

ELDERS AT THE GATES

"The elders have ceased gathering at the gate..." Lamentations 5:14a [NKJV]

In the course of our family devotion sometime in October 2018, we read Lamentation 5 and vs. 14a caught my attention: *"...the elders have ceased gathering at the gate..."* What does this mean?

A Little Overview:

The entire Chapter 5 was a lamentation of the present condition of God's people occasioned by their many years of rebelliousness to God's order. One of their present predicaments, a negative collective experience for God's people was that the elders no longer sit/gather at the gate. By implication, whenever we see this scenario playing out, we know definitely something is wrong. In other words, in normal circumstances of society, the elders are expected to gather at the gate.

I want to assume my average reader knows what the gate connotes especially in the communities of ancient Israel. The Old Testament is replete with such scenarios, so I will not bother to list them out. Suffice to say however, an example was when Boaz wanted to take Ruth in wedlock according to the family traditions, the matter was resolved at the gates. Do you remember that one of the characteristics of the virtuous woman in Prov. 31 is that her husband is known at the gates when he sits among the elders of the land? Of course, included in God's covenant to Abraham is this declaration: Your seed shall possess the gates of his enemies! And so on and forth.

So, I can safely posit that one of the significances of the gate is that it was a place of decision making; an informal court of sorts where cases are heard and judgment can be passed after the elders of the community put their heads together. The Contemporary English Version makes it so clear: *"Our leaders are not allowed to decide cases in court."* When elders no longer gather at the gate, then the head of the proverbial child at the back of its mother will certainly be twisted. And that is a sure path to societal anarchy.

Spiritual Significance of Elders Gathering at the Gates

I consider the Body of Christ, the Ekklesia (Assembly) who is presently the spiritual Israel (the nation of God): do we see our elders sitting at the gates, judging cases and settling disputes? Paul, in rebuking the Corinthian believers for daring to drag themselves before secular courts, asked a pointed question:

"Is there no one among you wise enough to settle disputes between fellow Christians?" 1 Cor. 6:5 [NET]

However, my concern here goes far beyond "conflict resolution"; while I do not in any way downplay that, I think even more importantly, **the job of these elders is to uphold entrenched values and norms of the society, to prevent the community, in the midst of ever-changing times,**

from drifting away from those ancient values that define our nationhood. That's what makes sitting at the gates of extreme importance to a society.

The Acts 15 scenario, Jerusalem council - as it is popularly called, readily comes to mind when thinking of a New Testament example. The Pauline instruction in 1 Cor. 14:29 also alludes to this practice. We must not fail to mention our Lord's own words in Matt. 18:17 in which He implied that the Assembly must be able to function as a house of judgment.

This is where I am deeply troubled: do we have this operation within the Body of Christ today? Christendom today is running riot in the matter of doctrine and unethical practices in ministry, yet nothing/no one is checking this wild development. Do we have elders in the land coming together to simply compare notes, crosschecking their beliefs and practices and helping to stem the tide of "anything goes" and thereby safeguard the diet of the corporate Assembly?

By this, I do not mean organizing conferences and bringing an array of ministers to preach their various revelations. More often than not, the posture we take during our conferences is this: once a man mounts the pulpit, it's as though God Himself is speaking directly. In other words, it is assumed whatever is said is a divine revelation that can't be faulted. And so, questions are not allowed, let alone cross-examination. In any case, neither the host nor the guest speaker wants the embarrassment of being challenged on something that has been said which may be off-tangent.

A Practical Example

Just yesterday (Dec. 03, 2019), I watched a video clip of a prominent elder in the land who said that the reason Job's blessing wasn't secured was he wasn't paying his tithe. He said while it is true that Job was always helping the poor and God was committed to blessing him, but because he wasn't tithing, there was no way to secure those blessings from the activity of the devourer. You could hear the wows and clapping of the congregation at the powerful revelation. And then he said the reason his life and ministry has been free from the devourer is because of his commitment to tithing.

There are too many things wrong with this teaching. Let me just mention one or two: nowhere does the bible insinuate what the bishop inferred. It doesn't even come close. Job by the way was not a Jew and the Law of tithing wasn't even there in Job's days. Perhaps the bishop does not know that. And if it was because he wasn't a tither, the bible said God later blessed Job with double everything he had. Should we then say that that was because he started tithing then? Are you getting the point? And then, what of the several thousands of faithful tithers who have had their own share of life's travails: loss of a child, terminal disease, car theft or job loss and so on? What do you want them to say: God is partial? They have a problem since the word did not work for them?

This is just a simple example of how wrong teaching permeates the Body without being checked. There have been far worse teachings, especially from the Pentecostal stream. In this nation, we've had salt service, padlock service, candle service, killing our enemies and so on.

So, do we have such a forum where our elders compare notes and serve as checks and balance for one another? Does PFN do this? CAN perhaps? I sincerely doubt they do. Of course, I stand to be corrected. I know they have sub committees for every other thing under the heaven; if they have a department that functions as a spiritual NAFDAC, do you think we would have this scenario of chaos in doctrine such as what we have today?

Contend for the Faith

Paul was a man in his generation who fought uncompromisingly like a wild mountain goat over the matter of doctrine. Thank God for him. Probably all of us (gentiles) would have become Jewish proselytes, doing pilgrimage to Jerusalem thrice a year with bulls, rams and turtle doves. If that were the case, Christianity would never have grown beyond the apron of Judaism, as it has today.

And so, the situation in which we have found ourselves calls for men like Paul to rise in the Body and contend with the adversary at the gates.

*“Even that question came up only because of some so-called Christians there—false ones, really—who were secretly brought in. They sneaked in to spy on us and take away the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to enslave us and force us to follow their Jewish regulations. But we refused to give in to them for a single moment. **We wanted to preserve the truth of the gospel message for you.**” - Gal. 2:4-5 [NLT]*

*“...To them we did not yield submission even for a moment, **that the truth of the Gospel might continue to be [preserved] for you [in its purity].**” [Vs. 5 – AMP]*

For the cause of Truth,

Temidayo Adeyemo
08038548073