

The Church Today and the YOU Factor

Then said I unto them, Ye see the distress that we are in, how Jerusalem lieth waste, and the gates thereof are burned with fire: come let us build up the walls of Jerusalem, that we be no more a reproach

- Nehemiah 2: 17



Tolulope Adeola Sonaike

The perspective I wish to share with you today is upon the underlying assumption that the above passage is figurative of the current state of the Church. Indeed, the Church instituted by Jesus Christ Himself as a His Bride is in *distress*; her strength is *wasted* and the gate *burned with fire*. The Church which, by the power of the Holy Spirit, had mediated succour for the troubled, liberty for the bound, comfort for the sorrowful and strength for the weak today lies wasted, plundered by men who profess godliness but demonstrate worldliness and spiritual deceit!

The situation of the Church today is likened to the picture painted by the Psalmist in his 80th chapter, verses 8 – 10, to wit,

⁸ *Thou has brought a vine out of Egypt: thou hast cast out the heathen, and planted it.*

⁹ *Thou preparedst and didst cause it to take deep root, and it filled the land.*

¹⁰ *The hills were covered with the shadow of it, and the boughs thereof were like the goodly cedars.*

¹¹ *She sent out her boughs unto the seas, and her branches unto the river.*

¹² *Why has thou broken down her hedges, so that all who pass by the way do pluck her?*

¹³ *The boar out of the wood doth waste it, and the wild beast of the field doth devour it.*

When the Lord shall return to behold the Church planted by His hand, the pillars of which He had made strong for Himself, shall the Church be able to withstand His visitation?

The Church

At the mention of the word 'Church', what comes to your mind? To some, it is a building where people meet for fellowship. To some others, it is a place of refuge in times of difficulties. However, the concept of the Church is all of these and more.

The word 'Church' in the Bible was translated from the Greek word *ekklesia*, meaning **called out**. It was a political term which referred to a gathering or assembly of people summoned by the crier, the legislative assembly (*The True Church*, Lisa Kaelber (source: internet)).

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The Church as a new testament concept can be traced to Jesus Christ when He declared to Simon Peter in Caesarea Phillipi *...thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church* (Matt. 16: 18a).

This concept became manifest after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the release of the Holy Ghost. The concept has continued to date and connotes, in the context of a building, a *spiritual house* where believers constitute the *lively stones* and are built up into *an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ*.

This contextual concept description of the Church was offered by Peter himself (1 Peter 2: 5), Christ's appointed minister (Matthew 16: 18a, John 21: 15 – 17). No doubt, he would best understand the ministry, for to him it was entrusted.

Indeed, before the new testament, people met to worship and praise God but not within the context of the Church as we know it today (*ekklesia*). God chose Israel as a people unto Himself; a people 'called out' of the nations. The word translated 'called out' is the Hebrew word *kahal*. The same word is translated 'assembly' severally in reference to the gathering of the children of Israel (Deuteronomy 18: 16; Judges 21: 8) and sometimes 'congregation' (Deuteronomy 31: 30; Joshua 8: 35; Psalm 22: 22 – 25). But at that time, there was no Church (*ekklesia*). There could not have been one. This is because the central philosophy underlying the Church is the foundation of faith in Jesus Christ, the *builder* of the church. And Jesus had not come then.

Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone of the Church and we (believers) are the 'bricks' jointly fitted to Him and built into a unit, which unit

is God's habitation through the Spirit (Ephesians 2: 20 – 22)

The foundation of the Church is Jesus Christ and it can never fail. Believers constitute the materials and vessels for the building. How well and long these materials stand the *elements* and test of time will be determined by the quality of materials we as believers constitute in the building. **Are we materials of gold, silver precious stones or materials of wood, hay and stubble?** *Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is* (1 Corinthians 4: 11 – 15a).

The Church Jesus Christ laid the foundation for is *a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God* (1 Peter 2: 5, 9). The question therefore, as Apostle Paul put it, is this: *Are YOU meet for the master's use and prepared unto every good work?* (2 Timothy 2: 20, 21)

Why the Church Exists

When Jesus departed the earth, His commission to the disciples in Galilee was:

¹⁹ *Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:*

²⁰ *And teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you* (Matthew 28: 19,20 (NIV))

This commission summarises Christ's purpose for His Church: **Evangelism** (*make disciples*) and **Edification** (*teaching*). It also reveals the two (2) interactive dispositions of the Church. As Gene Getz explains in his *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Victor Books, 1987), this commission describes *the Church existing in the world* and *the Church existing as a gathered community*.

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The obligation Jesus imposes on the Church to the world is evangelism while the obligation Jesus imposes on the Church to itself is edification.

One of the primary tasks of the Church in the world is to MAKE DISCIPLES OF ALL NATIONS. Remember that Jesus had said in John 10: 16 *"And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold and one shepherd"*.

Taking the gospel of Jesus Christ to every nation, Jew or Gentile, black or white is one primary task Jesus commissioned the Church for. As the gospel spread abroad, people who lived in various communities started forming new relationships. Their commonness was in the gospel they heard: **Jesus Christ**. In the words of Gertz (*supra*), *"They became brothers and sisters in Christ – members of the family of God. A new force was established, not to form as a "travelling group" but as a people "settled in a community", where they lived, worked and carried on the other routine responsibilities in life. And as they were taught and edified, they soon discovered that they had two basic responsibilities – one "to the world" and the other "to each other" (p. 57).*

In executing the task of evangelism (i.e. making disciples), two factors were prominent in the early church. These were *Love* and *Unity*.

Let us briefly examine how these two factors come into play in the Church of Christ.

1. The Power of Love

The Church emphasised its corporate existence above individual membership. Love among brethren played a very prominent role in preaching Jesus Christ to unbelievers. It is

written of the early Church that all who believed *"were together and had all things in common: and sold their possession and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need"* (Acts 2: 45, 46).

The lifestyle of the Church reflected love and concern for all men in their community. This stood the Church out in the community as a unique group. This love was one of the instruments Jesus Christ had emphasised to the disciples in the task of bringing the knowledge of Him to all men. In John 13 (34, 35) Jesus had instructed the disciples thus: *A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that that ye are my disciple, if Ye have love one to another"*.

Community evangelism was to be carried out through love among believers. This would be noticed by and proof to the community that believers are indeed disciples of Christ and sent of Him. This was what Jesus meant when he commanded as follows: *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your father which is in heaven* (Matthew 5: 16).

The same was emphasised by Apostle Peter when he enjoined in Chapter 2 verse 12 of his first epistle as follows: *"Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold glorify God in the day of visitation"*.

Love within and outside the Church must be so manifest and genuine that non-believers would desire to be part of you. This is the only time your sermons and preachings, crusades, door-to-door evangelism would have a meaning to non-believers. Jesus said in

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Mathew 7: 16a that *Ye shall know them by their fruits.*

What do we have in the Church today? A leadership that feeds on the sheep rather than *feed the sheep*; members who lie to and defraud one another and the community. What good news does such a Church have for non-believers? The community is watching!

2. The Power of Unity

The other aspect of corporate emphasis Jesus desires for the Church in the task of evangelism is unity. He prayed for it: *“Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they may be one; as thou, Father, art in me and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me”* (Matthew 17: 20,21).

When the world observes unity in the Church, they shall believe that truly, Jesus is the Son of God and the saviour of mankind. The Psalmist in Chapter 133 verse 2 had described unity

among brethren as *“...precious ointment upon the head; that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard: that went down to the skirt of his garment”*.

When the Church dwells in unity, there is no measure to its ability to accomplish her commission.

The two aspects of the Church highlighted above must be manifest if she must accomplish her commission. As Getz submitted, *“it was the love and unity among Christians in Jerusalem that provided the base for effective witness* (supra, p 59).

How well the Church holds up today on the foundation of Christ would be largely a function of how well YOU manifest the two aspects of the corporate existence of the Church, to wit, **Love and Unity**.

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