

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON AND THE CHRISTIAN PRACTICE OF
RECONCILIATION IN OYO SOUTH BAPTIST ASSOCIATION

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ABSTRACT

This study "Paul's Letter to Philemon and the Christian practice of reconciliation in Oyo South Baptist Association", examines how Christian leaders can use their position in the Church to reconcile aggrieved members of the Church in line with Christ mandate. It is a known fact that conflict is inevitable within the community of people, the Church inclusive. The world has been beclouded with all sorts of war and strife and damages are recorded daily. The Bible too has series of conflicts in both Old and New Testaments. Therefore, the focus of this research is to seek ways to curtail the menace of conflict in the Church and project it as light to this dark world. The study covers the types of conflict, their causes and effects; it considers, as well, the leadership role in the reconciliatory process in the Church. Paul's approach used in the conflict settlement of Philemon and Onesimus was the focal point of the study in Oyo South Baptist Association. The study adopts the descriptive survey to analyze the data collected from the questionnaires distributed to Church leaders. The information generated from the data can be used to reconcile the aggrieved members of the Church. The results of the data collected show that the main causes of conflict in the Church are unguided utterances, financial mis-management, adultery and poor interactions, presented in chronological order of their effects. Therefore, to initiate reconciliation as Paul did between Philemon and Onesimus, it was elucidated that friendly relationships, motivation by Church leaders, mutual respect of views of the leaders and the followers (members) are vital. Unresolved conflicts are discovered to be the bane of many crises facing the Church today. Paul's model of reconciliation was in place in all the Churches tested. In order to sustain this tempo, Pastors and Deacons must be alive to their reconciliatory responsibilities in the Church. This will lead them to showcase exemplary Christian faith and practice as Christ mission demanded of them. These Church leaders would be ready to sacrifice as humanly possible to get aggrieved members to achieve their denied rights. To do this, however, the offender must first accept his fault, before the expected forgiveness is secured for him. The members as a matter of trust need to promptly report their grievances to the leader for quick intervention. Having gone through this work the researcher is burdened to recommend that effective teaching through discipleship programme, seminars, retreat, Bible Study, prayer programme, sound Biblical preaching, mutual respect, cordial relationship, prompt response to reconcile the aggrieved members and visitation must be firmly on ground. As conflict opposes the message of love, that Christ established the Church to preach to the whole world.

Conclusion

The conclusion of these findings was that leaders in Oyo South Baptist Association were practicing Christian faith in accordance to Paul's intervention model in Philemon –Onesimus conflict resolution process. The leaders were active, possessed dignity; built healthy relationship, respect the views of other, not enforcing their thought on the members, mission minded, and have readiness of mind to bear the burden of others for Christ sake. The aggrieved report to the leaders (internal and external) who can intervene as Onesimus did to Paul. Conflict also ensued in the area of study between the led and leader as in the case of Onesimus and Philemon and

within the same Church. Speculatively, Onesimus-Philemon could have risen from utterance and financial matter, which is also found in this study. The intervention of Paul in conflict resolution as demonstrated with the tender hearted of Philemon in accepting resolution is also recognized in this study.

One area the Church is different in this conflict resolution model is in given the offender to prison.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

To Pastor

1. The Pastor should understand the law of connection that is within the concept of spiritual guidelines. Paul connects and asks for help of Philemon to grant Onesimus a pardon and repentance. Pastor needs other reputable people to work with and achieve better in conflict management.
2. Pastor should embark on visitation to Church members' house to see them physically and get any observed crisis solved at the early stage. The Pastor's availability to the Church members is one of the Pastoral rights they are to enjoy, if the flocks are going to be real Christ followers. It was Paul's availability that helped in Philemon- Onesimus conflict resolution. The Pastor-Church members relationship must be cordial and spiritually upright.
3. There should be constant spiritual education for Pastors' wives where they will be properly educated on their role with pastoral responsibilities of the Pastors in the Church. Their lifestyle must not for any reason generate heat in the Church and throw the congregation into conflict.
4. The pulpit should be used to preach love and Godly expectations from the Church members. The preacher gives his life for message of reconciliation,

which Christ came to do for mankind. Pastor's message is a way to satisfy God's justice to satisfy His wrath and vengeance against sin and still reconcile sinners. His lifestyle should be enough sermons to preach the message of the ministry of reconciliation. He must not for any reason being involved in conflict with anybody or of questionable character. Christ has endowed Pastor by the virtue of his calling to preach the gospel. The pastor's sermon must be well prepared and discharged with the power of the Holy Spirit.

5. Pastor, as a matter of fact should regard himself as an undershepherd under the leadership of Christ serving in the local Church. He is expected to lead the Church in the understanding of its covenantal responsibility to reach the world for Christ. He is to direct the Church to become reproducible through the art of building leaders whose lives are reproducible as well. (Acts 8:1,4,5)
6. It is of paramount importance for Pastor to actively involve in diligent service, as a title less areas of ministry. This qualifies men for opportunities of greater responsibility in the work of the Lord. For Paul worked for Christ inside the prison to regain back the soul of Onesimus to his erstwhile master. Pastor should understand that opportunities in the Lord's work depend on the Lord's timing and our faithfulness to Him. Pastor's identity should showcase of a chosen generation.
7. The Pastor needs to plan for Congregational Education, where the Church members will be exposed to seminars, retreats crusade and indoor revivals. These programs shall afford them opportunity to build up their Christian faith and provide readiness of heart to practice it. In the same vein, discipleship programme that can nurture the seed of all the Christian Education activities should be well plan and execute with all seriousness to produce the individuals

that will not be complaining, but stick to correction. Pastors must see themselves as agent of positive change.

8. Leadership training is a must for Pastors, as leaders in the Church to effectively lead the congregation aright in the way of God. The training acquired shall provide them ability to recognize individual differences, build up respect for other as an entity, not forceful, visionary and leading agent of the Church. but reconciling the estranged individuals. It will make them to gain leadership methods to function efficiently. Therefore, principles of conflict resolution must be adhered to when administering reconciliation techniques.
9. Pastor, as a matter of fact should exercise caution from the Church money. He must be ready to give account of the money in his possession whenever demanded. This shall prevent any ugly scene that may arise from the Church members. He is to maintain his integrity which is the main operation factor in conflict resolution process.

To Deacons

1. Baptist as a denomination recognizes the office of deacon as one of the principal leaders the Church. For this reason, the virtue of integrity, humility, service, love, and life of discipline must not be compromised with when seeking for the position of deacon.
2. All serving deacons must be given opportunity to undergo thorough discipleship training that will help them to be well grounded in Christ ordinances. They can also be the trainer for other disciples, as a commission assignment they professed to fulfill.
3. Pastor and Deacons relationship in the Church goes a long way in the formation of behavior of the Church members. The members use them as

