

Intro:

Our theme is “Families Making a Difference.” Obviously we are talking about making a *spiritual difference*. Perhaps we should qualify that more: we are talking about making a *Christian difference*.

For our men’s session this year, I thought I would narrow the theme a bit more and talk about:

Men making a Difference

I want to look at a little used book, Philemon, and guide us through a discussion of its content with this theme in mind.

Preliminary background points:

- Philemon represents a wide cultural difference from us – Greco-Roman culture and economy included a large component of slave labour.
- Paul is writing to Philemon, appealing for him to make a spiritual decision about a man who was a run-away slave, now a Christian (and perhaps even a blood relative of Philemon, his master).
- Philemon is a man who has a position of leadership in the church at Colosse

With those preliminaries, let’s look into the text:

I. Paul’s ground of confidence in Philemon’s Christian character and influence (1-7)

Let’s list the facts as we come to them about Philemon’s Christian character and influence. The terms we are looking for are descriptions of Philemon’s spiritual life, position, and influence.

A. The greeting (1-2)

1. Fellowsoldier (1)
2. Husband (Apphia probably his wife) (2)
3. Connected to Archippus (see Col 4.17) – a relative of Philemon?
Apparently the pastor of the church (2)
4. Host of the church that Archippus pastors – speaks of wealth and dedication to service of Christ (2)

B. The grateful prayers (3-6)

1. Frequent subject of Paul’s prayers (3-4)

2. Testimony (5)
 - a. Love
 - b. Faith
 - c. Towards Christ
 - d. Towards saints
 3. Subject of prayer: for an effective testimony (6)
 - a. Paul prays for effective witness
 - b. Paul prays for an effective witness based on a genuine testimony ('every good thing which is in you')
- C. The reason for Paul's prayers – 'For' (7)
1. We are spiritually refreshed by your brotherly love
 2. We know the saints are refreshed by your brotherly love

When you think of what Paul is about to ask, you might think he is 'battering Philemon up' in vv. 1-6, but v. 7 expresses Paul's genuine assessment of Philemon's testimony and character.

II. Paul's appeal based in terms of Christian spiritual life (8-20)

Here we are looking for terms that speak of the spiritual bonds that exist between brethren. Paul, as an apostle, could command, but instead he appeals.

- A. For love's sake (9)
- B. On the basis of Onesimus' transformed life (11)
- C. On the basis of Philemon's good testimony (14)
- D. On the basis of the new Christian relationship (16)
- E. On the basis of Philemon's relationship with Paul (17)
- F. On the basis of the long-standing Christian relationship between Philemon and Paul (20)

III. Paul's confidence in Philemon's response

- A. He expects Philemon to do what he wishes and more (21)

- B. He expects Philemon to also provide him lodging when he is able to come himself (22)

Conclusion:

Paul is writing to Philemon as a Christian of influence over a delicate matter. He wants Philemon to respond in a certain way.

A few concluding questions:

1. Why does Paul have confidence in Philemon's response?
2. What made Philemon the kind of man who Paul could have this kind of confidence in?
3. What do you think Philemon did? Why?