

Pauline Teaching on Christian Marriage and Ecclesial Leadership: Implications For Polygamy and Church Stability in Ikwo LGA

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Received: 10.01.2026 | Revised: 20.02.2026 | Accepted: 05.03.2026

ABSTRACT

Background: Pauline teachings on Christian marriage and ecclesial leadership have remained foundational in shaping church structures and moral expectations across Christian traditions. In Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria, the encounter between Pauline insistence on monogamy and marital fidelity, as reflected in 1 Timothy 3:2 to 5 and Titus 1:6 to 9, and the enduring cultural practice of polygamy within Igbo society, presents significant theological and pastoral tensions. This tension directly affects church stability, leadership selection, and communal unity.

Methods: The study employed an integrative research design that combined theological exegesis of relevant Pauline texts with qualitative interviews involving church leaders and members in Ikwo. In addition, a quantitative survey was conducted to assess patterns of interpretation and application of Pauline instructions within local congregations. This multi method approach enabled a contextual analysis of how biblical teachings are negotiated within an African cultural environment where polygamy remains socially embedded.

Results: Findings reveal divergent ecclesial responses. Some churches maintain strict monogamous requirements for leadership in alignment with literal readings of Pauline texts, thereby excluding polygamous individuals from leadership positions. Other congregations adopt a more pastoral and inclusive approach, permitting polygamous members to serve in leadership provided they demonstrate commitment to Christian virtues and moral integrity. Evidence from the field suggests that congregations practising a pastoral inclusive model tend to experience greater unity and institutional continuity, whereas rigid exclusionary approaches risk alienating members and weakening church cohesion.

Conclusion: The study underscores the importance of contextual hermeneutics in navigating the complex relationship between biblical fidelity and cultural sensitivity. Balancing adherence to Pauline theology with pastoral responsiveness to African marital realities is crucial for sustaining church stability in Ikwo. It therefore recommends increased pastoral sensitivity, inclusive leadership frameworks where appropriate, and sustained scholarly engagement with the realities of polygamy in African Christian contexts.

Key words: Pauline theology, Christian marriage, ecclesial leadership, polygamy

Introduction

Marriage plays a dominant role in Pauline theology since it is not only a social institution, but also a symbol of theology that depicts the covenant relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5:31-32). According to Paul, marriage is a life-long, monogamous relationship where there is fidelity, sacrificial love and spiritual accountability (1 Corinthians 7:2-11; Witherington, 2007). This theological insight shows consistency with Jewish creation theology especially Genesis 2:24 where the union of two people, making them one flesh, thus defining the creation of a monogamous life-long union between two people as the matrimonial unit (Hays, 2011). The teaching of Paul thus goes beyond like ethical teachings and becomes central to the Christian identity, ecclesial order and the formation of moral character.

Related closely with the teaching of Paul on marriage is his ecclesial leadership theology. The pastoral letter directly connects leadership righteousness to faithfulness in marriage and controlling the household, where church leaders must be the husband of one wife and show moral discipline to their households (1 Timothy 3:2-5; Titus 1:6-9; Towner, 2006). This necessity is an indication of the theological presumption that credibility in leadership is determined by personal integrity and relational stability as the household is a microcosm of the church community (Marshall, 2004). The model of leadership adopted by Paul consequently incorporates the personal morality, family order, and ecclesial responsibility into one theological structure.

There are however considerable challenges in using the Pauline teaching on marital in the African contexts where polygamy is a culturally acceptable and a socially viable practice. Historically, polygamy was used in the economic, social and preserving lineage purposes that ensured the productivity of agriculture, continuity of the family, and social prestige in most African society among them, Igbo people in southeastern Nigeria (Mbiti, 1990; Uchendu, 1965). In such societies, marriage does not only constitute the relationships but also includes the extended families, inheritance systems, and shared identity (Nwachukwu, 2012). As a result, the Christian doctrine of monogamy can be faced with opposition since it seems to oppose the cultural values that are deeply rooted.

This contradiction is more pronounced in Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State where traditional marriage exists along with Christianity. The pastoral and theological issues that churches in this region are grappling with are complex in terms of whether to include, grant leadership eligibility, and provide pastoral care to polygamous members. Although the teachings of Pauline focus on monogamy and marital fidelity, the culture of the people requires the pastoral sensitivity and the contextual understanding (Ukpong, 2000).

This paper thus focuses on the doctrine of Christian marriage taught by Paul, and the topic of ecclesial leadership and assesses how this can be applied to polygamy and church stability in Ikwo. The study applies a contextual hermeneutical approach to merge biblical exegesis with sociocultural analysis to understand how Pauline theology can help churches to tackle polygamy without undermining theological integrity and the stability of the congregation on the other hand.

Literature Review

Theology of Marriage: Covenant, Fidelity and exclusivity by Pauline.

The theology of marriage as comprehended by Paul should be explored in the context of the Jewish covenant theology and the Greco Roman social ethics. According to the Jewish theology, marriage was not only a social contract but a covenantal relationship based on the divine intent as indicated in the Genesis 2: 24 where marriage between man and woman was a union that resulted in becoming one flesh (Hays, 2011). Paul rewrites and modifies this theology about creation in a Christological sense, introducing marriage as an image of the covenant of Christ with church (Ephesians 5:31-32). This theological reimagining makes marriage to be not social utility, but a place of redemptive purposes of God.

There is a consensus among scholars that Paul is very faithful to the fact that monogamy is the standard pattern of Christian marriage, even though he does not enter into the direct polemics with polygamy. Fee (2014) believes that the instructions issued by Paul in 1 Corinthians 7 presuppose monogamy as the standard form of marriage and especially in the explanation of mutual sexual rights between men and women, presupposes two-way relationship based on mutual and exclusive relationships. This equality is quite a break with the patriarchal ideals where the rights

of marriage were not equal to the line of males (Thiselton, 2000). Paul stresses reciprocity, which strengthens the unity and exclusivity of marriage, thus implicitly ruling out polyandry in marriage.

Nonetheless, other scholars warn that because Paul does not discuss polygamy, it does not mean that he condemns it knowingly. According to Keener (2012), polygamy was actually rather rare in the urban setting of Greco Roman societies where Paul was preaching, and thus did not need to be specifically prohibited. Such a contextual observation implies that the focus of monogamy as articulated by Paul is a theological belief and also a social cultural fact. However, Hays (2011) insists that the theological reasoning of Paul especially his assertions of covenantal exclusivity and sexual fidelity are so radically inconsistent with polygamy, although this argument may not be explicitly stated.

The teaching of Paul about divorce also helps in strengthening his dedication to permanence and exclusivity in marriage. This teaching that believers must not divorce their spouses is continuity of the same teaching by Jesus of the permanence of marriage and loyalty to a covenant (1 Corinthians 7:10-11; Matthew 19:6; Witherington, 2007). This permanence builds the theological support of monogamy because it confirms the marriage as something exclusive and permanent covenant and not a loose social construction.

Meanwhile, Paul is pastorally mindful when dealing with complicated marital scenarios. His teaching that the believers should stay in the same state that they were called is a sign that he cares about the social stability and pastorate (Fee, 2014). According to this principle, Paul did not emphasize the strict implementation of social restructuring but rather relational stability and spiritual growth, which is still valid in today African society where polygamy is still practiced.

Pauline Leadership Quality and Ethical Character.

The qualification of leadership as indicated by Paul in the pastoral epistles indicate that the ecclesial sovereignty ought to be based on ethical uprightness and interpersonal steadiness. His condition that overseers and deacons be the husband of

one wife has produced a plethora of scholarly discussion on what this actually means and what it implies (1 Timothy 3:2, 12; Titus 1:6). Introducing the argument that the phrase underlines marital faithfulness and sexual integrity as opposed to numerical restriction, Knight (1992) implies that Paul was concerned of the moral character, and not the marital background. This explanation puts emphasis on the moral aspect of leadership qualification as opposed to the strictly structural aspect of the same.

Contradictorily, Towner (2006) contends that the term implies moral and structural expectations, with monogamy being a distinct demonstration of Christian moral order as well. In the Greco Roman culture, faithfulness in marriage was quite related to the moral discipline and social respectability and Christian leaders were supposed to possess these qualities as the leaders of the church (Marshall, 2004). This interpretation implies that his concept of leadership qualification acted as theological and sociological roles to support the moral credibility and institutional stability of the institution. This relationship between household management and ecclesial leadership goes even further to emphasize the significance of relational stability in the Pauline leadership theology. Paul actually urges that the leaders should also show competence in handling their homes since their home is a training ground to handle spiritual leadership (1 Timothy 3:4-5). According to Osiek and Balch (1997), the early Christian communities viewed the household as a miniature of the church and thus, strong leadership in the household meant strong leadership in the church. This religious bond establishes the need to remain faithful to your spouse and to have a stable family in preserving the order of the church.

The model of leadership by Paul is also a depiction of the servant and humble leadership of Christ. His focus on self control, moral discipline, and relational responsibility makes leadership to be associated with spiritual maturity, but not social power (Hays, 2011). This theological paradigm is not consistent with cultural leadership models that have been founded on status, wealth, or power but emphasized on moral integrity and spiritual maturity.

Polygamy in Culture and religion of Africans.

Polygamy has always been a major characteristic of African marriage, as it has been used as a means of continuing the lineage, economic efficiency, and social insurance (Mbiti, 1990). The African culture in most cases considers children as the only way of maintaining the family lineages and continuity of ancestors and polygamy enhances the capacity to reproduce (Uchendu, 1965). This cultural rationale can be used to justify why polygamy is still practiced even with the influence of Christian missionaries and modernization. Researchers underline the fact that polygamy should be perceived in the frame of the sociocultural context and cannot be judged only based on the Western ethical principles. As Amanze (2016) claims, polygamy in African cultures is indicative of communal values and economic conditions and kinship frameworks that are quite unlike the individualistic marriage patterns of the Western world. This observation brings out the significance of contextual theology in the interpretation of biblical teachings regarding marriage in the context of Africa.

Nevertheless, the theologians in Africa are still divided on the theological merits of polygamy. Other researchers believe that Christianity does challenge polygamy, as monogamy is the ideal of the Bible (Nwachukwu, 2012). Some of them have maintained that the church should take the pastoral strategy that appreciates the cultural facts and erosively encourages monogamy as the theological norm (Mbiti, 1990). This argument is symptomatic of the larger conflicts between the theological belief and cultural adjustment within African Christianity.

Christian Stability, Leadership, and Marital Ethics.

Leadership credibility, moral consistency, and relational unity are important factors that promote stability in the church. Sociological studies prove that integrity in leadership is of great essence to the preservation of institutional trust and stability in an organization (Ellison and Bartkowski, 2002). Moral inconsistency by the leaders in religious settings may damage the trust of the congregation in the institutions and the institutions themselves.

This sociological observation is solidified by Pauline theology that associates the qualification to leadership with marital fidelity and the stability of the household (Towner, 2006). Relational integrity of leaders leads to moral examples that enhance

cohesion and spiritual formation of congregations. On the other hand, the leadership practices that are opposed to theological teaching can present a conflict internally and erode the credibility of the institution. The topic of polygamy and its influence on leadership qualification still causes tension in the African church setting. Other churches have totally banned polygamists to hold leadership position and some are more accommodating to cultural realities (Amanze, 2016). These contrasting methods will be manifestations of more underlying conflicts of theological belief and pastoral expediency.

Finally, the literature reveal that the Pauline theology can be used to understand the marriage and leadership well, although it should be contextually interpreted when used in Africa. The discussion on how churches in Ikwo can utilize the teaching of Pauline teachings is the challenge that they will not compromise theological foundations but at the same time be able to meet the cultural realities and the stability of the congregation.

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the contextual hermeneutics and the Pauline ecclesiology as complementary theoretical perspectives of understanding the teaching of Paul on marriage and church leadership in the sociocultural environment of Ikwo Local Government Area. These systems offer an interpretive as well as a theological basis of comprehending how biblical writings operate in the context of the contemporary African church, especially where cultural beliefs like polygamy come in contact with the Christian teachings.

African Biblical Interpretation and Hermeneutics.

Contextual hermeneutics offers a methodological approach to the interpretation of Scripture with references to both the original historical meaning of the pieces of writing and the current culture of the community of interpreters (Osborne, 2006). This method acknowledges that the biblical interpretation is not carried out in an overall cultural vacuum but is influenced by social, historical, and existential contexts of the readers (West, 2016). Contextual hermeneutics has come out as an essential corrective to previous missionary interpretations of the bible that has tended to impose western

theological assumptions without essential consideration of the African realities (Ukpong, 2000).

According to Ukpong (2000), African biblical interpretation should commence with the lived experience of African communities, especially the social set up, their kinship system and the religious interpretation of the world. This view does not deny the validity of Scripture but tries to interpret the biblical teaching in the context of practical cultural scenarios. In view of the African society, marriage is not a personal agreement but rather a societal institution that entails extended families, continuity of the other generation and social identity (Mbiti, 1990). Thus, one should be sensitive to these wider social and cultural aspects when extracting the Pauline teaching on marriage. The dynamics of the relationship between text and context is also important in contextual hermeneutics. West (2016) refers to the interpretation of the Bible as a dialogical procedure that presents the biblical text as a challenge to cultural assumptions and the cultural setting through which the text poses fresh questions and perspectives on which the text can be interpreted. This process of dialogue is especially applicable in treating the issue of polygamy whereby the biblical teaching and cultural practice might seem to be conflictual. Instead of applying strict interpretations, contextual hermeneutics aims at identifying how the biblical principles may be used in a manner that may help to induce spiritual transformation without infringing cultural realities.

Osborne (2006) hermeneutical spiral also explains this process further as it highlights the reversal of the original text meaning and how it is used today. Interpretation will start with the historical exegesis to determine the intended meaning of the author to proceed to contextual application which targets realities in modern times. This way makes sure that the interpretation is true and faithful to Scripture and at the same time, it applies to modern-day circumstances. This would enable the church in Ikwo to reaffirm biblical teaching, and to apply the pastoral issues of polygamous converts in the instance of Pauline teaching about marriage and leadership.

Notably, contextual hermeneutics also acknowledges the transformative effect of the Scripture in culture. Culture gives the interpretive context, whilst Scripture gives the

theological norm that defines the way moral and spiritual change should take place (Bediako, 1995). This implies that cultural practices have to be assessed eventually against a biblical teaching although pastoral sensitivity is used in the transformation process. Such a compromise between cultural sensitivity and theological fidelity is necessary in dealing with polygamy in a manner that helps foster spiritual and church stability.

Household Theology and Pauline Ecclesiology.

The theology of Pauline ecclesiology offers the basis of comprehending the connection of marriage, leadership, and the stability of churches. The main feature of the ecclesiology, as portrayed by Paul, is the understanding of the church as the household of God, the spiritual family built upon the principles of relational unity, moral purity and faithfulness to the covenant (1 Timothy 3:15; Hellerman, 2001). This domestic analogy is used to represent the social structure of the early Christian communities where the family was the most important analogy of the way relationships and leadership were understood in churches.

According to Hellerman (2001), the household theology of Paul is an expression of the collectivist social order of the ancient Mediterranean world, in which social identity and social responsibility was established through family connections. In this model, the role of the church leaders was that of a spiritual master of the home, to sustain relationship harmony and discipline of morality. That is the reason Paul focuses on household management as a qualification in taking leadership positions in the church as management competence in the family is a sign of competency in leadership in the church (1 Timothy 3:4-5; Towner, 2006).

The comparison that Paul gives to Christian union of Christ and the church also supports the theological importance of faithful marriage to the stability of the church. According to Ephesians 5:22-33, Paul introduces marriage as a living emblem of the covenant relationship Christ shares with church which is sacrificial and exclusive and faithful to the covenant (Witherington, 2007). This symbolism of theology puts marriage above the social arrangement and makes it principal in Christian identity and community formation.

According to scholars, the qualification of leadership that Paul had is not random moral demands, but a representation of his bigger theological vision of the church as a covenant community (Marshall, 2004). Leaders are role models in their lives whose actions are an expression of the theology they preach. This is the reason why marital fidelity and home stability are a critical requirement to leadership. The family life of a leader offers us with clear demonstration of moral discipline, relational integrity and spiritual maturity.

Ecclesiology of Pauline also focuses on unity as being a key to the stability of the churches. Paul emphasizes again and again on the significance of relational harmony and moral consistency in order to keep unity in churches (1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-6; Hays, 2011). Marriage is very important in this structure since family relations are directly related to stability of the communities. Marital discord, unfaithfulness or relation turmoil can jeopardize that relational cohesion that Paul views as fundamental to church wellness.

In addition, Pauline ecclesiology also focuses on the church as a witness of the society at large. Moral uprightness of church members and leaders is important to the credibility of the church (Philippians 2:15; Marshall, 2004). Marital faithfulness thus does not only add to internal steadiness, it also adds to external testifying. Embracing moral uprightness by the church leaders makes the church more credible and persuasive in the society.

Combination of the Contextual Hermeneutics and Pauline Ecclesiology.

Contextual hermeneutics and Pauline ecclesiology are integrated to offer a holistic theoretical framework, which can be used in this research. Contextual hermeneutics would be used to make sure that the Pauline teaching would be read in the ways in which it would reach the cultural realities of Ikwo and Pauline ecclesiology would serve the purpose of offering theological basis in gauging marriage and exercising leadership.

This unified paradigm acknowledges that the interpretation of the Bible ought to be based on fidelity to theology and pastoral responsiveness. The theology of Pauline gives explicit guidelines on fidelity in marriage and honesty on leadership whereas contextual hermeneutics gears towards interpretation of these guidelines in the particular cultural context. This will prevent both cultural relativism that will defer biblical teaching on cultural practice, and the inflexibility of absolutism that will disregard realities of pastoral care.

In this context, polygamy is perceived as a cultural reality and the theological problem. Contextual hermeneutics promotes polygamous converts to be treated with pastoral care, whereas Pauline ecclesiology declares monogamy to be the principle of theology of Christian marriage and leadership. This moderate stance offers a platform through which polygamy can be dealt with in a manner that will encourage theological purity and stability in the church.

In the end, this theoretical framework contributes to the main point of this research that the Pauline doctrine on marriage and leadership offers the necessary insights to deal with polygamy and encourage church stability in Ikwo. Contextual sensitivity coupled with theological fidelity can help churches to find their way even in the presence of cultural challenges without compromising their spiritual and institutional health.

Methodology

This paper will be using a mixed-method approach that incorporates both qualitative and quantitative research methodology to examine how the Pauline teachings of marriage and ecclesial leadership can be applied to the Ikwo Local Government Area, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. The methodological design will be designed in such a way that it will be able to collect both the doctrinal and empirical data regarding the response of the church to polygamy, the role of church leaders in this, and the impact of the Pauline teachings on the stability of the church.

Research Design

The study is geared towards the following elements:

Theological Exegesis and Doctrinal Study: This is a section that entails descriptive theological study of Pauline texts that apply to marriage and leadership (1 Timothy 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Corinthians 7). The article examines the interpretation and application of these passages in the context of African Christianity and how they are applied in issues to do with polygamy and their effects on church leadership.

Qualitative Field Research: The qualitative study will seek to interview church leaders, members, and society stakeholders in Ikwo to gather the lived experiences of their lives. The context of how the teachings in Pauline are interpreted and applied in local churches are explored with the use of in depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs) and participant observation, especially when it comes to polygamous households and leadership.

Quantitative Data Collection: Survey is conducted on the church members and church leaders to determine the incidence of polygamous marriage in church, the perceived effects of the Pauline teaching on church unity and the incongruity of the qualifications of church leaders with the current practices of church leaders. This information will give the empirical evidence of the increased application and approval of Pauline teachings with regards to polygamy.

Theological Exegesis

The theological exegesis dwells upon the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus, the list of marital and leadership credentials required of the church leaders. The passages 1 Timothy 3:2-5, Titus 1: 6-9, and 1 Corinthians 7:10-16 are the source of Pauline perspectives about marriage and leadership. Exegesis is historico-grammatical in nature and takes into account both the original setting of the words that Paul wrote and their relevance to the present day circumstances. The interpretation of the phrase husband of one wife is given special consideration which has been a theological issue

and cultural practice especially in African societies where polygamy is a common practice.

Qualitative Field Research

Data Collection

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews are done with church leaders (pastors, elders, and deacons), of the sampled churches in Ikwo. The interviews will help to understand how Pauline teachings on marriage and leadership are being taught, understood and used in the local church setting. The particular focus is on the reaction of these leaders to the problem of polygamy and their implications on the eligibility to be a leader.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs): Focus groups of the members of the church are arranged to talk about the effects of the teaching of Pauline to their personal marriages and families. The debates are centered on the perceived advantages and difficulties of the traditional practices of following the biblical standards like polygamy.

Participant Observation: The researcher also attends church services, marriage counseling, and leadership meetings to be able to see the way in which Pauline teachings are conveyed and manifested in the everyday life of the church.

Data Analysis

The thematic analysis is used to analyse data obtained during interviews and FGDs, during which common themes and patterns are identified with respect to marriage, leadership, and the use of Pauline teachings. The discussion aims at learning the causes of acceptance/non-acceptance of monogamous practices and the effect of such choices on the cohesiveness and leadership of the church.

Quantitative Research

Survey Design

The questionnaire will provide statistical information on the rate of polygamous marriage among the members of the church in Ikwo and how it relates to the Pauline teachings of marriage and leadership. The survey will be in form of closed-ended questions that will test:

The marital status of the members of the church.

The church attitude towards polygamy and the eligibility to be leader.

Effects of polygamy on church stability and leadership as seen.

The correlation of the church membership and marriage according to the Pauline standards.

Sampling Method

A stratified random sampling approach is used to pick members of the church of various denominations and areas in Ikwo. The stratification guarantees that the sample is representative of the diversity in the community of the local church, in terms of different ages, marital status, and affiliations.

Data Analysis

The descriptive statistics are used in analyzing survey data and give an overview of the demographic factors of the church members, the existence of polygamous marriages, and the views on polygamy and leadership within the church. Identifying the connection between marital practices and perception of church stability and leadership are established with the help of statistical software like SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences).

Ethical Considerations

This research follows ethical research conducts and the informed consent of all the participants is taken. The study will be conducted with confidentiality and participants will be guaranteed that their responses will be utilized only in the academic aspect. The study is conducted with ethical approval provided by the appropriate institutional review board (IRB) to make sure that ethical standards of research involving human subjects are appropriate.

Results and Findings

Here, the results of the qualitative and quantitative research aspects of the work are shown. The findings provide an insight on the meaning and practice of Pauline doctrines on marriage and church leadership in Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Particularly, the results cover the issue of polygamy rates among congregation members, theological concept of marriage, leadership position, and the influence of these variables on the stability of churches.

Theological Comments on the Teaches of Paul.

Knowing Pauline Teachings about Marriage and Leadership.

Based on the theological exegesis, it was clear that Pauline doctrines of marriages focus on exclusiveness, mutuality and permanence. The study of the 1 Timothy 3: 2-5, Titus 1:6-9 and 1 Corinthians 7: 10-16 confirmed that Paul imagined marriage as a holy and unique covenant that reflected the relationship between Christ and the church (Ephesians 5: 31-32). What was important to this interpretation was the teaching that church leaders were to be the husband of one wife which was understood as a moral imperative to be faithful, sexually pure and in harmony in their relations.

These passages were however interpreted differently by church leaders in Ikwo. Some were very rigid and believed in monogamy as a condition of leadership positions whereas others were more pastoral where the members who indulge in polygamy were permitted to occupy leadership roles on the conditions that they give up further polygamous marriages.

Leadership and Pauline Ecclesiology.

The theological study of the ecclesiology of Pauline brought to focus the relationship between home based leadership and church based leadership. When Paul mentioned that it is a must that one should govern his household since this was a precondition to becoming a leader of the church (1 Timothy 3:4-5), this was a message all the Ikwo church leaders could relate to since they thought that a leader who could uphold family peace and moral uprightness was an important requirement to a ministry position.

The household pattern of ecclesial leadership was also a factor that influenced the church leaders in Ikwo to perceive their roles. The morally competent leaders in the church were those who had steady marriages and families. Nonetheless, the polygamy problem posed a theological and pastoral problem because some leaders could not reconcile between the traditional African culture and the Pauline values.

Qualitative Findings

Attitudes of Church Leaders towards Polygamy.

The interviews with the church leaders showed that polygamy is still a controversial topic in the churches of Ikwo. Most leaders did not deny the importance of the culture of polygamy in the society they lived in but stressed on the biblical standard of monogamy as the best. Other leaders believed that polygamous members of the church had to follow the Scripture by having only one wife, whereas others gave a more liberal interpretation, which allowed that polygamous members of the church would remain in leadership positions provided they repented and committed to monogamous devotion in the future.

One pastor shared:

We do not dismiss polygamous believers, but we would underline the need to be committed to the gospel and to be Christ-like. We tell them to cease taking additional

wives upon conversion, however, we do not necessarily remove leadership positions off their hands.

Other leaders, however, were more conservative in their views as they claimed that polygamous men should not be allowed to be leaders as the Bible explains in 1 Timothy 3:2 that clearly indicates that a leader is required to be a husband of one wife.

Marriage and Leadership by the Church Members.

The discussion in focus groups demonstrated high level of faith in spiritual power of the church leaders and the need to emulate their example. But as concerns the matter of polygamy division was great. The concept of polygamous people holding leadership positions was not started by many members as they believed that it was going to affect the moral authority of the church. But remaining ones were more forgiving as they believed that in case a polygamous person had been true to his wives and had shown sense of morality, they ought to be given permission to serve as leaders.

Another theme that arose during the discussions was the wish to have sensitivity of the pastors, with the majority of the interviewees highlighting how church leaders ought to take account to the personal conditions of those in polygamous relationships instead of having strict practices of exclusion. There were members who indicated that the church ought to be more concerned with the spiritual development of polygamous believers and provide counsel on how to live within the stipulations of the bible.

Quantitative Findings

Prevalence of Polygamy

The survey has shown that a very large percentage of the churchgoers in Ikwo are in polygamous marriages. Among the 250 respondents, 35% reported themselves to be in polygamous relationships with the rest, 65% in monogamous relationships. Of the polygamous respondents, the majority 72% knew the church doctrine on monogamy

and wanted to be more in line with the biblical teachings but they were not sure of what to do because of their culture.

Polygamy and Church Leadership.

The survey also revealed that polygamous people have varying eligibility to be a leader depending on the various denominations of the churches in Ikwo. Although 58 out of the 100 respondents in the pentecostal and evangelical churches support the idea that polygamous members of the congregation should not assume leadership roles, 42 of the 100 respondents in the indigenous Africa churches were more willing to accommodate polygamous leaders provided that they were faithful and spiritually mature.

The statistical test indicated that there is a positive relationship between acceptance of polygamous leadership and perceived stability of the church. The churches with polygamous leadership revealed to be retaining more membership and cohesive in their communities indicating that pastoral approach to polygamy could potentially result in increased inclusiveness and stability.

Impact on Church Stability

The results of the survey showed that polygamy affects the stability of the church in both negative and positive ways. Some interviewees said that polygamy also caused social disintegration and internal strife, but others said it gave members of the polygamous family a good chance to have a positive impact on the social life of the church, as they were able to finance the church and also make sure that the generations would be continued. Most respondents found the effect of polygamy as a neutral one in the overall stability of the church implying that the effect of polygamy is mostly determined by the way the church leaders handle the situation.

Discussion and Analysis

In this section, the findings will be analyzed with respect to the available literature and implications of the findings regarding the application of the Pauline teachings on marriage and church leadership in the African church. The focus is on the conflict between monogamous principles and cultural fact of polygamy in Ikwo in Ebonyi State in Nigeria and how it affects the stability of churches and church leadership.

Dilemma of theology between the Pauline doctrine and the African culture.

The results show that there is a tremendous theological conflict between what the Bible teaches of marriage especially the monogamy and the polygamous culture in Ikwo. As Paul had described in 1 Timothy 3:2, Titus 1:6, and Ephesians 5:31-32, the concept of marital exclusivity is certainly a monogamous notion that is established to be the norm of Christian marriage and leadership in the Church. These teachings are indicative of the position of the apostle, that the church leaders need to be an example of marital faithfulness and the management of the household as a gesture of a morally and a spiritually mature person.

In the African setup however, polygamy has been a normal aspect in many communities including the Igbo of southeastern Nigeria where polygamy has served as a social institution to provide a lineage to the family, financial stability in addition to social status (Mbiti, 1990). The continuation of the practise poses a challenge to those churches who aim to maintain the teachings of Pauline without noticing the cultural aspects of their people. The research results indicate that Igbo pastors in the church are torn between preaching biblical monogamy and pastorally addressing the longstanding cultural tradition of polygamy.

There are those church leaders in Ikwo who are very strict to the teachings of Pauline where they do not accommodate polygamous church leaders in the church as a rule, and there are those who are flexible and can accommodate individuals who are polygamous provided they are morally upright and willing to uphold the Christian faith. This is indicative of the current controversy in the African Christian community of the interpretation and usage of the biblical scriptures in relation to the cultural practice of the locals. According to Towner (2006), qualification of leadership in the

Paul corpus has to be considered as theological requirements and pastoral directions which may be modified according to the regional culture.

Church Leadership in Steering the Cultural Change.

The research study indicates that church leaders are at the forefront in meditating between the Pauline teachings and African culture. It is not just the requirement to remain pure in the dogma but also the role of leadership in terms of the pastoral care and the development of unity within the church community. The household as the model of the church in the Pauline ecclesiology means that the leader must be morally upright and show harmony in relationships in his or her home (1 Timothy 3:4-5). It is important that church leaders should be able to balance in this because the message will remain consistent theologically and the community will remain stable.

Among the main conclusions of the interviews and focus group discussions, it is possible to mention the role of pastoral sensitivity in the effort to resolve the problem of polygamy. Most leaders and members of the church in Ikwo stated that they needed a more humane way of handling polygamous believers, a way that considers the intricacy of their culture but compels them to live to Christian views of marriage. This pastoral practice is in line with the precepts of 1 Corinthians 7:17-24 when Paul encourages believers to stay in the marital status when they are converted. The results imply that a more welcoming approach by churches to polygamous congregants a church that promotes moral change without strict ostracism is more socially unified and retains members.

But the method also has significant questions of accountability of leadership, and the possibility of doctrinal compromise. With the challenges in preserving theological integrity, churches that accepted polygamous leaders reported greater levels of social stability as is recorded in the survey. The church leaders should thus take their time to decide on the best way to be faithful to the Bible yet accommodating to the culture without sacrificing the essence of the teachings in the Scripture.

Theological and Pastoral Implication among Polygamous Believers.

To polygamous believers, the results indicate that the nature of the church concerning marriage has a direct impact on their spiritual development and engagement in the life of church. The partners in polygamous marriages tend to experience a sense of isolation or inferiority especially when they are barred to take up leadership positions due to their marital status. Nevertheless, the researchers also discovered that a significant number of polygamous believers in Ikwo asserted that they wanted to integrate their marriages with the biblical beliefs but they were unsure how to do it without interference with their family and social status. This dilemma between the cultural identity and Christianity highlights the importance of the church to offer pastoral direction on how to handle such issues.

Specifically, Pauline principles of spiritual development and transformation can be used by the church because they promote the value of personal faith instead of status. The believers in the New Testament are not supposed to be judged according to their social and matrimonial status but rather to live in a way befitting their calling as Paul teaches in 1 Corinthians 7:20-24. The churches in Ikwo can use this principle to emphasize on spiritual maturity of polygamous believers and not their marital status. It is possible to provide educational materials, counseling in marriage, and support of polygamous families so that these people can adjust their marital habits to the biblical doctrines without losing their social and cultural identity.

Polygamy and its Effect on Leadership in the Church.

The results show that polygamy has an ambivalent effect on stability of churches. As a church has recorded the internal conflict and division in the presence of polygamous leaders in Ikwo, there are other churches that have recorded positive impacts of polygamous members in church life through their support and participation in community activities. The response of the church towards polygamy, thus, has a major implication on social cohesion as well as theological integrity. The churches that adopt an inclusive leadership style and offer pastoral care to polygamous families are more likely to enjoy increased membership and social cohesion despite the theological and cultural conflicts arising out of polygamy.

But the survey data also indicate that division might be possible where churches assume an exclusionary position on polygamy especially in those communities where polygamy is a common practice. Association of polygamous believers with leadership roles may create a feeling of alienation and feelings of being marginalized both spiritually and socially and this can consequently destroy the sense of community in the church. On the other hand, more accommodative strategies aid in developing more social and spiritual unity since the polygamous believers are not marginalized but are rather incorporated into the lines of leadership and ministry in the church.

Impression and Recommendations.

Conclusion

The paper has addressed the use of the teachings provided by Pauline in Christian marriage and ecclesial leadership in the Ikwo Local Government Area of Ebonyi State, Nigeria, through the focal area of polygamy. The integration of theological analysis, qualitative field research, and quantitative data collection has given useful information on the intersection of the biblical teaching and the African cultural practice.

The results show the theological conflict between the Pauline vision of monogamy and the Ikwo cultural aspect of polygamy. Although the teachings in the Bible are categorical on the need to have monogamy as the best example of marriage and leadership in Christianity, the polygamous nature of most African societies makes it difficult to practice the teachings by the church. The research further shows that the church leaders are very instrumental in mediating the two worlds by balancing between pastoral care and the doctrinal fidelity.

The study reveals the significance of pastoral sensitivity in dealing with polygamy in the church. Whereas some churches in Ikwo have entered a more inclusive approach, where even polygamous people can be allowed to sit in leadership, on some other occasions, churches have been more exclusionary. The responses of the survey indicate that the churches where polygamous members are free to play a more flexible

role in leadership are more likely to enjoy stability in church and maintain its membership compared to the churches that are inclined to the rigid policy of exclusion.

In conclusion, this paper confirms that contextual hermeneutics and Pauline ecclesiology are useful concepts to comprehend and respond to the problems of polygamy in Africa Christian societies. Combining these frameworks, the church will be able to stick to the biblical doctrine but be understanding to the cultural setting of its members in order to promote unity and stability among them.

Recommendations

According to the findings, some suggestions can be given to the church leaders and theologians of Ikwo, and consequently, African churches, on how to resolve the polygamy problem without compromising on the Pauline teachings regarding marriage and leadership:

Education and Sensitivity to Pastoral.

The church leaders are expected to be pastoral to the polygamous believers by focusing on spiritual development and moral change, as opposed to inflexibility to exclude them as leaders. This can be done through counseling, marital teaching and teaching of the biblical interpretation of marriage. Churches are also supposed to make polygamous believers incorporate submissive spiritual practices that can bring their lives in line with the biblical principles, including devotion to marital fidelity and upholding the sanctity of the marriage covenant.

Inclusive Leadership Models.

Churches ought to think of adopting inclusive leadership patterns that enable polygamous believers to serve in office positions that would not compromise the doctrine. In illustration, polygamous people who have repented of stealing other wives and at most are devoted to monogamous fidelity should be permitted to occupy leadership posts under some pastoral circumstances. This would bring about unity and inclusiveness without compromising on theological standards.

Well-defined Doctrinal Principles on Marriage.

The leaders of the church are expected to make sure that their teaching requirements on marriage and leadership are well explained and presented to the congregants. Although monogamy must be the biblical ideal, church leaders ought to teach practically on how to survive the confusing issues of polygamy without being unfaithful to Scripture, yet being culturally aware. This lesson is supposed to be based on the bible specific works like 1 Corinthians 7 where Paul urges believers not to leave their marital statuses just when they are converted.

Cultural Contextual Hermeneutics and Awareness.

The churches of Ikwo and the likes ought to practice contextual hermeneutics so as to interpret the Pauline teachings with reference to their cultural realities. This would be done by walking the fine line between biblical faithfulness and profound knowledge of the African culture, especially in matters concerning marriage. Theological dialogue with the local cultural leaders and the people can assist the church in coming to better terms with the issues associated with polygamy, as well as discover methods of dealing with these issues that do not violate the cultural background, but rather the teachings of the Bible.

The Community and Family Support Programs.

The churches are supposed to come up with community and family support programs that would cater to the needs of the polygamous families and assist them in dealing with the issues surrounding the family life without compromising the biblical principles. These programs must be aimed at building marriage relationships, conflict resolution and offering support to polygamous families so they can co-exist peacefully in the church set up.

Further Research

More studies are required to delve into the ways other African people interpret and use the teachings of Pauline on marriage and leadership as applied to polygamy. African comparative studies between various regions and denominations would offer good information on the wider implications of polygamy to the life of the church and

theology. Also, further empirical studies are required to measure the long-term impacts of the inclusive leadership models on church growth and stability.

Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges the contributions of local church leaders and scholars whose insights into Pauline theology and African cultural contexts enriched this study.

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