

ELDERS AT THE GATES

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

Origin of the Burden:

During 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..."* I became burdened following the insights I got from that scripture, penned down my meditation and circulated it the little way I could. As I saw things happen every now and then, the burden would again come up stronger and I have made attempts to interview a few elders, including the PFN leadership (no success with the PFN leadership yet but we'll continue request for audience). Some elders we have interviewed so far:

1. Evangelist Matthew Owojaiye – Kaduna
2. Bishop Dapo Asaju – Ilesha
3. Professor Gary Maxey – Lagos
4. Pastor Olubi Johnson

Below is the original article, with a little modification:

An Overview:

The entire chapter 5 was indeed 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 was that the elders no longer sit/gather at the gate. By implication, whenever we see this scenario playing out, we know something is wrong. In other words, in normal circumstances of society, the elders are expected to gather at the gate.

I assume my reader knows what the gate connotes especially in the communities of ancient Israel. The Old Testament is replete with such scenarios; a classic example was when Boaz was to take Ruth in wedlock according to the family traditions, the matter was resolved at the gates. One of the characteristics of the virtuous woman is that her husband is known at the gates when he sits among the elders of the land (Prov. 31:23). Of course, included in God's covenant to Abraham is this declaration: Your seed shall possess the gates of his enemies (Gen. 22:17).

So, I can safely posit that the gate was a place of decision making; an informal court of sorts where cases are heard and judgment is 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 AT THE GATES

The Body of Christ is presently the spiritual Israel (the nation of God). Herein is my concern: ***do we see our elders sitting at the gates, judging cases and settling disputes?*** Paul, while 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 Corinthians 6:5

This by itself is an indictment, for the courts in our nation today is littered with various court cases of brethren against each other and even church versus church. Worrisome as that is, my concern here goes far beyond “conflict resolution”. Again, I do not in any way downplay that, but 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 is 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. Also, the Pauline instruction in 1 Corinthians 14:29 (Let the prophets speak two or three and let the other judge) also alludes to this practice. We must not fail to mention our Lord’s own words in Matthew 18:17 in which He implied that the Assembly is 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 simply to compare notes, crosscheck their beliefs and practices and work together 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

On December 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 applause of the congregation at the ‘powerful revelation’. And then he said the reason his life and ministry have 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 allude to what this elder insinuated. 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. Did the elder not know that? Now, we are told that God later blessed Job with double of everything he had; should we then say it was because he started tithing? I hope you get the point? And I can’t help but think: 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; there are far more damaging teachings we have heard from popular pulpits which oftentimes go unchecked.

A FEW WORRISOME AREAS OF CONCERN

- During the nation's general elections, the Body of Christ is equally as sharply divided as the rest of society with many conflicting voices coming from our pulpits which add to the confusion.
- Characters like Abel Damina, T.B. Joshua (now late) among others have been leading controversial figures who have been instruments of division in Christendom.
- Matters like hyper-grace, tithe, first fruits, leadership succession among others have become controversial topics, over which believers are sharply divided.
- There have been extra-biblical teachings and practices, especially from the Pentecostal stream: salt service, padlock service, candle service, selling of oil and prayer water, Jerusalem artefacts etc.

In all these, we are asking, where is the voice of corporate eldership to:

- serve as a check against unbiblical teachings/practices,
- unify God's people and
- give direction to in times of uncertainty and lack of clarity?

Do we have such a forum like the Jerusalem council where our elders compare notes and serve as checks and balance for one another? Is there a department under CAN/PFN that functions as a spiritual NAFDAC to safeguard the doctrinal waters from pollution and being watered down in the name of ministry growth? I sincerely doubt they do. Of course, I stand to be corrected. I know they have sub committees for several other things. They should consider setting up a department that promotes doctrinal orthodoxy and balance among ministers.

Contend for the Faith

Paul in his generation fought uncompromisingly over the matter of doctrine. Of course, others like Peter, John and Jude were equally as vocal in their letters; these men spoke very critically of false teachers, false prophets and so on. The situation we have found ourselves today 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.**" – Galatians 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

Essence Restored Magazine

08038548073