their lifestyles and actions and thus make their integrity questionable when their lifestyle should confirm rather than contradict the gospel they proclaim. In some of the Epistles of Paul, we understand that Paul established consistency between his own practice and the gospel he preached as a model of integrity. No wonder, in his letters to Timothy and Titus when giving them instructions on the requirements for ministerial ordination, he told them that gospel ministers must be blameless, above reproach, and must exhibit integrity in all they do even in their teaching (cf. I Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 2:7). In his mission, Paul exhibited a good character of financial integrity which could be a good model for the contemporary ministers of the gospel. Therefore, the crux of this paper is to appraise the financial integrity of Paul in his mission as a model for the contemporary Gospel ministers.

### The Concept of Integrity

Integrity in the context of this paper bothers on the ethics of behaviour of everyone involved in gospel ministry. Integrity is a common concept used within formal and informal discussions of leadership that has no universally accepted definition. As Carter<sup>1</sup> rightly observes, it is like the weather that everyone talks about but does not know what to do about it. Everybody demands it from one another. In the words of Montefiore and Vines,<sup>2</sup> integrity means “wholeness” or “completeness,” like consistency and coherence of principles and values. In a similar perspective, Karssing asserts that integrity means “when a professional exercise his tasks adequately, carefully and responsibly, taking into account all relevant interests.”<sup>3</sup> Huberts sees integrity “as the quality of acting in accordance or harmony with relevant moral values, norms, and rules.”<sup>4</sup> Etymologically, integrity is derived from the Latin word *integritas* which means “wholeness” or “unity.” This suggests that achieving integrity demands integrating various parts of one’s personality into a harmonious, intact whole.<sup>5</sup> The Hebrew word for integrity is *tom* or *tummah* which means “whole,” “sound,” “unimpaired,” “perfection.” The words are used

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<sup>1</sup> S. L. Carter, *Integrity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 6.

<sup>2</sup> A. Montefiore & D. Vines, *Integrity in Public and Private Domains* (London: Routledge, 1999), 9.

<sup>3</sup> E. Karssing, “Professional Business Ethics” (2001/2007):3, [tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15/10/2020](https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15/10/2020).

<sup>4</sup> Lisa Schotti, The Concept of moral integrity and its implications for business, *KICG*, [econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/16/10/2020](https://econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/16/10/2020).

<sup>5</sup> L. W. J. C. Huberts, Integrity: what it is and why it is important, *International Colloquium on Ethical Leadership: Past, Present and Future of Ethics Research*, (1998): 44-45, [tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15/10/2020](https://tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15/10/2020).

in several texts of the Old Testament Bible to describe the character of some people like David (Ps. 7:8), Solomon (I Kings. 9:4), and Job (Job 2:9; 27:5).<sup>6</sup> According to Trull and Carter, though these men were not perfect, each of them modeled a life of wholeness and maturity.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, in all places where the word *tom* or *tummah* is used in the Old Testament, it seems to carry the meaning of simplicity, or sincerity of heart and intention, truthfulness or uprightness.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Walker affirms that the word “integrity” does not occur in the New Testament, but its equivalents may be seen in “sincerity,” “truth,” the “pure heart,” the “single eye,” etc.<sup>9</sup> In the opinion of Koehn, integrity could be described as the precondition for being human. He posits that this can be seen as a synonym for human character.<sup>10</sup> In a similar perspective, Simons asserts that integrity has to do with consistency with regard to social behaviour of every human being.<sup>11</sup> This is in agreement with Paine’s opinion that adversity, temptation, or any challenge whatsoever does not change the behaviour of a person of integrity.<sup>12</sup> In support of this view, Carter asserts that persons of integrity would stand up for their beliefs, even when they have something to lose.<sup>13</sup> In the light of these submissions, we agree with this view that integrity has to do with personal moral conviction. A person of integrity would not be moved by any circumstance, pressure, or the like, but rather be the same whether alone or being observed. As part of one’s character with discrete virtues, a person of integrity has behavioural consistency in his/her words and actions across time and situations, avoiding all forms of hidden agendas and acting morally, sincerely, and transparently.<sup>14</sup> Integrity affects every aspect of one’s life. However, the purview of this work is financial integrity. A man or woman of financial integrity is transparent, accountable, and honest

<sup>6</sup> Joe E. Trull & James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Benin City, Nigeria: Gospel Press and Literature International, 2004), 60.

<sup>7</sup> Joe E. Trull & James E. Carter, *Ministerial Ethics: Moral Formation for Church Leaders*, 60.

<sup>8</sup> W. L. Walker, “Integrity” [Encyclopedias - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/integrity/](https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/integrity/) on 16/10/2020

<sup>9</sup> W. L. Walker, “Integrity” [Encyclopedias - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia - https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/integrity/](https://www.biblestudytools.com/dictionary/integrity/)

<sup>10</sup> D. Koehn, “Integrity as a Business Asset,” *Journal of Business Ethics*, 58 (2005):132.

<sup>11</sup> T. L. Simons, Behavioural integrity as a critical ingredient for transformational leadership, *Journal of Organisational change Management*, 12 (2002): 89-104.

<sup>12</sup> L. S. Paine, Integrity, in Werhane, P.H. and Freeman, R. E. (eds), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Management: Business Ethics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Malden, UK: Blackwell, 2005), 248.

<sup>13</sup> S. L. Carter, *Integrity* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 23.

<sup>14</sup> S. Schick & J. Goosby Smith, “The Genesis of Integrity: Values and Virtues Illuminated in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam for Workplace Behavior” in [Integrity in Organizations](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137280350_16), p. 308, [https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137280350\\_16](https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1057/9781137280350_16), 30/10/2019

in all his/her financial dealings. This is the aspect of Paul's life this work intends to appraise to serve as a lesson for the contemporary ministers of the gospel.

Financial accountability is one of the distinctive marks of the New Testament church. Early Christians were taught to be above reproach in their financial dealings. In fact, the attitude of the members of the New Testament church was highly commendable in this regard. Christians are expected to conduct their financial affairs in a manner that would protect their reputation in society at large.<sup>15</sup> In this regard, Paul takes financial integrity very seriously in his mission because he sees that lack of it could affect the integrity of the gospel and hinder its spread across the Mediterranean world. No wonder he emphasises in his first letter to his spiritual son, Timothy, that, one of the required qualifications for church leadership should be that the candidate must be free from the love of money (I Tim. 3:2-3, 8). As Akintunde rightly observes, in the Early Church as recorded in Acts 6:1-4, the group of disciples appointed to oversee the daily distribution of food in the community demonstrated integrity in the task given to them, because there was no discrimination in the way those resources were distributed to the people concerned, and more importantly, financial integrity, for no record of mismanagement on their part was recorded.<sup>16</sup>

### **An Overview of Paul's Mission**

Saul was once a persecutor of Christians. In his bid to arrest the disciples in Damascus and bring them to Jerusalem for punishment, he had an encounter with the Risen Christ on his way to Damascus (Acts 9:1-16). After Saul's encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus and the consequent blindness by the light from heaven, his associates led him to the city of Damascus where he met with Ananias who was sent by Jesus to minister to him. He thus conveyed to Saul the words of Jesus concerning his mission both to the Gentiles and the people of Israel, saying; "...Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel" (Acts 9:15). Immediately after Ananias ministered to Saul and he regained his sight, he started preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ (vs. 20-22). All the three accounts of Paul's call and commission recorded in the book of Acts describe his mandate to proclaim Christ to the Gentiles. Bowers notes the pivotal significance of the Damascus-Road experience of Paul as something that gave him a sense of missionary calling for Paul vividly declares that

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<sup>15</sup> Felix B. Akintunde, "The Early Church's Commitment to Probity and Accountability in the Context of Nigerian Pentecostalism" in J. K. Ayantayo, B. A. Adedibu & B. O. Igboin, eds., *African Pentecostalism: Probity and Accountability* (Nigeria: Adekunle Ajasin University Press, 2019), 136.

<sup>16</sup> Felix B. Akintunde, "The Early Church's Commitment to Probity and Accountability in the Context of Nigerian Pentecostalism," 137.

God revealed Jesus Christ, His Son, to him, so that he might preach Him to the Gentiles (Gal 1:15-16).<sup>17</sup> Everts, therefore, observes that Paul saw his call as unique and he zealously defended his unique mission anywhere he went to preach the gospel.<sup>18</sup>

Later, the church commissioned Saul and Barnabas for the mission work as instructed by the Lord (Acts 13:1-4); hence, they launched out for the work. Paul evidently went on three missionary journeys spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. Chom argues that Paul went out on all his three notable missionary journeys (Acts 13:2-14:28; 15:40-18:23) planting new churches and strengthening the existing ones. According to him, Paul was not only planting churches but advancing the kingdom of God by taking the kingdom messages to places where it is not known – that is, reaching those who do not belong to any church who have never heard about Christ or accepted Him as Lord and Saviour.<sup>19</sup> Ugo opines that, in each of Paul's missionary journeys, he traveled through the Mediterranean world preaching the gospel and establishing new churches.

### Backgrounds to Paul's Financial Integrity

Jewish Rabbis were expected to perform their religious and legal functions without demanding a fee; so, it was necessary for them to have some other sources of income.<sup>20</sup> This might have influenced Paul's decision to repudiate his right to financial support from the Corinthian church as a Rabbi. In the ancient Jewish culture, as Marshall opines, Jewish parents were required by law to see that their sons were taught some trade, so that should adverse circumstances come, they would not be dependent upon others but through the learned trade would be able to provide for their own necessities.<sup>21</sup> According to Atowoju, this explains the reason behind the carpentry apprenticeship of Jesus Christ and the tent-making of Paul.<sup>22</sup> He argues further that, just because it was considered improper for a Scribe or Rabbi to receive payment for his teaching, many of them, therefore, practiced a trade in addition to their study and teaching of the Law.<sup>23</sup> Barclay posits that a Jewish Rabbi was the equivalent of a college lecturer or professor,

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<sup>17</sup> W. P. Bowers, "Mission" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, Gerald F. Hawthorne et al (eds.) (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 612.

<sup>18</sup> J. M. Everts, "Conversion and Call of Paul" *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, 162.

<sup>19</sup> P. M. Chom, *Solitary Method of Church Planting* (UK: Xlibris Publishing Company, 2015), 168.

<sup>20</sup> Howard I. Marshall, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 293.

<sup>21</sup> Howard I. Marshall, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, An Introduction and Commentary*, 293.

<sup>22</sup> Ayodele Atowoju, *Paul of Tarsus* (Lagos: Bprint Publishing, 2004), 46.

<sup>23</sup> Ayodele Atowoju, *Paul of Tarsus*, 46.

who according to the Jewish law must not take a penny for teaching, but must have a trade by which he supported himself.<sup>24</sup> And because the Jews discouraged idleness, Paul as a youth, like Aquila and Priscilla, learned the manufacturing of leather from goats' hair and skins to form a fabric called "cilicium" for making tents, carpets, and sandals. Paul's mastery of this trade thus gave him economic independence.<sup>25</sup> The trade, therefore, became major financial support for Paul during his missionary enterprise. This was the reason he could say to the Corinthians, with a sense of integrity, that "we labour working with our own hands..." (1 Cor. 4:12); "...refusing to be a burden to you...for I seek not what is yours but you" (II Cor. 12:13, 14b).

Similarly, Rabbi Zadok said: "Make not of the Torah a crown wherewith to aggrandize thyself, or a spade wherewith to dig."<sup>26</sup> Also, Hilliel used to say:

He who makes a profit from the crown of Torah  
shall waste away. Hence, thou mayest infer  
that he who derives gain for himself from the  
words of the Torah is helping on his own  
destruction.<sup>27</sup>

This Jewish background might be the reason Paul chose to labour with his own hands to provide for his own necessities as a teacher of the Word of God, all for the sake of the gospel of Christ that he preached. Going back to the Old Testament times, we see Nehemiah, unlike other governors who were before him, who was also self-supporting. He chose not to place a burden on the Jews who returned from captivity (Neh. 5:14-18). Paul probably imitated the example of Nehemiah here.

Paul would never accept payment from the people he was teaching, though he may receive voluntary contributions from another church (II Cor. 11:8). To this end, Paul conducted himself like a Rabbi. Again, Paul's Jewish background places him in the tradition of scribes who by practicing a craft as a means of economic independence could take pupils without charging them.<sup>28</sup> Besides, Paul behaved himself like the sect of Essenes<sup>29</sup> whose self-support was maintained by manual labour.<sup>30</sup> Brumfield cites

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<sup>24</sup> William Barclay, *Ethics in a Permissive Society* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons and Co. Ltd., 1971), 94.

<sup>25</sup> Ayodele Atwoju, *Paul of Tarsus*, 46.

<sup>26</sup> Fredrick F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 367-368.

<sup>27</sup> Fredrick F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts*, 367-368.

<sup>28</sup> James Francis and Francis J. Leslie, eds., *Tent-making: Perspectives on Self-supporting Ministry* (USA: Grace-wing Publishing Company, 1998), 42.

<sup>29</sup> The Essenes were a definite ascetic brotherhood that could be entered only by those who were willing to submit to the regulations of the group and to undergo ceremonies of initiation. They abstained from marriage and habitually dressed in white garments when they are not working. See Merrill C. Tenney,

Old Testament prophets of God who supported themselves with their own sources of income, such as Prophet Elisha who was a farmer, and Prophet Amos who was a herdsman who grew sycamore trees. He argues that their ability to support themselves made them be bold spokesmen for God because they were not financially dependent on God's people for their financial needs.<sup>31</sup>

Although Paul's background made him socially at par with those in the leisure classes, his sense of mission and method of support identified him with those of relatively low social status.<sup>32</sup> He who was born a Roman citizen, which implied that he was an elite from the provincial Cilicia (Acts 22:28) chose to do a tent-making work in order to support himself in the business of preaching the gospel, so as to protect the integrity of the gospel.<sup>33</sup> This expressed his high level of integrity and uprightness.

Most itinerant Greco-Roman philosophers and religious teachers supported themselves in one of four ways: charging fees, staying in well-to-do households, begging, or working at a trade. The last of these was the least common but generally acknowledged to give the philosopher the greatest freedom to teach however he liked.<sup>34</sup> This last one was Paul's choice and he avoided the first three options just for the sake of the integrity of the gospel that he was preaching. Fee observes that the wealthy in the Hellenistic society expressed their power by becoming patrons, and since benefaction was the basis of friendship, refusing a gift was regarded as pride and created enmity. Philosophers who wished to avoid this network of obligation could either beg, as the Cynics chose to do, or work. However, since most of the Greek society looked down on those who worked by trade or begged, not many philosophers chose these methods of support.<sup>35</sup> But as for Paul, he chose that method for the sake of his own integrity and the integrity of the gospel of Christ. For many philosophers, manual labour was demeaning; this is echoed perhaps in a sentiment expressed by Paul himself in 1

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1985, *New Testament Survey*, revised. Walter M. Dunnett (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 167.

<sup>30</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, *New Testament Survey*, revised. Walter M. Dunnett (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 167.

<sup>31</sup> Robin Brumfield, *Tentmakers Guide to Ministry* (Forest, Mississippi: Mississippi Baptist Convention Board, 2004), 6.

<sup>32</sup> David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker exegetical commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academy, 2003), 417.

<sup>33</sup> S. C. Barton, "Social-Scientific Approach to Paul" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne, et al (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 897.

<sup>34</sup> Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 1994), 173.

<sup>35</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* NICNT (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1987), 399.

Corinthians 9:19 “I have made myself a slave to all” and in II Corinthians 11:7 “...abasing myself...because I preached God’s gospel without cost to you.”<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, Paul’s financial independence by working with his hands helped him to freely express himself and to demonstrate his financial integrity with regards to his mission, and to prove that he was not relying on a human benefactor, but on a heavenly benefactor.<sup>37</sup> He knows very well that money is a source of power and influence; that accepting and giving money create obligations between people and bind them together in a relationship of either subordination or domination. So, he worked for himself: “We worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we preached to you the gospel of God” (1 Thess. 2:9).<sup>38</sup> Wealth and privilege were confined to the upper 5% of the highly stratified Corinthian population. From the upper class came financial patronage to suitable clients who are not to be confused in any way with modern borrowers. Clients became more like hired hands at the beck and call of the patron. This helps explain Paul’s boast of meeting his own needs by his tent-making trade, not by receiving support from Corinthian financial sources. He was controlled by no one and showed his pure motivation by his independence.<sup>39</sup> Paul feared that if he lived on preaching the gospel, he might be suspected of selfish motives in doing the work. This Hellenistic society’s prejudice was the reason Paul refused support from the Corinthian church and from other parts of the Hellenistic world like Thessalonica. So, he would not have any reason to be discouraged in the work of the gospel by people imputing selfish motives to those who preached the Word.<sup>40</sup>

### Exegesis of Acts 20:33-35 on Paul’s Financial Integrity

#### Acts 20:33-35

ἀργυρίου ἢ χρυσίου ἢ ἱματισμοῦ οὐδενὸς  
ἐπεθύμησα ·

αὐτοὶ γινώσκετε ὅτι ταῖς χρεῖαις μου καὶ τοῖς  
οὔσι μετ’ ἐμοῦ ὑπηρέτησαν αἱ χεῖρες αὐταί.

<sup>36</sup> Ronald Hock, *The Social Context of Paul’s Ministry* (Philadelphia: Fortress Book, 1980), 558-562.

<sup>37</sup> S. C. Barton, “Social-Scientific Approach to Paul” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne, et al (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 897.

<sup>38</sup> S. C. Barton, “Social-Scientific Approach to Paul” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 897.

<sup>39</sup> Ben Witherington III, *A Week in the Life of Corinth* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2012), 158.

<sup>40</sup> Ellen White, 2004, [http://www.worldslastchance.com/updates/the\\_apostle\\_paul\\_and\\_manual\\_labour\\_part\\_1\\_html](http://www.worldslastchance.com/updates/the_apostle_paul_and_manual_labour_part_1_html), retrieved on 20/06/2020.

πάντα ὑπέδειξα ὑμῖν ὅτι οὕτως κοπιῶντας δεῖ  
ἀντιλαμβάνεσθαι τῶν ἀσθενούντων,  
μνημονεύειν τε τῶν λόγων τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ  
ὅτι αὐτὸς εἶπεν Μακάριόν ἐστιν μᾶλλον  
διδόναι ἢ λαμβάνειν.

arguríou he chrusíou he himatismoú oudenós  
epethúmesa:

autoí ginoskete hótí taís chreíais mou kaí toís  
oúsin met' emoú huperétesan hai cheíres  
haútai.

pánta hupédeixa humín hótí hoútos kopiontas  
deí antilambánesthai ton asthenónton,  
mnemoneúein te ton lógon toú kuriou Iesoú  
hótí autós eípen: makárión estin mállon didónai  
he lambánein.

I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel. You  
yourselves know that these hands ministered  
to my necessities, and to those who were with  
me. In all things I have shown you that by so  
toiling one must help the weak, remembering  
the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is  
more blessed to give than to receive.

Paul was giving his farewell address to the elders of Ephesus in this passage. He was giving an account of his own life during the three years of his stay with them to teach them a good example of how they should behave themselves in the church of God. He reminded them of the solemn responsibility saddled upon them by the Holy Ghost to care for the people of God in Ephesus as shepherds over the flock of God (v. 28). Then, he went on to say: "I coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel" (*arguríou he chrusíou he himatismoú oudenós epethúmesa*). Silver, gold, and fine clothes were accepted forms of wealth and status symbols in the ancient world. Paul had been contented to work with his own hands to support himself, although as an apostle he might have claimed support from the churches.<sup>41</sup> Here, Paul was warning the elders of Ephesus against covetousness which means a consuming and controlling desire for what others have and for more of what they already had. "Thou shall not covet" is the last of the Ten Commandments (Ex. 20:17). Covetousness is idolatry (Eph. 5:5; Col 3:5). In the

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<sup>41</sup>Howard Marshall, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, An Introduction and Commentary* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1980), 336.

qualifications for an elder, it is expressly stated that he must not be guilty of the sin of covetousness (1 Tim. 3:3).

Paul here laid a good example for the elders of Ephesus to follow. He says: "You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me". Paul earned his own living as a tentmaker during the long period of his ministry in Ephesus where for three years he carried out aggressive evangelistic work throughout that region, living on his tent-making trade, even though he could have used his apostolic authority to demand material and financial support and thereby have an easier life. As Polhill observes, Paul's detachment from material gain is well documented in his epistles. He never used his ministry as a "mask to cover up greed" (2 Thess. 2:5). He understood that greed is a universal human problem, and church leaders are not exempted.<sup>42</sup> Polhill adds that such avarice among church leaders was a real problem in Asia Minor which seemed to be attested to by the pastoral Epistles when Paul insisted that a major qualification for church leaders should be their detachment from the love of money (1 Tim. 3:3, 8; Titus 1:7, 11).<sup>43</sup>

And finally, Paul reminded them that those who take care of the people of God must do so without thought of material reward. Ministers should be in a position to meet their own financial needs and the needs of others by working with their hands. By working to meet one's need as Paul did, church elders would be able to help both the weak and sick as well as exemplify the words of Jesus. As Samuel called all Israel to witness when he was about to lay down his office as judge (1 Samuel 12:3), so, Paul called the Ephesian elders to witness that all the time he spent with them he coveted nothing that was not his; on the contrary, he did not even avail himself of his right to be maintained by those for whose spiritual welfare he cared, but earned his own living, and that of his colleagues – by his own labour, hence his frequent reference to "these hands" (cf. 1 Cor. 4:12; 9:3ff; 2 Cor. 4:5; 11:7f; 12:13, etc.).<sup>44</sup> Kistemaker asserts that Paul worked day and night with his own hands to support himself so that no one would ever be able to accuse him of depending on the hearers of the gospel for his material needs, and the Ephesian elders were able to testify that he had never exploited anyone, but had always set an example of diligence and self-sufficiency.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1992), 429-30.

<sup>43</sup>John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts*, 429-30.

<sup>44</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Williams B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1981), 418.

<sup>45</sup>Simon J. Kistemaker, *New Testament Commentary: Acts* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990), 737.

When Paul wrote: “In all things, I have shown you that by so toiling one must help the weak...,” it is clear that he was providing a model for them to follow. But why provide such a model if elders (pastors) are to completely depend on the church for their welfare?<sup>46</sup> However, Paul sought to be an example of helping the needy (1 Thess. 5:14) and of living in accordance with the saying of the Lord Jesus: “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (v. 35). Munck asserts that this saying ascribed to Jesus is not found in the canonical gospels and must be termed an ‘agraphon’, that is, a saying of Jesus recorded outside the four gospels.<sup>47</sup> Bruce posited that though this dominical logion did not appear in any of the Gospels, its similarity was manifested in many other sayings of Jesus which the gospel writers recorded (cf. Luke 6:38; 11:9ff; John 13:34).<sup>48</sup> Marshall observes that this saying is expressed in a Jewish form (with the use of ‘blessed’), and it possibly finds its echo in Didache 1:5, “Blessed is the giver... alas for the receiver”. He adds that Paul quoted the words of Jesus only rarely; when he did so, it was to back up some ethical instructions, as here (1 Cor. 7:10; 9:14; 1 Tim. 5:18).<sup>49</sup> Therefore, the minister should be a giver, not a taker. However, Paul is sounding a piece of ministerial advice that the one who leads the flock of God should focus on the needs of others, be more concerned with giving than with acquiring.<sup>50</sup>

In the mission of Paul, it is evident that his main motivation was the gospel, not money. He willingly set aside his right to financial support, so that people would not think his message was just a speech designed to get money. Some Greek orators made their living by traveling and entertaining audiences with speeches; others formed schools and charged students for lectures, but Paul did not want anyone to think his message was motivated by selfish concerns. He wanted to make it clear that he was not preaching for his own benefit, rather he was preaching because the Lord commanded him to do so. Thus, the gospel was his priority (1 Cor.9:16-17).<sup>51</sup>

Though Paul was proving his right to support from the Corinthian church (1 Cor. 9:1ff), his intention was not to get their money. On the other hand, some people at Corinth thought that Paul was not accepting support because there was something ‘wrong’ with

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<sup>46</sup>John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts*, 429-30.

<sup>47</sup>Johannes Munck, *The Anchor Bible: The Acts of the Apostle, Introduction, Translation and Notes*, eds. William F. Albright and C.S. Mann (Garden City, New York: Double Day and Company, Inc., 1967), 115.

<sup>48</sup>F. F. Bruce, *Commentary on the Book of Acts: The English Text with Introduction, Exposition and Notes*, 418.

<sup>49</sup>Howard I. Marshall, *The Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Acts of the Apostles, An Introduction and Commentary*, 336.

<sup>50</sup>John B. Polhill, *The New American Commentary: Acts*, 429-30.

<sup>51</sup>N. A. “A Command Paul did not Obey”, retrieved from [http://www.gci.org/bible/1 Cor9](http://www.gci.org/bible/1%20Cor9) on 10/06/2020.

his apostleship. He, therefore, defended himself by showing that he was just as qualified for these rights as the rest of the apostles but decided not to make use of his rights, just to show that his reward was not money.<sup>52</sup> In fact, he made it clear that he would rather die than take money from them for preaching (1 Cor. 9:15). No wonder he chose to work with his hands to provide for his own necessities so that the gospel would not lose its integrity before the people because of money. David Garland observes that Paul might not want to insinuate that persons had to pay to hear the message of the self-giving love of Christ, which he characterised as a “free gift” (Rom. 5:15, 16; 6:20, 23) offered to all.<sup>53</sup> So, to Paul, as Kruse asserts, it was mandatory for him to preach the gospel without charge, and this was his own choice and his integrity.<sup>54</sup> There is no place in the New Testament where God commanded him to do so.

Paul also links his self-supporting ministry to a sense of financial independence. This independence was a value also prized by moral philosophers of his day. It was not only to avoid his teaching being compromised by taking money but also that he might be free to fulfill apostolic care for his churches by not being a burden upon them.<sup>55</sup> Paul did not want to become a client of the donors or become financially obliged to anyone, and thus lose his independence, for, in Paul’s world, the acceptance of a benefaction often meant becoming a ‘client’ of the benefactor, and so sacrificing some of one’s independence.<sup>56</sup> Garland opines that Paul did not want to get trapped in the sticky web of social obligations that would hinder his freedom to preach and admonish, the obligations he described as a kind of slavery. He, therefore, refused to become anyone’s “kept apostle” (cf. 2 Cor. 12:14) or “house apostle.”<sup>57</sup> Robertson and Plummer asserted that Paul wanted to be free to rebuke and for his praise to be above the suspicion of being bought.<sup>58</sup> This was his high level of financial integrity.

Besides, Paul’s financial integrity was demonstrated in his action to avoid anything that may hinder the progress of the gospel. He says: “... we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel” (1 Cor.

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<sup>52</sup>S. J. Hafemann, “Corinthians, Letter to the” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne, et al (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 166.

<sup>53</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 419.

<sup>54</sup>Colin Kruse, *TNTC: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistles to the Corinthians* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 188.

<sup>55</sup>James Francis & Francis J. Leslie, eds., *Tent-making: Perspectives on Self-supporting Ministry* (USA: Grace-wing Publishing Company, 1998, 48).

<sup>56</sup>Colin Kruse, *TNTC: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistles to the Corinthians*, 188-190.

<sup>57</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 419.

<sup>58</sup>Archibald Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1958), 187.

9:12). The basic idea expressed by this word *enkope* rendered as “obstacle” in this verse is that of “blocking the way.” Paul saw that he might become an obstacle by using his right to take financial support, that is, by giving the impression that he was doing his work for personal profit, or by frightening away the poor. Hence, his supreme concern is that there be no *enkope* to the *prokope* of the gospel (Phil. 1:12).<sup>59</sup> Robertson and Plummer posit that the word *enkope* is perhaps a metaphor for breaking bridges or roads to stop the march of an enemy. They stressed further that the English word “hamper” had a similar origin, of impeding by means of cutting.<sup>60</sup> So, Paul seemed to mean “that we may not in any way hamper the progress of the gospel.” Prior holds a similar view. He affirms that Paul avoided doing anything which might prevent a clear road for gospel advance.<sup>61</sup> He sought to avoid any impression that he was preaching only to acquire financial support. Potential converts may have shied away from converting to the gospel if they suspected that it came with strings attached, for acceptance would cause them to incur financial obligations to support the one who brought them the gospel.<sup>62</sup> Apart from this, receiving patronage could create factions, as the well-to-do might be in competition for teachers to support. This would have been an obstacle in the way of the gospel.<sup>63</sup>

In addition to these, Paul, in demonstrating his financial integrity, may have wanted to divorce himself from the variety of hucksters roaming the ancient world with their hands always extended in hopes of getting donations. They taught for profit, and he castigated them as peddlers who hawked their wares and water down the value of their goods to get money from people (2 Cor. 2:17; 4:2).<sup>64</sup> Witherington refers to them as itinerant teachers who accepted fees or patronage, or like the Cynics who begged for a living.<sup>65</sup> Paul, therefore, wanted to undermine the claim of those gospel peddlers who boasted in their mission that they work on the same terms as Paul, those who not only accepted remuneration but greedily extracted it. So, Paul did not want to be identified with such people, so that he would not be suspected that he was in the preaching in order to exploit people. Hence, he named them false teachers, deceitful workmen, who

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<sup>59</sup>Geoffrey Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in one volume*, 453.

<sup>60</sup>Archibald Robertson & Alfred Plummer, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthian*, 186.

<sup>61</sup>David Prior, *The Message of 1 Corinthians: Life in the Local Church* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1985), 157.

<sup>62</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 413.

<sup>63</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 209.

<sup>64</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 419.

<sup>65</sup>Ben Witherington III, *Conflict and Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians*, 208-209.

were disguising themselves as apostles of Christ, and revealed them as instruments of Satan who disguised themselves as servants of righteousness.<sup>66</sup> That means if Paul took money for preaching the gospel, then, he would not be different in this regard from those whom he called “false apostles” and “deceitful workers” (2 Cor. 11:13). Bray posits that Paul would not allow the vigor of his message to become sluggish, for the person who accepts payment from sinners loses his authority to censor them.<sup>67</sup>

And the hallmark of his financial integrity is that Paul wanted to become a living paradigm (a good example) of the gospel, offering the “free gospel of Christ” free of charge to the people.<sup>68</sup> Everts supports this view. He argues that Paul thought that when he preached the gospel “free of charge,” he would be a living example of the message he preached that God’s grace was freely offered to all in Christ. So, when the truth of the gospel is at stake, he would be able to boast that he served only the gospel, not his own financial interests.<sup>69</sup> Possibly, he aimed at challenging the commonly held aversion for manual labour by many Greeks. The Greeks disdained manual labour. They were of the opinion that physical labour had to be performed by slaves. So, by working with his hands, Paul lowered his status in the eyes of local citizens. He deliberately set the example of hard work to support himself and called upon his converts to imitate him (1 Thess. 5:14; 2 Thess. 3:6-13).<sup>70</sup> Barnett opines that the practical values of life in Christ were concretely exemplified in Paul’s consciously executed lifestyle in which he supported himself by work (Eph. 4:28; Cf. Acts 20:35).<sup>71</sup>

In a similar perspective, David Garland rightly observes that Paul intended to present the gospel about Christ’s self-sacrifice by means of his own self-sacrifice.<sup>72</sup> Therefore, the apostle says repeatedly “imitate me” (1 Cor. 11:1; 2 Thess. 3:7). So, Getty asserts that Paul has renounced his right to financial support precisely so that his lifestyle would not be an obstacle to the message he preached but be a good example.<sup>73</sup> Instead of Paul depending on the hospitality of his converts at Thessalonica, he and his team members devoted themselves to long hours of hard labour to provide for their own necessities. Paul reaffirms the principle of the right of labourers to be paid or supported, but he chose to be a good example and set a pattern for Christian behaviour. He chose

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<sup>66</sup>Colin Kruse, *TNTC: The 2<sup>nd</sup> Epistles to the Corinthians* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1987), 188-190.

<sup>67</sup>Gerald Bray, *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: 1-2 Corinthians, New Testament*, 292.

<sup>68</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 419.

<sup>69</sup>J. M. Everts, “Financial Support” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 296.

<sup>70</sup>P. W. Barnett, “Tentmaking” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 927.

<sup>71</sup>P.W. Barnett, 1993, “Tentmaking” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 927.

<sup>72</sup>David E. Garland, *1 Corinthians: Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, 419.

<sup>73</sup>Mary Ann Getty, “1 Corinthians” in *The Collegeville Bible Commentary*, 1117.

to work with his own hands while preaching the gospel of Christ, so as to be a good exemplary leader to others, a man of integrity (I Thess. 2:9-10; II Thess. 3:6-9).

### Lessons for Contemporary Gospel Ministers

Obviously, from the life of Paul, there are few lessons for the contemporary Gospel ministers. First. Paul's financial integrity helped him not to be a burden to his converts and churches. Gospel ministers are not expected to be a burden to their congregations or converts, for this may demean the gospel which has eternal value. Second, Paul did not sacrifice his independence to any benefactors lest should it hinder his freedom to preach and admonish in truth. Gospel ministers would not be free to speak the truth or correct many of the members of their congregations or clients if they have become the 'clients of their benefactors' when those benefactors are not doing well according to the standard of the Bible. Some ministers who could not exhibit endurance may find it easy to call on any well-to-do member of their congregation when they have any financial challenge instead of calling on God, their Employer. This attitude may cause ministers to lose their integrity and respect before such members. Third, Paul avoided any impression that he was preaching only to acquire financial support. Frequent demands for money from church members can drive away some people from the church, for such may see the church as a business centre when money becomes the priority of the minister-in-charge in every church service. So, Gospel ministers should avoid this kind of impression. Fourth, some hucksters in the ancient world who taught for profit were called peddlers of the word because they go about to solicit for financial support. Contemporary itinerant Evangelists or prophets should desist from using their anointing to trade for money from the church of God where they go to minister. Such attitude could make some people see the act of preaching as a means of exploiting people; hence, this could demean the integrity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, every gospel minister should learn to work to defend the integrity of the gospel.

### CONCLUSION

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The presence of integrity in the life of a gospel minister would undoubtedly draw people to the truth because integrity has the power of persuasion. The power of consistency between a message and the life of the one who proclaims it was clearly demonstrated by Apostle Paul which is worthy of emulation by the contemporary preachers. The Pharisees were good teachers of the Law but they lacked integrity, which was why Jesus said; "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not" (Matt. 23:2-3, KJV). The contemporary society wants preachers who would live the truth they are preaching, unlike the hypocritical Pharisees. Perhaps the most surprising and challenging expression of Paul's commitment to preaching with integrity was his

practice of purposely calling attention to his own conduct. Being confident of his integrity, Paul twice pleads with the Corinthians, "Imitate me!" (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1). To the Philippians, he writes, "Join with others in following my example" (Phil 3:17). In the same epistle he continues, "Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, do..." (Phil 4:9). Therefore, contemporary gospel ministers should emulate the life of financial integrity of Paul in order to defend the integrity of the gospel of Christ Jesus before the world.

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