Biblical Ethics and Governance: Lessons From Luke 12:16–21 for Public Office Holders in Delta State

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Abstract

This study explores the socio-political relevance of Luke 12:16–21, focusing on the parable of the rich fool as a moral lens for evaluating governance in Delta State. The parable highlights the dangers of excessive self-interest and neglect of communal responsibility, which parallel contemporary challenges of corruption, materialism, and misuse of public resources among political leaders. The research problem centers on how these destructive attitudes undermine both spiritual values and social development of the people.The paper adopts exegetical to the biblical text, hermeneutical and sociological approaches to the phenomenon. The findings indicate that greed is expressed through embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds, pride manifests in authoritarian leadership practices, and ingratitude is evident in the disregard for citizens' welfare despite abundant state resources. These vices collectively erode public trust, weaken democratic institutions, and perpetuate poverty.The paper concludes that the parable remains a timeless critique

of governance, warning against the futility of wealth accumulation without social responsibility. It recommends that leaders should be trained in ethical values as part of government systems. Promote Strong accountability measures that are needed to fight corruption. Public servants should be encouraged to show humility in their work, while policies should promote gratitude by focusing on community development. Thus, the application serves as a springboard that should build integrity, service with humility, and management of resources with a high of responsiblity, leading to positive change in society.

Keywords: Biblical ethics, Governance, Corruption, Servant leadership and Accountability

Introduction

Religion has historically shaped governance and public service in Nigeria, providing moral frameworks for leadership and accountability. Religious leaders were once regarded as custodians of integrity, serving as voices of conscience against corruption and injustice. However, recent scholarship suggests that their influence on governance and public servants is waning. Afolabi (2015) observes that while religion continues to permeate Nigerian politics, its sustainability as a moral force for political development is increasingly questioned. This decline is linked to the growing perception that religious practitioners themselves are entangled in political patronage and materialism, thereby weakening their authority. . Isiorhovoja (2019) demonstrates in his study of Luke 20:9–16 that many Christian leaders in Nigeria have shifted from being moral exemplars to "profiteers," prioritizing material gain over prophetic responsibility. This transformation undermines their ability to hold public officials accountable, thereby weakening religion's corrective influence on governance.

Similarly, Danjibo (2009) highlights that religion, once a stabilizing factor in governance, has been compromised by sectarian interests and the politicization of faith communities. Public servants, who should embody values of humility, service, and gratitude, often exploit religious affiliations for legitimacy rather than ethical accountability. Achunike (2013) further notes that the commercialization of religious practice in Nigeria has eroded its moral credibility, reducing the ability of faith leaders to challenge governance failures effectively.

This waning impact raises critical concerns for governance in Delta State and beyond. As public servants increasingly disregard religious ethics, corruption, pride, and ingratitude thrive unchecked. The study therefore situates itself within this context, examining how the diminishing moral authority of religious leaders affects governance and exploring ways to reinvigorate religion's role in promoting ethical public service. Thus, the study situates itself within this context, examining how the diminishing values of religious leadership affect governance and public service. By drawing on biblical insights such as Luke 12:16–21 and Luke 20:9–16, it underscores the urgent need to reinvigorate religion's role in promoting ethical accountability, servant leadership, and gratitude in public office.

Statement of the Problem

Public office in Delta State, like in many parts of Nigeria, has become increasingly associated with ethical decay, where the values of integrity, humility, and gratitude are overshadowed by self-interest and corruption. Leaders entrusted with the stewardship of public resources often prioritize personal enrichment, prestige, and political survival over the welfare of the citizens they are meant to serve. This reality mirrors the parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16–21, which warns against the futility of wealth accumulation without responsibility to God or community. Greed is evident in the mismanagement of funds and the diversion of resources meant for development projects. Pride manifests in authoritarian leadership styles that elevate personal status above service, while ingratitude is reflected in the neglect of citizens' needs despite the privileges and opportunities afforded by public office.

The consequence of this ethical collapse is far-reaching: it erodes public trust, weakens democratic institutions, and perpetuates poverty and inequality in a region endowed with abundant natural wealth. The problem is not simply administrative inefficiency but a deeper moral and spiritual crisis, where traditional and biblical values are sidelined in favor of material gain. Unless these vices are confronted, governance in Delta State will continue to alienate the populace, hinder sustainable development, and compromise the moral fabric of society. The challenge, therefore, is to draw lessons from scripture to restore accountability, humility, and gratitude in public service.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this study is to critically examine the impact of greed, pride, and ingratitude as reflected in Luke 12:16–21 and to evaluate how these vices challenge the ethical conduct of public office holders in Delta State.

A specific objective is to analyze the manifestations of greed among leaders, particularly in the mismanagement of public resources, embezzlement, and the prioritization of personal wealth over communal development.

Another objective is to investigate how pride and ingratitude influence governance, focusing on authoritarian leadership styles, disregard for accountability, and neglect of citizens' welfare despite the privileges of office.

Together, these objectives aim to draw moral lessons from scripture that can inspire ethical reorientation, promote servant leadership, and restore integrity in public service within Delta State.

Research Questions

1. How do the attitudes of greed, pride, and ingratitude described in Luke 12:16–21 manifest in the ethical conduct of public office holders in Delta State?
2. In what ways can the moral lessons from Luke 12:16–21 provide corrective guidance for promoting accountability, humility, and gratitude among public servants in Delta State?

Significance of the Study

1. **Moral Reorientation:** The study underscores the dangers of greed, pride, and ingratitude as highlighted in Luke 12:16–21, offering public office holders in Delta State a moral compass for ethical leadership.
2. .**Promotion of Accountability:** By drawing lessons from the parable of the rich fool, the research emphasizes the need for transparency and responsibility in governance, discouraging selfish accumulation of wealth at the expense of citizens.
3. **Societal Transformation:** The findings provide a framework for instilling values of humility and gratitude, which can foster trust between leaders

and the governed, thereby strengthening democratic institutions in Delta State.

4. **Practical Guidance for Policy Makers:** The study serves as a reminder that leadership is service-oriented. It challenges office holders to prioritize public welfare over personal gain, ensuring that policies reflect justice, fairness, and compassion.

Scope and Limitations

This study focuses on the moral lessons in Luke 12:16–21, examining how greed, pride, and ingratitude influence governance among public office holders in Delta State. It highlights ethical challenges and proposes values for responsible leadership. The scope is limited to biblical interpretation and its application to political conduct within Delta State, without extending to other regions or religions.

Background of Luke 12:16–21

Luke 12:16–21, commonly referred to as the *Parable of the Rich Fool*, presents Jesus' warning against covetousness and misplaced trust in material wealth. The narrative describes a wealthy man whose land yields an abundant harvest, prompting him to build larger barns to store his goods. His self-centered reasoning reveals greed, pride, and ingratitude, culminating in divine judgment when God calls him a "fool" for neglecting eternal priorities (Luke 12:20). Scholars emphasize that the parable reflects Luke's broader theological concern with wealth and discipleship. Noble (2015) argues that being "rich toward God" implies generosity and almsgiving, contrasting selfish accumulation with divine expectations of stewardship. Similarly, Stacy (1997) highlights that the parable situates wealth within the context of mortality, reminding readers that possessions cannot secure life or ultimate fulfillment. Contemporary interpretations stress its socio-ethical relevance, particularly in societies where corruption and materialism dominate public life. The parable critiques the illusion of self-sufficiency and underscores gratitude and humility as antidotes to pride. Thus, Luke 12:16–21 serves not only as a theological warning but also as a moral framework for leaders and communities, urging them

Exegesis of Luke 12:16–21

Literary and Historical Context

Luke 12:16–21, the *Parable of the Rich Fool*, is situated within Jesus' broader discourse on covetousness (Luke 12:13–15). The parable critiques the illusion of security found in wealth, reminding hearers that life's meaning is not measured by possessions but by one's relationship with God (Green, 2021).

Parsing of Key Words

"Barns" (ἀποθήκας, apothēkas) – The term **"barns" (ἀποθήκας, apothēkas)** refers to storage houses in the parable. It conveys the idea of keeping surplus harvest beyond immediate need. Culturally, it symbolizes wealth hoarded without consideration for others. The imagery critiques excessive accumulation divorced from generosity. It highlights selfishness that undermines communal responsibility and gratitude. Thus, barns become a metaphor for greed and misplaced priorities.(Marshall, 2009).

"Soul" (ψυχή, psychē) – The term **"soul" (ψυχή, psychē)** denotes life itself in the passage. It reveals the man's mistaken belief that wealth could secure his future. Material goods are shown as inadequate to sustain true existence. The word emphasizes dependence on God rather than possessions. Thus, *psychē* exposes the futility of equating life with material abundance.

"Fool" (ἄφρων, aphrōn) – The term **"fool" (ἄφρων, aphrōn)** conveys moral deficiency rather than intellectual weakness. It highlights the man's failure to recognize God's authority over life and possessions. His reasoning reflects arrogance and misplaced confidence in material wealth. The word underscores spiritual blindness and ethical irresponsibility before divine judgment. Thus, *aphrōn* stresses disregard for divine sovereignty and communal responsibility.(Noble, 2015).

"Rich toward God" (πλουτῶν εἰς θεόν, ploutōn eis theon) – The phrase **"rich toward God" (πλουτῶν εἰς θεόν, ploutōn eis theon)** implies stewardship of resources entrusted by God. It emphasizes gratitude, recognizing divine providence behind material blessings. Generosity is central, urging believers to share wealth with those in need. This contrasts sharply with selfish accumulation

that isolates individuals from community. The expression highlights responsibility to align possessions with God's purposes. It calls for humility in handling wealth as a sacred trust. Thus, being "rich toward God" reflects divine expectation of service and compassion.

Exposition of the Passage

The parable narrates a wealthy man's decision to expand his barns after a plentiful harvest. His self-centered reasoning reflects greed, pride, and ingratitude, as he speaks only to himself and ignores God or community. God's rebuke—"This very night your life will be demanded of you" (Luke 12:20)—underscores the brevity of life and futility of materialism. Theologically, the passage warns against misplaced priorities, urging believers to embrace humility, gratitude, and generosity. As Green (2021) notes, Luke emphasizes discipleship shaped by stewardship rather than accumulation. Noble (2015) further argues that being "rich toward God" entails aligning wealth with divine purposes, particularly through service and compassion. Thus, Luke 12:16–21 functions as both a critique of greed and a call to spiritual richness, to prioritize service, justice, and dependence on God over personal gain.

Theological Perspectives on Greed, Pride, and Ingratitude in Luke 12:16–21

The parable of the rich fool in Luke 12:16–21 illustrates Jesus' warning against covetousness and misplaced priorities. **Greed** is evident in the man's desire to build larger barns to hoard his surplus harvest, reflecting an excessive attachment to possessions. Theologically, greed is portrayed as idolatry, where wealth replaces God as the source of security (Holbert, 2025). Luke consistently emphasizes the dangers of wealth, showing that accumulation without generosity leads to spiritual poverty. **Pride** emerges in the man's self-centered reasoning. He speaks only to himself, assuming control over his future, yet disregards divine sovereignty. Pride here is not intellectual but moral, revealing arrogance in believing that material abundance guarantees life (Marshall, 2009). Theologically, pride blinds individuals to their dependence on God and distorts stewardship into self-glorification.

Ingratitude is implicit in the man's failure to acknowledge God as the giver of his harvest. Instead of thanksgiving or sharing, he plans for personal enjoyment.

Noble (2015) argues that being "rich toward God" entails generosity and almsgiving, which the man neglects. Ingratitude thus becomes a theological failure to recognize divine providence and communal responsibility.

Ultimately, Luke 12:16–21 teaches that greed, pride, and ingratitude are spiritually destructive, leading to divine judgment. The passage calls believers to humility, gratitude, and stewardship, emphasizing that true wealth lies in being "rich toward God" through service and compassion (Jatau, 2025).

Corruption and Leadership in Delta State, Nigeria

Corruption remains a persistent challenge to leadership and governance in Delta State, Nigeria. Scholars from the University of Delta, Agbor argue that unethical practices such as embezzlement, favoritism, and lack of accountability weaken public trust and hinder effective service delivery. Ojogbo and Odor (2025) demonstrate that ethical leadership—grounded in integrity, fairness, and justice—significantly improves outcomes in local government administration. Their study, based on empirical evidence from Delta State, shows that leaders who prioritize accountability foster transparency and better service provision.

Similarly, Okudaye and Meye (2025) emphasize the role of citizen engagement in combating corruption. Their research highlights how social media platforms empower communities in Ika South Local Government Area to demand accountability and expose corrupt practices. This underscores the importance of participatory governance in strengthening leadership.

Adding to this discourse, Isiorhovoja (2019) critiques the decline of Christian leadership values in Nigeria, arguing that leaders have shifted from being "holy workers" to "profiteers." His thesis highlights how spiritual and moral decline fosters corruption, as leaders prioritize personal gain over communal service. This perspective resonates with the Delta State context, where political leadership often mirrors the same waning values, eroding integrity and accountability. By connecting Isiorhovoja's theological critique with empirical studies from Delta State, it becomes clear that corruption is both a moral and institutional crisis. Effective leadership therefore requires ethical reorientation, humility, and stewardship to restore trust and promote sustainable governance.

Cultural Impact of Greed, Pride, and Ingratitude in Luke 12:16–21

Luke 12:16–21, the *Parable of the Rich Fool*, critiques greed, pride, and ingratitude, values that resonate within the cultural realities of the Agbor people in Delta State. Traditionally, Agbor society emphasizes communal living, reciprocity, and stewardship of resources. Greed, however, disrupts these values by encouraging leaders and individuals to hoard wealth rather than share with the community. Ojogbo and Odor (2025) note that in Delta State governance, greed manifests in embezzlement and favoritism, undermining service delivery and communal trust.

Pride, as seen in the rich man's self-centered reasoning, parallels cultural challenges in Agbor where some leaders prioritize personal prestige over collective welfare. Isiorhovoja (2019) argues that Nigerian leadership has shifted from service to profiteering, reflecting arrogance that disregards accountability to God and community. This pride erodes traditional respect for humility and stewardship. Ingratitude is evident in the rich man's failure to acknowledge God as the source of his harvest. Similarly, Okudaye and Meye (2025) highlight how leaders in Agbor neglect gratitude and citizen engagement, weakening communal bonds. Theologically and culturally, Luke 12:16–21 calls Agbor people to resist these vices by embracing humility, gratitude, and generosity, thereby restoring traditional values of service and communal responsibility.

The identified gaps in the study include the underreporting of greed, pride, and ingratitude within the state and among media practitioners. Although religious leaders have been firm in proclaiming the dangers of these vices, scholarship shows they remain inimical to societal well-being, undermining governance, ethics, and communal trust (Isiorhovoja, 2019; Ojogbo & Odor, 2025; Okudaye & Meye, 2025; Noble, 2015).

Methodology

The exegetical approach to Luke 12:16–21 involves a careful study of its literary context. It examines the narrative structure of the parable of the rich fool in Luke's Gospel. Historically, the passage is situated within Jesus' broader teaching on covetousness. Theologically, it highlights the dangers of greed, pride, and ingratitude in human life. Exegesis seeks to uncover the meaning of "being rich

toward God" in discipleship. It emphasizes stewardship, humility, and gratitude as central biblical values.

Qualitative methods complement this exegetical study by engaging lived experiences. Interviews with community members reveal how the text shapes moral consciousness. Focus groups provide collective insights into cultural perceptions of wealth and pride. Textual analysis allows comparison between biblical teaching and contemporary leadership. These methods highlight ethical implications for governance and social responsibility. Together, exegesis and qualitative inquiry deepen understanding of scripture in society today.

Oromareghwake and Arisi(2013),cited Akpotor (2007) in earlier research made from his study on areas predominantly critique by the masses and perceived to be challenge. They are: 1. Looted Funds and Wealth Kept Secretly Abroad: These include ownership of coded secret bank accounts abroad from money and property stolen from Nigeria. They also exist in form of mansions worth billions of dollars in major cities of the world like London, New-York, Paris, Cape-Town etc. (. 2. Misappropriation of Public Funds: Embezzlement, swindling and looting of public treasury are related to the form of corruption discussed above because some of the stolen funds may be kept or spent locally or spirited abroad (Ibid. p 329). 3. Money Laundering: This includes extra legal and illegal transfer of funds across national boarders by avoiding official controls over such transfer (Ibid, p. 329). 4. Gratification: This involves monetary, pecuniary, material or physical favour (e.g. sexual relation) as a condition or reward for performing official duty. They involve receiving and giving these favours in order to influence official decisions and behvaiours. (Ibid p 330). 5. Abuse of office: This embraces both political and official corruption in which an incumbent violates the oath of office and debases official procedures for personal financial and non-material gain, for obstructing the course of justice as well as due process or rule of law and for offering undeserved advantages or favour to self or others. (Ibid. p. 330). 6. Nepotism: This is a kind of favouritism. Unlike gratification, nepotism confers undeserved favours and advantages without receiving and giving gratification. So, P.B.O. Oromareghake et al. 38 nepotism is a corrupt practice based on ethnic, clan, family, sibling and biological or primordial relationship. (Ibid, p. 330).

Contextualising the Parable in Delta State

Luke 12:16–21, the parable of the rich fool, provides a theological framework for condemning greed, pride, and neglect of communal responsibility. The rich man's decision to build larger barns to store his surplus harvest symbolizes excessive accumulation without generosity, a theme that resonates with the misuse of public funds and embezzlement in contemporary governance. In Nigeria, particularly in resource-rich regions such as Delta State, leaders often prioritize personal enrichment over the welfare of citizens, despite abundant natural resources. This parallels the biblical warning that life does not consist in possessions but in being "rich toward God" (Noble, 2015). The misuse of public funds and embezzlement reflect the same moral deficiency as the rich fool's actions, undermining trust and perpetuating poverty.

Pride and authoritarian leadership further compound the problem. The rich fool's self-centered reasoning mirrors leaders who glorify themselves, elevate personal prestige, and disregard accountability. Isiorhovoja (2019) critiques the waning values of Christian leadership in Nigeria, noting a shift from service to profiteering, which parallels political leaders who prioritize self-glorification over communal welfare. Such pride erodes democratic values and fosters authoritarian tendencies, leaving citizens marginalized.

Neglect of citizens' welfare despite abundant resources is another critical issue. Ojogbo and Odor (2025) demonstrate that corruption in Delta State's local government administration undermines service delivery, while Okudaye and Meye (2025) highlight how leaders ignore citizen engagement, weakening communal bonds. Theologically, this neglect reflects ingratitude, as leaders fail to acknowledge God's providence and the responsibility to steward resources for the common good. Luke 12:16–21 thus condemns these vices, calling for humility, gratitude, and stewardship. By aligning governance with divine expectations of justice and compassion, leaders can resist corruption and restore trust in society.

Discussion

The implications of greed, pride, and ingratitude for governance in Delta State are profound, shaping both political culture and socio-economic outcomes. **Greed** manifests in the misuse of public funds and embezzlement, where leaders

prioritize personal enrichment over communal development. This has contributed to widespread poverty and insecurity despite the region's oil wealth. Mordi (2014) argues that the conspiracy between political elites and multinational corporations perpetuates underdevelopment in the Niger Delta, reflecting the destructive impact of greed on governance.

Pride, expressed through authoritarian leadership and self-glorification, erodes democratic accountability. Leaders often elevate personal prestige above service, weakening institutions and silencing citizen voices. Sheriff, Clark, and Ikenga (2025) highlight that governance failures in Delta State exacerbate insecurity, as prideful leadership neglects the social contract between government and people.

Ingratitude is evident in the failure of leaders to acknowledge communal needs and divine providence, leading to neglect of citizens' welfare despite abundant resources. David (2025) notes that the greed-need-creed spectrum in Nigeria's Niger Delta insurgencies reflects how ingratitude and corruption fuel unrest. Collectively, these vices undermine trust, perpetuate inequality, and call for ethical reorientation in governance, aligning with biblical condemnation in Luke 12:16–21.

Challenges of biblical ethics on Effective Governance

The challenges of biblical ethics—particularly greed, pride, and ingratitude—pose significant obstacles to governance in Delta State, Nigeria. Luke 12:16–21, the parable of the rich fool, condemns excessive accumulation, arrogance, and disregard for divine sovereignty, themes that resonate with the misuse of public resources in the region. Greed manifests in embezzlement and mismanagement of oil revenues, where leaders prioritize personal enrichment over communal development. Mordi (2014) observes that political elites in Delta State often divert funds for private gain, perpetuating poverty despite abundant resources. Pride, expressed through authoritarian leadership and self-glorification, undermines accountability and silences citizen participation. Isiorhovoja (2019) critiques the decline of servant leadership in Nigeria, noting that arrogance and profiteering mirror the rich fool's misplaced confidence in wealth. Ingratitude is evident in leaders' failure to acknowledge communal needs and divine providence, resulting in neglect of citizens' welfare. Ojogbo and Odor (2025) emphasize that ethical

leadership rooted in humility and stewardship is essential for effective service delivery, while Sheriff, Clark, and Ikenga (2025) highlight how governance failures exacerbate insecurity in Delta State. Collectively, these vices challenge governance by eroding trust, fostering inequality, and contradicting biblical expectations of justice, compassion, and stewardship, calling for ethical reorientation in leadership.

Functional Roles of Religion on Societal Psyche

The functional theory of religion views faith as serving essential roles in shaping moral order and social cohesion. In *Luke 12:16–21*, the parable of the rich fool demonstrates how religion functions as a moral compass, warning against greed, pride, and ingratitude. The rich man's decision to hoard his harvest reflects selfish accumulation, which religion condemns by promoting generosity and communal responsibility. Ngele, Uwaegbute, and Odo (2017) argue that the parable critiques materialism in Nigerian Christianity, urging believers to prioritize spiritual values over wealth. Similarly, Nwaomah (2009) explains that Jesus employed parables to reshape attitudes toward money and inheritance, stressing stewardship and accountability before God.

Religion also challenges pride and self-glorification by reminding leaders and communities that life is sustained not by possessions but by dependence on God. Ezeonwumelu (2021) emphasizes that religion fosters morally conscious societies through humility and ethical responsibility. Isiorhovoja (2013) further highlights Paul's mentoring paradigm as a model for peace and youth development, showing religion's role in cultivating responsible leadership. Thus, religion functions to instill moral consciousness, promote justice, and align governance and personal conduct with divine expectations of compassion and stewardship.

Conclusion

The parable of the rich fool in *Luke 12:16–21* offers a timeless moral lesson for leadership, especially in Delta State where greed, pride, and ingratitude weaken social responsibility. The rich man's decision to store wealth for himself reflects corruption and misuse of public resources that deprive citizens of essential services. His barns symbolize selfish hoarding, similar to leaders who prioritize personal enrichment over accountability and stewardship.

Despite abundant natural resources, governance failures persist as leaders focus on personal gain rather than communal welfare, eroding trust and deepening inequality. The parable warns against arrogance and neglect of others, reminding governments that true legitimacy comes from justice, compassion, and service. Applied to Delta State, these insights highlight the dangers of corruption and authoritarian leadership while offering a framework for reform. Leaders who embrace humility, gratitude, and responsibility can strengthen democracy, restore confidence, and promote stewardship as the foundation of ethical governance.

Recommendations

The study recommends that leaders in Delta State adopt ethical governance built on stewardship, humility, and accountability, aligning with both biblical and democratic principles. Religious institutions should strengthen moral education, using texts like *Luke 12:16–21* to confront corruption and encourage generosity. Civil society and media must expose governance failures, promote transparency, and ensure resources serve citizens. Policies should emphasize fair distribution to reduce poverty and insecurity caused by mismanagement. Finally, collaboration among government, religious leaders, and communities is vital to foster gratitude, justice, and compassion, transforming governance into a tool for societal growth and sustainable well-being.

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