

# To Appeal or Not to Appeal

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**Bible Text:** Philemon 1:8-9  
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John Newton wrote that song. John Newton is the writer of "Amazing Grace" and that song is weighty with truth, is it not? Weighty with truth. Maybe that's part of why this crazy warfare has been going on these last few weeks as we went into the True Church Conference and prayed, "God, bless it. God, make sure my heart is right. God, bless the preaching." He said, "Okay, then I'm going to have to trouble you in ways you haven't thought about. I'm going to have to humble you in ways that you know not of." But he always does it in faithful faithful love.

Philemon. Paul is writing a letter from the Roman prison cell, actually a little hut outside of Nero's palace. He's no longer able to write with his own hand probably just due to the rigors of his incarceration and health issues, so he's dictating to Luke, his companion. Luke is writing it down and it's going to be sent back to this man called Philemon, and it's also addressed to the church that meets in Philemon's house.

Philemon is a godly man. He is a church man. He's the kind of man that Paul has already said, "I know I can count on you. Philemon, you're one of the guys no matter where I am, no matter what I'm doing, I know you're going to be faithful to the Lord. I depend on you, Philemon. I know you're going to stand with me." And Philemon being a wealthy man, he had the means to let the church meet in his house. He, reading between the lines, probably financially helped Paul quite a bit in his itinerant preaching church planting ministry, but there is a very important issue that this letter is addressing. Philemon had a slave named Onesimus. Onesimus robbed from Philemon, abandoned Philemon, ends up wandering around in Rome and he runs into the Apostle Paul. We don't know the timing of this but in his association with Paul and sitting under Paul's preaching and teaching, he is gloriously born again. He becomes a Christian and becomes a great asset and associate to the Apostle Paul, but Paul knows this has got to get fixed so he sends Onesimus back to Philemon with this letter and Paul's goal is, "I've got to get Onesimus and Philemon back together but no longer as master and slave." No, the Gospel changes everything. Can I get an amen there? The Gospel changes everything. Paul is going to write here, "Now Philemon, when Onesimus comes back, he is now your brother in Christ and I want there to be a beautiful reconciliation and forgiveness here." Are you listening to me, church? I don't care what's happened, Christians can reconcile. Now you may have to forgive 70 times 7, whatever that is, 490 or so, but Christians can always humble themselves, forgive and reconcile, and that's where Paul is getting to here but it's a little

bigger than that. As a matter of fact, it's more than a little bigger than that, Paul writes not only to Philemon so that Philemon can demonstrate the power of the Gospel in his life and forgive Onesimus and be reconciled to Onesimus, and not even just be reconciled but now view him as a brother in Christ and no longer a slave under his authority as master, but also he says he is writing to Philemon and the church that meets in your house. What Paul wants this to be is a great learning or object lesson for the entire church as to how we are to conduct ourselves with the kind of love, self-denial and forgiveness and reconciliation that the world knows not of.

As I've told you a thousand times from this pulpit: if you've been wronged, if you've been hurt and if you've been offended, if you don't approach the situation right, you may be a bigger sinner than the one who actually wronged you. Your approach in reconciling is more important, likely, likely more important than whatever was done against you. Do you know why? Because forgiveness and reconciliation pictures God and it pictures his Son Jesus Christ more than anything else, does it not? Have you thought lately what glorious, wondrous, unbelievable forgiveness and reconciliation God has offered to you in Christ Jesus? And surely after he offered it to you, you were perfect toward him from that point onward, weren't you? No, he forgives you again, and forgives you again, and forgives you again, and reconciles again, and forgives you again, and reconciles again, and then the end of all that, he defends your honor before the Father continuously.

So Paul is writing to Philemon and says, "Philemon, when Onesimus gets back, not only does this need to be a glorious illustration that Christ has changed your heart and you really are the man of God I know you are so you will forgive and reconcile to him, this is going to be a great example to the whole church of how we should all always function together as Christians."

Now we come to this new section, well, not new, the continuation, where Paul says in verses 8 and 9,

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--

So here Paul says, "I could just order you to do what you ought to do, Philemon, but I'm not going to do that. I'm going to appeal to you in love." So the title of this exposition is "To Appeal or Not to Appeal." To appeal or not to appeal. Paul says here, "Now Philemon, I've got enough confidence in Christ to order you." It's really the idea of command. "I could command you to do what's right and you've got to do it. I not only function as your pastor, I'm beyond a pastor, I'm an apostle." We don't have the office of apostle anymore but we do have the office of pastor. Paul was functioning in the sense as both of those for those new church plants until they got their own elders in charge, but even when they got their own pastors and elders, he still functioned as an authority over them even. But he says, "I'm not going to do that. I've got much confidence."

Now, let me just unpack that for just a moment. The word "enough," where he says, "I've got enough confidence in Christ," it's really the idea of, "I have much confidence." He says, "I know he saved me and I know Christ has called me to this office of apostle and, Philemon, further I know he has matured me in this work and I know I now have long-term proven credibility, therefore, I do have, Philemon, the God-ordained authority and proven reputation to command you to do what is right in this situation. I mean, I could come to you with no hesitation and order you, Philemon, to get this right and get over it but I'm not going to do that." What actually Paul is saying here is, "In Christian love and in Christian fellowship, I want us to function in more than just the sterile skeleton of the legal precept." A lot of words there, isn't it? "I want us just to have more than the sterile skeleton of the legal precept." Well, what is the legal precept? Well, in this case the legal precept is Paul is an apostle, you are required to submit to him, you are under him, obey him. That's just the sterile skeleton of the precept. But Paul says, "I don't want to just deal with that. That's short of true Christianity. Christians don't just deal with that." He said, "I also want to add the vital energizing light of Christian love to that skeleton." Did you hear that? We have the skeleton of the sterile precept but we want to always strive to add the vital life-energizing love of Jesus Christ to the whole dimension. As we'll see in a few moments, the love of Christ through the Gospel changes everything.

I. Let's note authority structures are given by God. Paul shrinks back not at all to establish that we serve a God of authority structures. God likes structure and order. I have to be a little careful here. There has to be some balance on everything, usually. But God likes structure and order so much so that disorder is ungodly. In God's orderly universe, he has ordained a line of command or structures of authority, and that's exactly what Paul is saying here, "I have confidence, I have one of those offices of responsibility and authority and so, Philemon, I could order you to do what's right. I'm not going to do it this time but I could."

So I thought this is a good place for us to review in our hearts and minds, first of all, now look, you're going to have to listen all the way through this message so you're not out of balance. If I hear you quoting me after we get done and you're out of balance, I'm going to say, "You didn't listen all the way through." But let's talk, first of all, about the sterile structural skeletons that God has ordained for society or for his creatures to function by.

First of all, he has ordained authority structures in his church. Hebrews 13:17, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." Do I have the wrong verse? It should be 17, brother, not 7. Well, you heard it anyway. Obey your leaders and submit to them. They keep watch over your souls. So that's for the church.

Now in the home. Ephesians 5:22, "Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord." Now, we know the husband is to love the wife like Christ loved the church, and the wife is to submit to the husband as to the Lord, but that's just the sterile skeleton of the structure. Then Ephesians 6:1, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." Children are under the structure or under the authority of their parents and that's

the sterile skeleton structure. It's good and it's right. We don't shirk from that. We don't explain that away. It's true.

We go on to society at large or the culture at large and under this we have governing authorities. Romans 13:1, "Every person," every person, "is to be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God." So we as Christians are to be the utmost of respectful to our policeman, our city magistrates, and our leaders. It doesn't mean we agree with their morality or their view of life, it doesn't mean we're not troubled by their utter arrogance like our President has though we might agree with a lot of his policies and positions, which I certainly do. Sure, we don't like something but we are to submit to the office of authority God has ordained. Amen? Never never never never be disrespectful to that law officer who pulls you over. It should be, "Yes, sir," and, "No, sir," and, "I did that, and that's why I need a Savior, I'm a sinner." Good witnessing opportunity, amen?

Your employer. Colossians 3:22. This all comes under society. "Slaves, in all things obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service, as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord." If you are a Christian employee, you work for your employer like working under the Lord, the Bible tells us. From your heart. You've got to understand God ordained his authority. It's not his authority, God ordained that authority, and if that troubles your union boss, your union boss needs to get over it. That's what God says to do. You've got another boss and his name is Jesus. This is God's sterile structure, I call it the skeleton of authority, the legal precept.

The elders in your community, and I know the context here, 1 Timothy 5:1, is the church but the balance of scripture weighs out that we ought to always have respect for those who are older. They are further down the track. Now especially for older brothers and sisters in Christ, but for elders in general. My, how that is missing in our culture. Oh goodness, it's so absent. I don't think it's always been. I believe if you go back to the 1950s, you didn't see this kind of stuff but we have lost it today, respect for our elders. "Do not sharply rebuke an older man," Paul tells young Timothy, "but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers." So he says, "Timothy, be careful." If I went to our senior adult men's Sunday school class, I would not talk to them the way I talk to a 40-year-old men's Sunday school class. I'm the same pastor, they are to honor me as their pastor just like the others, but I can't talk to them the same way. Those men are older than me. They've been down the road further than me and I need to respect that. And if I go to a senior adult ladies class, I just do whatever they say. I love our ladies, and I mean that. I talk to pastors all the time and they are battling older women in the church who are problems. And I'm not just saying this to make up, I'm telling you our ladies are sweet blessings and I thank God for them. They are a blessing to this pastor and they are a blessing to all of us. So don't change, ladies. Be what you are, all right?

Then there are angels. God has ordained authority structures among the angels. He says in Romans 8:38, "For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers." The word

"principalities" there means "rulers." It implies very clearly God has got ruling authorities among the angelic band. Gabriel, the Archangel, the Bible says.

God loves structure and authority. This is the cold, sterile skeleton that God has ordained for all of society, and then even in the Godhead, there are structures of authority and responsibility. Jesus exercised authority in sending the Holy Spirit. For example, in John 14:16, "I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever." He said, "I'm going to go and on my word and my authority, the Spirit will be sent and he'll be another like me. He'll be a helper who will stay with you forever. I'm leaving but he'll be with you forever." And then God the Father's authority over God the Son. Jesus said in John 6:38, "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me." Jesus, God the Son, co-equal to God the Father yet for God's purposes he submits himself to the authority of God the Father. He prayed in the garden, "Not my will but yours, God the Father, I'm under your authority, your will be done." And the Bible says in the end of all things, he will lift up or raise up and present all that he has accomplished and conquered unto God the Father.

God loves order and structure. It's all through the Scriptures. It's to be seen in all parts of mankind. Now listen to me, one of the greatest ploys of Satan is to disrupt these lines of authority. Children start having... Can you believe in a million years we have some states in our country that are contemplating preventing parents by law from helping their children decide what gender they are. What kind of sick, bizarre, perverse wickedness is going on in our country? And that's only compounded by the fact that there are some parents actually giving their little boys female hormones to help them be more like little girls. This is wrong! It is perverse! It is not of God! Parents, not the state, are the authority over children. We wouldn't have these mass shootings and these horrendous things we are seeing today if we had better pastors, better churches and, therefore, better homes. It always flows in that order, brothers and sisters.

Now there is a word I'm going to bring out now and I wonder if anybody can tell me what word I'm likely to bring up at this point? Say it: balance. Balance. Here's what you've got to understand. We're like Paul, we don't shrink back one iota, God has ordained these sterile skeletons of law about authority, but what you need to remember is, you think, "Well, that's pretty heavy. I've got my employer. I've got my church elders. I've got the government. I'm just beat down all the time." Oh, I don't feel sorry for you. Get over it. You'll be all right. But here is what I would say: you don't bear the responsibility for God that authority has. If you would just look at it in the right way, the person under the authority is the protected one. Sir, you listen to me: you'll give an account for your wife and your home in ways your wife will not. Are you hearing me? You bear a weightier accountability and judgment from God. James said, "Let not many of you become teachers," that refers to the office of teacher, the pastors in your church, "Let not many want to be teachers because you will incur a stricter judgment." So before you start squirreling around about, "I don't like it! Why do I have to submit to his authority?" You'd better back up a little bit because if you usurp his authority, you will be judged as if you were an authority and you don't have the calling or equipping to do it. Are you hearing me? So be careful. Balance out the fact you think there is some kind of bad thing

here. No, there is a weighty accountability God has given those who are in authority, and practically every one of us here except for maybe young people, have some position of authority before God. This is the way he structured the world to be a sane and decent culture.

Now, that's the cold, sterile, skeletal structure. Nothing wrong with the skeleton except it just doesn't really work good by itself, does it? Skeletons are kind of cute in some ways, but they are not good for much, especially if you don't like Halloween the way I don't like Halloween. I do like the first "Pirates of the Caribbean." It was pretty neat but other than that, skeletons just, there is just not much about skeletons that do much for me or for anyone. That's why we have II, as Paul continues in verse 9, love's all transforming power. Paul is about to illustrate for us, we don't back up, we don't apologize for the structures of authority God has ordained, amen? But in Christianity, there is this new component that comes into that structure and radically transforms everything about it. Wow. When love comes in, the pastor is different in the way he exercises his authority. When love comes in, the parents are different in the way they exercise authority. When love comes in, the husband is different in the way he exercises headship. It's all transforming. You never deny the authority and subjection role. No, no, no, no, but just that love comes in and changes everything.

Notice what Paul says in verse 9, verse 8 he says, "I've got much confidence that I can order you to do what's right," verse 9, "yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you. I'm going to approach this differently." So what Paul is saying here is there is the sterile skeletal structure but Christian love starts putting the nervous system on that structure, the cardiovascular system on that structure, the vital organs are all there, the muscles, the sinew, the tendons and ligaments and the skin, and all of a sudden what was once just a dead, sterile, cold law becomes a beautiful, vital, energizing life. That's what love does. That's why Christianity is so superior to anything else. The world, if you go all over the world, you'll find these authority structures because they are just ingrained in the fabric of human beings. God made his creatures with this makeup. We get it. We may try to rebel against it but it's there. It's there. We understand it. But Christianity, the new birth, the Gospel changes everything and transforms this. It's an all-transforming influence.

I'm preaching to Brother Jeff this morning because as a pastor, my goodness, how I had to look back through the decades now with you and realize how I have grown and am growing. I have repented and am repenting in having the right approach to various circumstances. For example, I preach to you today as us against them, the world, the flesh and the devil. In the early days, I preached against you. Now I don't mean specifically you but you do understand one of the first things we did when I became your pastor was remove 500 people from the rolls that didn't even come. My point is we had a lot of the unregenerate among the regenerate and I felt the cold harsh resistance and sometimes in error but sometimes rightfully, I combated that with forceful hard reproofs and rebukes. There is a place for that but as you mature as a pastor, and as a people mature with you, you find yourself much more like Paul.

I was thinking about Brother Matt because Brother Matt has been here since he was a boy. He was in Brother David Young's Sunday school class and I thought about mine, and Brother Matt you have to get up tonight and correct me if I'm wrong here, all right? But I think I'm right. But I don't think I've remembered a time that I've called Matt, texted Matt, talked to Matt and said, "Brother, why don't we do this, this and this?" I've never come down on him like harsh because he doesn't need it. He loves the Lord. He loves his pastor. He loves his church. And I think most all the time I'll say, "Brother, what do you think about?" Because I prize his opinion. Now, he knows he's under my authority. He would never go against that but that's not the issue. Brotherly love changes everything. Brotherly love changes everything. Now, there might be someone else in his age bracket that needs to be handled a little differently depending on just where they are and what they're doing. But that's my point.

So there is a balance in this also and that is that appealing in love is not always the best case but as you mature in Christ, you should always strive to be long-suffering and appeal through love and not bring down the harsh hard hand of authority. I know senior adult couples where the husband in that family is still hard handed in his rulership over his sweet wife and he's wrong because she doesn't need that. I know pastors who, like me and many others, face so much opposition and difficulty and like me, blundered and messed up and had to repent a lot along the way, and yet in their latter years they still have a forceful harsh spirit toward sweet sheep who love them and will follow them. What I'm saying is let's all keep striving to exercise this God-ordained authority not by the sterile, cold skeleton of the precept but that skeleton infused with the life-giving energizings of true Christian love.

When I was in Romania the first time, I've mentioned this to you many times, not this particular story, but the fact that that was one of the most startling and shocking things I've ever come into. I was on a train for 7 hours going across Europe. We arrived in Romania. I believe I'm accurate to say that it had only been a few months since the execution of the brutal, tyrant, communist dictator Ceausescu. He had been assassinated, him and his wife. But brutal totalitarian communism had destroyed that country. It was literally like driving into the 1920s, and I mean literally things had not been painted for decades. Everything was dull and gray and drab and you'd pull up to where we were going to stay, what should have been a nice hotel, and there would be one lightbulb hanging from a line. It was like something out of a movie hanging from a wire. It was just very depressing and the people were very depressed, but here's something interesting: the Baptist churches were thriving. Packed. Packed. You're going to think I'm just exaggerating, they'd put 7,000 people in this building if it were over there. I preached in churches where within 20 feet of my pulpit 200 people would be sitting. They would just be stacked right on top of each other. You could preach for 3 hours and they would not move. They needed the word of God. It was the most amazing...as the years go by, I realize what an amazing and unique time that was in church history, how without anybody hardly even knowing it, the Gospel was thriving underneath that great oppression.

But one thing that was interesting as we drove around the cities, was they had these massive, huge, square, multi-storied, drab, ugly, gray buildings. Just ugly. And I asked one of the Romanians, I said, "What are these massive buildings everywhere?" He said, "Well, that's the buildings Ceausescu built to house his people." That's the blessings of communism, everybody gets their own little cubicle so every family had their own little cubicle assigned to them. Once a week they went down to the government food bank and they got their distribution of food and that's the way they lived their lives. And that old building was so unattractive. It just spoke of depression. No freedoms. No liberties. Then I compared that, I flew into New York and I compared it with the buildings I saw there, how different they were. I mean, in New York City we have buildings that were not built by the central authorities but by private citizens who are free; buildings designed not only to just achieve a purpose but to express one's artistic taste and architectural creativity. Glass of various colors and shapes and stonework and engravings and arches and colors and metalworks all over these massive skyscrapers. They were just beautiful. They were works of art. They just breathed with vitality and life and creativity. I thought, do you know what's significant? Those old, drab, square structures out of the communist regime of Ceausescu in Romania, they probably had a very similar skeletal structure as those beautiful elaborate carvings and skyscrapers of New York City, but something was added to the ones in New York that gave it a vitality and a life. So you see, you can believe in God's structures of authority and still miss everything. Paul teaches us that.

"Philemon, we all know God's order of authority. Philemon, I'm over you in Christ Jesus. Philemon, I'm an apostle. Philemon, I could order you, I could command you to do what is proper. But I'm not going to do that. I'm going to appeal to you in love and run the risk that you won't do what's right. I have confidence in you but there is always that risk." So he brings that appeal and that's the way our relationships need to be with one another in the church, in the home. We need to have the vital energizing life of Christian love, not just the sterile structure of the precept.

Psalm 133, I think it's on your screen. I'll turn there but do we had that, fellas? There it is. It illustrates something powerful here about this peace and this sweetness and this oneness that God can give us that nobody else can. He begins here and he says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!" Now for brothers to dwell together in unity, for Philemon and Onesimus and Paul to be in unity, it's going to take something, is it not? It's like going on here. I mean, Philemon could be really upset with Onesimus and not ready to forgive him or restore him, much less view him as a brother, and Philemon could take offense at Paul even suggesting such a thing. I mean, it could be ugly, have a church fight, church split right here in Philemon's house. That could happen but love has all-transforming power. Do you know here at Grace Life Church of the Shoals, in the last 2 decades we've experienced hundreds of things that normally would have split a church but the ladies involved or the men involved decided in love we are not going to make an issue about that. The glory of God and the good of the church is more important than my preference and my feeling and my viewpoint. And we've seen that sweet, love-transforming unity bear out in our church life. It's such a beautiful thing and that's what this is pointing out here.



"Behold, how good," It's just good to look at it. It's good to experience, "and how pleasant it is For brothers to dwell together in unity!" Now verse 2, "It is like the precious oil upon the head, Coming down upon the beard, Even Aaron's beard, Coming down upon the edge of his robes." Now in the Old Testament, oil is almost always a metaphor, a symbol of the Holy Spirit. So when Aaron, the head of the Levitical priesthood, was anointed for his office of priest, they anointed him with oil and it covered him. It saturated him all the way down to the hem of his garment. Here's what the writer is saying, "The Spirit of God changed everything about Aaron. It made it." Now why is he saying unity in verse 1 and the anointing of the Holy Spirit in verse 2? Because they always go together. Where the Holy Spirit is there, genuine Christian love thrives, and where genuine Christian love thrives, forgiveness thrives, reconciliation thrives and unity is the beautiful result. It takes the Spirit of God to make us this kind of person that Paul is hoping Philemon is and he's going to forgive Onesimus. More than that, be reconciled to him. More than that, view him as a brother when he has been so very very wronged. You do understand that under Roman law, Onesimus could be put to death by Philemon, and yet Paul is saying, "Because of the power of the Spirit of God that lives in you and has changed you, I expect a radically better result than that. Full forgiveness and full reconciliation."

Now he says in verse 3, "It is like the dew of Hermon." Let me just stop right there. Hermon was a mountain area and it was known for this heavy dew. That's the way their crops were watered in the dry season. The dew would come up and settle back down on the crops and in the early morning it would be a beautiful picture as everything glistened with the dew all over Hermon. What he's saying is, "This is so attractive." Have you ever looked at a skeleton, just a skeleton? It's not very attractive but you put the muscle and the sinew and the tendons and ligaments and the vital organs, the respiratory system and the cardiovascular system and the nervous system, put the skin on it, it becomes a beautiful living thing, not just a sterile, cold, unattractive skeleton. That's what he's saying here. It becomes a beautiful thing.

The last phrase of verse 3 of Psalm 133, "For there the LORD commanded the blessing-- life forever." In other words, God is the one who commanded all this to take place. God is the one who is behind, who is the author of this kind of Christian love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

Can I challenge you this morning? In the name of Jesus Christ and by the power of the Spirit that lives in you, whatever you have in your heart against a brother, right now in Jesus' name, forgive them. Forgive them. Some of you have been abandoned by a spouse. That's wrong. Nobody is saying that's not wrong but from your heart say, "God, I know you are sovereign and I forgive them, thinking for a moment on how much you have forgiven me. I was a rebel and a traitor against you and you went as far as to defend my reputation before the holy God and vindicate my honor before a holy God who ought to crush me into wrath. So I surely can forgive my brother or my sister in Christ." God authored this. It's the Holy Spirit that brings the love of Christ into our relationships and it's beautiful, it's delightful, and it's productive for our good and for God's glory in his

church. That's what Paul is getting at, "I want this church at Philemon's house to illustrate God's goodness and God's glory."

This won't take long. III. God's structure of authority, it's like a sterile skeleton. The all-transforming power of love in Christian relationships, it's like putting the ligaments and the tendons and the muscles and the vital organs. It makes it a beautiful thing. It changes the nature of that structure of authority. Then but in all of your situations you come into, it might be with a child, it might be with a spouse, it might be with a church member, it might be with whoever in the Christian community, I can't go outside to the governing authorities and others because they are not necessarily converted, but for those of us who know Christ together, we ought to always look at the particulars of each situation, and it's not manipulation, it's not scheming, but be wise about those particulars.

Notice what he says here. We're back in Philemon now, verse 9, as Paul is appealing now, not ordering or commanding. He's got the authority to do it but he chooses not to do that. He has matured beyond that and he knows in this case that's not the right approach. He says in verse 9, "yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you—since," first of all, "I am such a person as Paul," then he's going to say, "the aged," then he's going to say, "a prisoner of Christ Jesus." That was peculiar and particular to this situation. When he says, "I am Paul," he says, "Remember I'm Paul. I'm your dear friend. You and I have had countless hours in the word together, we spent countless hours in fellowship together, Philemon. I led you to faith in Christ. I've disciplined you. This isn't just anybody asking you, Philemon, this is Paul." I have at times exhorted a person, I think I was being loving but I would say, "Now, I'm your pastor. I love you. Now listen to me." That's kind of what Paul is saying, lovingly but saying, "I'm Paul." Philemon knew what that meant.

Then he says, "I am the aged." I am the aged which means, "I have a long reputation, Philemon, of faithfulness. I'm very credible. You know my fidelity to Christ and to you. I've gained a high spiritual appreciation and this should inspire respect for what I'm asking you to do."

Then he said, "I'm a prisoner." I'm Paul, the aged, and a prisoner. "I've suffered like few others have suffered for the faith and for the church." And this should earn Paul a hearing by Philemon and this should earn for Paul a desire out of Philemon to fulfill this appeal and this request.

So a couple of quick thoughts as we close. Make sure in forgiveness and reconciliation or if you are appealing to somebody, and this would go from whether you are the authority structure appealing to the one under you in love, or if you're the one under the authority and you're appealing respectfully to the person over you. Two things, do what Paul did, don't be a manipulator. I see parents doing this and you are going down the wrong road if you are manipulating your children to good behavior. "If you behave, I will ..." You're cursing your children when you do that. Raising children by manipulation is a curse. If you don't believe it is, just wait until the second generation follows your lead. It's ugly. It's awful. It's not good. Don't be a manipulator but do be wise like Paul is. He wasn't manipulating when he said, "I'm Paul. You know how far we go back. I'm an old man

now. I've been at this a long time. You know my credibility and my reputation. I'm a prisoner for Christ. You know I haven't compromised. I'll stay in your house when I'm there and you'll give me the finest room in the house, that's fine too, but when it calls for it, I'll stay in the prison cell to be faithful to Jesus. You know what I am."

So at this point in reading this letter, can you imagine when Philemon got this letter? I'd like to have been there, wouldn't you? When Philemon got this letter and he began to read this letter, I believe Philemon surely felt as we feel, an irresistible humbling, a genuine moving of the heart by this loving gracious dignity of Paul's wise, not manipulation, wise appeal. If you're having to challenge somebody under you, now not every scenario gives you the setting to do that, but when at all possible, find the good and positive things in their life and commend them for those things. Maybe, "You're so good here and you do that so well. I have confidence in you because I see these good things, but over here, would you consider this?" That's Paul's wisdom.

So pray for wisdom for your position of authority, whatever it might be, and pray for humility. If there were a man on earth who rightfully deserved to just say, "This is what ought to be done," it's Paul. But in wisdom he deferred as much as possible, and we see this throughout his writings, to appeal in love and not wield the hammer of authority, because too too often, now there is a place for that hammer of authority from time to time, Jesus showed it, the Apostle Paul showed it from time to time, but most of the time if at all possible, he appealed in love and didn't just resort to the sterile skeleton of the legal precept of his authority.

Now, do you know what time it is right now? It's time for you to do what I've been doing in my study: repent. You need to repent this morning. You may be under authority and you haven't honored God under your authority like you should have and you need to repent. You may be in authority and you about 9 times out of 10 have the hammer of authority going and not the sweet loving appeal that you can exercise in your position. So as your pastor who loves you, I charge you this morning: repent.