

Introduction

A couple months ago a stray cat began hanging around. The cat had been hurt and one of its back legs was broken. It had a collar and a pink tag on it that jingled, so Karen named the cat, Jingle Bells. Karen put food and water out for it every morning and night, and it gradually became more comfortable around Karen, and then the rest of us. The cat had a very sweet disposition. This past week the cat finally trusted us enough to let us pet it. Karen was able to take off the collar this week, and we learned that the cat's real name was Cassie. The tag also had a phone number on it, so Karen called the number, and left a message on the answering machine. A lady named Sheila called Karen back and was excited that her cat had been found. She and her husband live in Shannon, and did not know how their cat got way over here. They think that Cassie may have got in the truck of their son's girlfriend, who lives near us, and accidentally taken over here, and then got out of the truck. Sheila and her husband came by on Saturday afternoon to pick up Cassie. When the cat saw Sheila and heard her voice, the cat came to them and allowed Sheila to pick her up and cuddle her. The cat obviously knew them and was happy to see them. Sheila was rejoicing because her cat had been found and reunited with her.

Paul's letter to Philemon is a letter of appeals. It is also a story of forgiveness and restoration. Philemon had a slave named Onesimus, who had run away to Rome, where Paul was imprisoned. They crossed paths and Paul led Onesimus to the Lord, and then disciplined him. Onesimus belonged to Philemon, so Paul is sending him back to Philemon and reuniting him with his master. Paul sends the letter of appeals with Tychicus and Philemon.

In our text this morning, Paul has authority to order Philemon to do what is right. He chooses to make an appeal to Philemon, rather than ordering him. Paul's first appeal was to have Onesimus sent back to Paul. Paul did not want to keep him without the voluntary blessing of Philemon. Paul's second appeal was for Philemon to forgive Onesimus and to accept him, just as he would accept Paul, which we will cover next week. After making his two appeals, Paul requested that Philemon would prepare a place for Paul to stay, as he expects to be freed from prison and to come and visit him. In the conclusion of the letter, Paul's team share their greetings and Paul ends with a blessing.

The letter to Philemon is about Paul's appeals. In verse nine, Paul says, "yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you..."

(Phile 9a) "yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you..."

What is an appeal? The Greek word used is *parakaleo*, which literally means to call beside. It is often translated as exhort, encourage, urge, plead, or appeal. The KJV uses the word beseech, but most translations use the word appeal, mainly because of the context. Paul is asking and pleading with Philemon to do something. An appeal is a request by someone to do something, or to change something. Normally, an appeal is generally made to someone in authority. If you do not think that your taxes have been raised fairly, you can make an appeal to the tax commissioner, the one who has authority to raise taxes. If your employer makes a decision that you are not in agreement with, you can make an appeal for him to change his mind. If you do not like a court decision, you can make an appeal to the appellate court, which is the court of appeals. Sometimes the appellate court will send something back DOWN to the LOWER court to reconsider. Appeals go to higher authorities.

An appeal needs to include several key elements. First, the one making the appeal needs to identify himself. Second, the appeal needs to be addressed to the person with authority to address the appeal. Third, the appeal needs to state what action or decision is wanted. Fourth, the appeal needs to state why this action or decision is warranted.

The attitude of the appellant is very important. The person making the appeal should come humbly and respectfully. An arrogant person making demands will generally not find much favor with an authority, so the right attitude is important. In Paul's letter of appeal, he has come humbly. Even though he was an apostle, and could have ordered Philemon to do what was right, he came humbly and made an appeal. He came respectfully and honored Philemon. In the introduction, he commented how he was full of joy to hear how Philemon loved the Lord and people. He rejoiced that Philemon refreshed the saints. Paul has come humbly and respectfully to make this appeal. In this letter, Paul makes two appeals. We will cover the first appeal today, and Paul is very clear about what he would like Philemon to do. Paul also gives five reasons why he believes that Philemon should grant him this appeal.

In the Old Testament, Daniel made an appeal to the king about his diet. The king had appointed a daily ration from the king's choice food and wine, but Daniel did not want to defile himself with unclean food, so he made an appeal to be served vegetables. All vegetables were clean, but not all meats were clean, and rather than inquire about every bit of meat that was served, it was wiser to just eat vegetables. It was not that Daniel was opposed to meat; it was his desire to keep from defiling himself. So, Daniel made an appeal to the overseer in charge. The overseer was concerned that they would not look as good and he would get in trouble. So, Daniel asked for a ten-day trial of vegetables only, and the overseer granted the trial run. After ten days, Daniel and his three friends looked better and were fatter than all the youths who had been eating the king's choice food, so the overseer granted Daniel's appeal.

(Dan 1:5–16) “The king appointed for them a daily ration from the king's choice food and from the wine which he drank, and appointed that they should be educated three years, at the end of which they were to enter the king's personal service.... {8} But Daniel made up his mind that he would not defile himself with the king's choice food or with the wine which he drank; so he sought permission from the commander of the officials that he might not defile himself. {9} Now God granted Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the commander of the officials, {10} and the commander of the officials said to Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has appointed your food and your drink; for why should he see your faces looking more haggard than the youths who are your own age? Then you would make me forfeit my head to the king.” {11} But Daniel said to the overseer whom the commander of the officials had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, {12} “Please test your servants for ten days, and let us be given some vegetables to eat and water to drink. {13} “Then let our appearance be observed in your presence and the appearance of the youths who are eating the king's choice food; and deal with your servants according to what you see.” {14} So he listened to them in this matter and tested them for ten days. {15} At the end of ten days their appearance seemed better and they were fatter than all the youths had been eating the king's choice food. {16} So the overseer continued to withhold their choice food and the wine they were to drink, and kept giving them vegetables.”

In the New Testament, Paul was standing trial before Festus, the Roman governor of Judea. Festus was not a man of integrity, wanting to see righteous judgments; he was a man who wanted political power, and was willing to pervert justice to obtain self-promotion. We read in Acts 25 that Festus wanted to do the Jews a favor, and he asked Paul if he was willing to stand trial in

Jerusalem. Paul was discerning and said that he was standing before Caesar's tribunal where he ought to be tried. He confronted Festus, telling him that he knew that he had done no wrong to the Jews. Paul then made an appeal to Caesar, a higher authority. He was not going to accept Festus' suggestion to be tried in Jerusalem before a fixed court. His appeal to Caesar took Festus out of the picture, and put his case before a higher authority.

(Acts 25:9–12) “But Festus, wishing to do the Jews a favor, answered Paul and said, “Are you willing to go up to Jerusalem and stand trial before me on these charges?” {10} But Paul said, “I am standing before Caesar's tribunal, where I ought to be tried. I have done no wrong to the Jews, as you also very well know. {11} “If, then, I am a wrongdoer and have committed anything worthy of death, I do not refuse to die; but if none of those things is true of which these men accuse me, no one can hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar.” {12} Then when Festus had conferred with his council, he answered, “You have appealed to Caesar, to Caesar you shall go.”

A few years ago, I made an appeal to the International Well Control Forum (IWCF). They are one of the two main certification organizations in the oil and gas industry. I had taken my exam to maintain my instructor status, and it requires a score of 90 or higher on all three parts of the exam. On two of the three I scored in the high nineties. However, in the Equipment test, I scored below ninety. I retook the exam and still scored below the passing rate for instructors. I had studied and knew the material, and I felt that their answers to their questions were incorrect, so I made an appeal. I wrote down the questions and the answer choices that were given. I also cited the American Petroleum Institute (API) regulations pertaining to the questions. The IWCF put together a panel to look into my appeal, and after reviewing it, they decided that I was correct. They changed my grade to what it should have been and I was recertified for another two years.

Generally, an appeal is made to someone in authority. Even though Paul is an apostle, and has authority, he is making an appeal to Philemon, rather than ordering him to do something. Philemon is the owner of a slave, by the name of Onesimus, and so any decision that must be made concerning Onesimus must be made by Philemon, who has authority over his slave.

Slavery was very prevalent in that day. Historians believe there were about sixty million slaves in the Roman world. One of the most common ways that someone became a slave was through debt. When someone could not pay an obligation, they became a slave to the lender. When that debt was paid, they could be set free. The early church had lots of slaves in it. In the Lord, men, women, slaves, freemen, Jews and Greeks were all one.

(Gal 3:28) “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

This morning we will be looking at Paul's first appeal, which is for Philemon to send Onesimus back to Paul. Paul gives five reasons for appealing to Philemon rather than ordering him to do it. Paul was confident that Philemon would do what was right, so he did not need to order. Paul appealed for love's sake. Third, Paul appealed because of his age. Fourth, Paul appealed because he was imprisoned. Fifth, Paul appealed because he has begotten Onesimus in his imprisonment.

(Phile 7–16) “For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. {8} Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, {9} yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus—

{10} I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, {11} who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. {12} I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, {13} whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; {14} but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. {15} For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, {16} no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord.”

Why Paul Makes an Appeal to Philemon

1. Because he had confidence in Philemon
2. Because of love
3. Because of his age
4. Because he is imprisoned
5. Because Onesimus is now a spiritual son

1. Because he had confidence in Philemon

After telling Philemon that he had come to have much joy and comfort in Philemon’s love, because the hearts of the saints had been refreshed through him, Paul makes his first appeal to him. Paul makes an appeal rather than ordering him to do what is proper. Paul was an apostle and was giving spiritual oversight to Philemon and the church in Colosse. Paul was also the one that had brought Philemon to the Lord, and mentored him, so he was a spiritual father to him. But Paul did not want to order Philemon to do it; he chose to make an appeal for several reasons. First, Paul was confident that Philemon would do what is proper. Therefore, there was no reason to order him to do something that he was confident that Philemon would do.

I worked for Cobb County Sheriff’s Department as a prison chaplain for several years. The Sheriff’s Department had authority to use force, but they only used force when necessary. If someone was cooperative with them, they used minimal force. Paul did not need to use his authority, because he was confident that Philemon would do what was right.

(Phile 7–9) “For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. {8} Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you to do what is proper, {9} yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”

In Psalm 32 God takes the same approach with us. He promises to instruct us and teach us in the way we should go. He promises to counsel us with His eye upon us. Then, He exhorts us not to be as the horse or the mule which have no understanding and whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check. God wants us to come to Him on our own volition. He does not want to use circumstances to make us come to Him, but He has the authority and power to do it. I am glad that God does not always use authority to deal with us. I want Him to be confident that I will do what is proper. I want to hear Him whisper something to me rather than raise His voice. I believe all of us appreciate that. Paul was confident that Philemon would do what is proper and that he did not need to use his authority.

(Ps 32:8–9) “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. {9} Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no

understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you.”

2. Because of love

Paul’s second reason for making an appeal was for love’s sake. Paul wanted to handle this situation in the most loving way possible.

(Phile 9) “yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”

As I reflected on this, I thought about a marriage relationship. The scriptures are clear that the husband is the head of the wife, and that she is to submit to him. The husband has authority to tell his wife to do something. However, a marriage that is based on authority will struggle; it must be based on love.

(Eph 5:22–23) “Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. {23} For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”

If the husband lays his life down for his wife, washes her with the word, nourishes and cherishes her, and loves her as Christ loved the church, he will not have to order his wife to do anything. A woman has no problem with submitting to a man that loves her like this. Love is a much better motivator than force. Paul was appealing to Philemon for love’s sake.

(Eph 5:25–29) “Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, {26} so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, {27} that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. {28} So husbands ought also to love their own wives as their own bodies. He who loves his own wife loves himself; {29} for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also does the church,”

3. Because of his Age

Paul’s third reason for appealing was because of his age. He refers to himself as “the aged.” As we get older, we are not able to do all the things that we could as a younger person; we need some help. Paul needs help writing letters. Paul needs help with many other things, and Onesimus has proven to be a big help to Paul in his old age.

(Phile 9) “yet for love’s sake I rather appeal to you—since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus.”

Another reason to mention that he is older is the respect and consideration given to older people. In their culture, older people were respected. Today, we do not show as much respect to the aged. In Paul’s first letter to Timothy, which is about how to conduct ourselves in the church, he taught that we are to honor older men as a father and older women as mothers. God wants us to honor older people. Paul made an appeal as an aged person, because he knew that Philemon would honor him as an elderly man.

(1 Tim 5:1–2) “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, {2} the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

4. Because he was imprisoned

Paul’s fourth reason for appealing rather than ordering was because he was a prisoner of Christ Jesus. Because Paul is a prisoner, he needs help in many ways. He needs people to bring food, and other supplies. He needs someone to write and deliver letters, set up meetings, and many other things. Paul’s appeal is out of need for help. Ordering someone to help you could be construed as self-serving, so an appeal for someone to help you is a more appropriate and loving way.

(Phile 1) “Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker,”

(Phile 10) “I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,”

5. Because Onesimus is now a spiritual son

Paul’s fifth reason for making an appeal to Philemon to have Onesimus sent back to him is because he had begotten Onesimus while imprisoned. Philemon would understand that Onesimus is a spiritual son, and that Paul is raising up a spiritual son. Paul has been and wants to continue pouring into Onesimus. Since Paul led Philemon to the Lord, Philemon understands that Paul would have begun disciplining him. Philemon also knows the special relationship that Paul now has with his runaway slave.

(Phile 10) “I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment,”

Then, Paul makes a play on the meaning of Onesimus’ name, which means useful. Paul wrote, “who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.” God created each one of us with a purpose. Our gifts, abilities, personalities, experiences, and family background all play into God’s plans and purposes for our lives. When we live our lives for our own purposes, and are not serving God’s purposes in our lives, we are useless. When we submit our lives to Christ and begin living for Him, we become useful to Him. Onesimus was not useful to Onesimus, Paul, or God when he was living in sin and rebellion. Now, that Onesimus has committed his life to Christ, and is living for Christ, he has become useful to Paul, Onesimus, and to God.

(Phile 11) “who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me.”

In 2 Peter, he gives some qualities that help us to be useful and fruitful. He said in verse eight that “if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Since Onesimus had been useless and has now become useful, these are qualities that became part of his life.

(2 Pet 1:8) “For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

What are those qualities? Moral excellence is the first quality. Whatever Onesimus was in the past is the past; he is now a man of moral excellence. Whatever past of anyone has is washed clean by the blood of Jesus. “He who knew no sin became sin for us that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.” The second quality mentioned is knowledge. We have to grow in our knowledge of God and His ways. Onesimus was being taught by the apostle Paul, who was also a teacher. We need to personally be in God’s word, and we also need to be taught and fed by apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. We need to have self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and love. When Onesimus went from being useless to useful, these are the qualities that he took on and was increasing in.

(2 Pet 1:5–7) “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, {6} and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, {7} and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.”

(2 Cor 5:21) “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

So, Paul does not presume that Philemon will be okay with him keeping Onesimus, so he sends him back to let him make the decision. Paul is open and candid with Philemon, telling him that he is sending his heart and that he wished to keep Onesimus with him. Paul has a father’s love for Onesimus, and sending him is like sending part of himself.

Paul had a love for people and carried them in his heart. In Paul’s letter to the Philippians, he told them that he thanked God in his every remembrance of them, and that they were in his heart. What is in your heart? Are people on your heart. Many people have the things of the world on their hearts, but God has people on his heart. Paul had people on his heart, and we should love people and have them on our hearts.

(Phile 12–14) “I have sent him back to you in person, that is, sending my very heart, {13} whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel;”

(Phil 1:3–7) “I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, {4} always offering prayer with joy in my every prayer for you all... {7} For it is only right for me to feel this way about you all, because I have you in my heart...”

Paul did not keep Onesimus without first getting Philemon’s consent. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard people say that it is easier to ask for forgiveness than permission. I have seen this being practiced in the church. I have seen this done in the business world. That does not make it right or acceptable. I believe that we need to submit to authorities, and we need to go through the proper channels. Recently, a businessman told me that he did not bother asking for permission on certain plans, and then he said that forgiveness is easier than permission. I responded to him by saying that I cannot preach that, and I cannot do that either. I think he was a little surprised by my answer. Onesimus belonged to Philemon, and Paul did not do anything without Philemon’s consent.

(Phile 14) “but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will.”

Paul also did not want to make Philemon feel obligated or under compulsion. He wanted Onesimus back as a result of Philemon voluntarily sending him back. Paul wanted it to be by Philemon's own free will. Paul did not pressure him; he made a very strong appeal to Philemon to send him back. Just in case Philemon was feeling pressured to send him back, Paul said, "For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother." With that statement, Paul has given Philemon the freedom to say no to his appeal. Paul wanted Philemon to send Onesimus back to him by his own free will.

(Phile 15–16) "For perhaps he was for this reason separated from you for a while, that you would have him back forever, {16} no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord."

Conclusion and Applications

Paul had authority, and in many situations, he used that authority. With Philemon, Paul did not use that authority, but chose to make an appeal to Philemon to do what is right. Paul was confident that Philemon would do what was right. Paul also wanted to appeal for love's sake. Great leaders lead by example and influence, rather than relying upon authority, and Paul was a great leader. Paul also appealed because he was elderly and imprisoned, and had begotten Onesimus while imprisoned. Paul is sending Onesimus back and leaving the matter in the hands of Philemon.

Prayer

Father, thank You for Paul's letter of appeals to Philemon. Thank You for Paul's leadership example. Help us to do all things for love's sake. Help us to learn to make appeals. Help us to honor and respect the elderly. Help us to serve others and make the most of the opportunities that we have to help people in need. Father, one of Paul's main objectives is to reconcile Onesimus with Philemon and his family. Help us to be a church that reconciles people to You, and to one another. Help us to connect people with You and with one another. Help us to apply the lessons from today and next week as we study this wonderful book of the Bible. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Q & A

- Are the approaches you take based on love?
- Do you express confidence in others, especially when they have decisions to make?
- How is your communication? Do you give people an understanding of your perspective so that they can make good decisions?
- Paul was persuasive, but did not pressure Philemon. Do you pressure people to do what you want them to do?
- Have you ever had to make an appeal? What was the nature of the appeal? Was the appeal successful?

- Have you ever made an appeal that was rejected? Why do you think it was unsuccessful? Did you provide sufficient reasoning why it should have been granted?
- If you were Philemon, would you have granted Paul's request to have Onesimus sent back to him?
- What kind of response do you think Philemon had when he discovered that Onesimus had been found, saved, and was now being returned to him?
- In your life, did you become useful to everyone after being saved? What changed?

Introduction (Matt 5:23–24, 2 Cor 5:18–19, Phile 7-16)

- 1. Because he had confidence in Philemon** (Phile 9, Dan 1:5–16, Acts 25:9–12, Gal 3:28, Phile 7-9, Ps 32:8–9)

- 2. Because of love** (Phile 9, Eph 5:22–23, 25-29)

- 3. Because of His Age** (Phile 9, 1 Tim 5:1–2)

- 4. Because Paul was Imprisoned** (Phile 1, 10)

- 5. Because Onesimus is now a spiritual son** (Phile 10-16, 2 Pet 1:5-8, 2 Cor 5:21, Phil 1:3–7)

Conclusion and Applications