

PHILEMON: EFFECTIVE MINISTRY AMID SENSITIVE ISSUES

Part VII: Paul's Persistency Toward Resolving The Sensitive Issue

(Philemon 22-25)

I. Introduction

- A. Sometimes we believers face very sensitive issues in relating to relatives, coworkers or even in relating to one another in the Lord, issues that if not properly handled can create unwanted and severe interpersonal conflicts.
- B. Paul's letter to Philemon dealt with the potentially explosive issue of what to do with a runaway slave who had accepted Christ as his Savior, especially when such slaves were often killed in punishment for having run away. (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, p. 1727, "Introduction to the Letter of Paul to Philemon")
- C. Exemplifying how to face such an issue, Paul in Philemon 22-25 exhibited persistency toward solving the sensitive issue, an edifying focus that we should use toward resolving sensitive issues we face today:

II. Paul's Persistency Toward Resolving The Sensitive Issue, Philemon 22-25.

- A. Paul exhibited persistency toward resolving the sensitive issue between Philemon and Onesimus, writing to tell Philemon to prepare a guest room for him as he hoped by Philemon's prayers to be released and thus to visit him, Philemon 22. Paul was following his letter on the sensitive issue by a visit to further the cause.
- B. Paul's persistency was great, seen in how it led many of his coworkers to be persistent for God, v. 23-24 et al.:
 1. Paul sent Philemon greetings from Epaphras, Paul's fellowprisoner for the Lord (Philemon 23) and a man who always labored fervently in prayer for those like Philemon at Colossae (Ibid.), that they might stand mature and complete in the will of God, what would take time under persistent discipling, Colossians 4:12.
 2. Paul sent greetings from Marcus, whom we know as Mark, author of the Gospel of Mark (v. 24a), and Mark was in the midst of a spiritual rebound from defeat as Paul and others persisted in discipling him:
 - a. Mark had abandoned Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, so Paul had refused to take him on the second journey so that Barnabas had taken Mark to Cyprus to disciple him, Acts 15:36-40.
 - b. In Colossians 4:10b, we learn that Mark was rebounding from his spiritual defeat, that he was under probation by Paul and the church at Colossae at the time that Paul's letter to Philemon was written. (Ibid.)
 - c. Later, near Paul's martyrdom, Paul requested that Timothy bring Mark with him to minister to Paul since Mark was then profitable to him, meaning Mark had fully recovered from his past failure, 2 Tim. 4:11b.
 - d. Thus, persistency by Barnabas, Paul and the Church at Colossae had helped Mark to recover, and he later wrote one of the Gospels of Christ! (Ibid., p. 1397, "Introduction to the Gospel According to Mark")
 3. Paul sent greetings from Aristarchus (Phm. 24b), a man who had traveled with Paul to Ephesus and had been pushed by an angry mob into the theater at Ephesus only to face hours of their angry shouting against his Christian faith, Acts 19:29-41. Yet, Aristarchus had persisted in continuing with Paul to serve Christ.
 4. Paul sent greetings from Demas (Phm. 24c), a coworker who later abandoned Christian service in favor of living for this present world, 2 Timothy 4:10a. Regardless of the persistent faithfulness of Paul and his other associates, Demas defected, and it must have grieved Paul and his coworkers.
 5. Nevertheless, Paul sent greetings from Luke (Phm. 24d), the "beloved physician" (Colossians 4:14a), and Luke was very persistent in his devotion to the Lord seen in his long-term help to Paul in his ministry:
 - a. Regardless of the defection of coworker Demas from Paul for the world, Luke remained with the imprisoned Apostle even as he neared his martyrdom, 2 Timothy 4:6, 11a.
 - b. Luke had ministered with Paul's missionary team in Acts 16:10-40 and again later in Acts 20:5 to the end of the book at Acts 28:31, Ibid., ftn. to Acts 16:10. Luke's persistency involved staying with Paul through his beating and imprisonment at Philippi (Acts 16:22-24), through Paul's arrest in Jerusalem and through his voyage and shipwreck at Malta (Acts 21:27-28:10) until Paul reached Rome (Acts 28:11-31) for his hearing and trial and eventually being by Paul's side as he prepared for his martyrdom, 2 Timothy 4:6, 11a. Regardless of Demas' defection, Luke persisted in devotion to Christ to minister to Paul to the end of the Apostle's earthly life. Luke also wrote the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts.
- C. Paul closed his letter, persisting to disciple by wishing that the grace of Christ be with Philemon's spirit, v. 25.

Lesson: Paul was persistent in seeking to see Philemon disciplined unto being reunited with Onesimus as a beloved brother in Christ, a persistency that influenced a number of his ministry associates to be persistent for the Lord.

Application: If we face sensitive issues in the discipling process, may we like a number of Paul's ministry associates and Paul himself faithfully persist in our discipling efforts until they reach full maturity in Christ.