

THE STORY OF A RUNAWAY SLAVE NO. 1268

A SERMON
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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

*“Perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that you should receive him forever.”
Philemon 1:15.*

NATURE is selfish, but grace is loving. He who boasts that he cares for nobody and nobody cares for him, is the reverse of a Christian, for Jesus Christ enlarges the heart when He cleanses it. None so tender and sympathetic as our Master and if we are truly His disciples, the same mind will be in us which was also in Christ Jesus. The apostle Paul was eminently large-hearted and sympathetic. Surely he had enough to do at Rome to bear his own troubles and to preach the gospel. If, like the priest in the parable of the Good Samaritan, he had, “passed by on the other side,” he might have been excused, for he was on the urgent business of that Master who once said to His seventy messengers, “Salute no man by the way.” We might not have wondered if Paul had said, “I cannot find time to attend to the needs of a runaway slave.” But Paul was not of that mind. He had been preaching and Onesimus had been converted—and from now on he regarded him as his own son. I do not know why Onesimus came to Paul. Perhaps he went to him as a great many unprincipled persons have come to me—because their fathers knew me. And so, as Onesimus’ master had known Paul, the servant applied to his master’s friend, perhaps to beg some little help in his extremity. Anyway, Paul seized the opportunity and preached Jesus to him and the runaway slave became a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul watched him, admired the character of his convert, and was glad to be served by him. And when Paul thought it right that he should return to his master Philemon, he took a deal of trouble to compose a letter of apology for him, a letter which shows long thinking, since every word is well selected. Although the Holy Spirit dictated it, inspiration does not prevent a man’s exercising thought and care on what he writes. Every word is chosen for a purpose. If he had been pleading for himself, he could not have pleaded more earnestly or wisely. Paul, as you know, was not accustomed to write letters with his own hand, but dictated to a secretary. It is supposed that he had an affection of the eyes and therefore when he did write, he used large capital letters, as he says in one of the epistles, “You see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand.” The epistle was not a large one, but he probably alluded to the largeness of the characters which he was obliged to use whenever he himself wrote. This letter to Philemon, at least part of it, was not dictated, but was written by his own hand. See the 19th verse. “I, Paul, have written it with my own hand. I will repay it.” It is the only note of hand which I recall in Scripture, but there it is—an I O U for whatever amount Onesimus may have stolen!

Let us cultivate a large-hearted spirit and sympathize with the people of God, especially with new converts, if we find them in trouble through past wrongdoing. If anything needs setting right, do not let us condemn them off-hand and say, “You have been stealing from your master, have you? You profess to be converted, but we do not believe it.” Such suspicious and severe treatment may be deserved, but it is not such as the love of Christ would suggest. Try and set the fallen ones right and give them again, as we say, “a fair start in the world.” If God has forgiven them, surely we may, and if Jesus Christ has received them, they cannot be too bad for us to receive. Let us do for them what Jesus would have done had He been here—so shall we truly be the disciples of Jesus.

Thus I introduce to you the text, and I notice concerning it, first, that it contains *a singular instance of divine grace*. Secondly, it brings before us *a case of sin overruled*. And thirdly, it may be regarded as *an example of relationship improved by grace*, for now he that was a servant for a season will abide with Philemon all his lifetime and be no more a servant, but a beloved brother in Christ.

I. But, first, let us look at Onesimus as AN INSTANCE OF DIVINE GRACE.

We see the grace of God in his *election*. He was a slave. In those days, slaves were very ignorant, untaught, and degraded. Being barbarously used, they were for the most part themselves sunk in the lowest barbarism. Neither did their masters attempt to raise them out of it. It is possible that Philemon’s attempt to do good to Onesimus may have been irksome to the man and he may, therefore, have fled

from his house. His master's prayers, warnings, and Christian regulations may have been disagreeable to him and therefore he ran away. He wronged his master, which he would scarcely have done if he had not been treated as a confidential servant to some extent. Possibly the unusual kindness of Philemon and the trust reposed in him may have been too much for his untrained nature. We know not what he stole, but evidently he had taken something, for the apostle says, "If he has wronged you, or owes you anything, put that on my account." He ran away from Colosse, therefore, and thinking that he would be less likely to be discovered by the ministers of justice, he sought the city of Rome which was then as large as the city of London is now, and perhaps larger. There, in those back slums, such as the Jews' quarter in Rome now is, Onesimus would go and hide. Or among those gangs of thieves which infested the imperial city, he would not be known or heard of any more, so he thought—and he could live the free and easy life of a thief. Yet, mark you, the Lord looked out of heaven with an eye of love and set that eye on Onesimus.

Were there no free men that God must elect a slave? Were there no faithful servants that He must choose one who had embezzled his master's money? Were there none of the educated and polite that He must look upon a barbarian? Were there none among the moral and the excellent that infinite love should fix itself upon this degraded being who was now mixed up with the very scum of society? And what the scum of society was in old Rome I should not like to think, for the upper classes were about as brutalized in their general habits as we can very well conceive. What the lowest scum of all must have been, none of us can tell. Onesimus was part and parcel of the dregs of a sink of sin. Read Paul's first chapter of the epistle to the Romans, if you can, and you will see in what a horrible state the heathen world was at that time. And Onesimus was among the worst of the worst. And yet eternal love, which passed by kings and princes and left Pharisees and Sadducees, philosophers and magi to stumble in the dark as they chose, fixed its eyes upon this poor benighted creature that he might be made a vessel to honor, fit for the Master's use.—

*"When the Eternal bows the skies
To visit earthly things,
With scorn divine He turns His eyes
From towers of haughty kings.
He bids His awful chariot roll
Far downward from the skies,
To visit every humble soul,
With pleasure in His eyes.
Why should the Lord that reigns above
Disdain so lofty kings?
Say, Lord, and why such looks of love
Upon such worthless things?
Mortals are dumb; what creature dares
Dispute His awful will?
Ask no account of His affairs,
But tremble and be still.
Just like His nature is His grace,
All sovereign, and all free
Great God, how searchless are Your ways
How deep your judgments be!"*

"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion," rolls like thunder from the cross of Calvary and from the Mount of Sinai. The Lord is a sovereign and does as He pleases. Let us admire that marvelous electing love which selected such a one as Onesimus!

Grace also is to be observed in the next place in the *conversion* of this runaway slave.

Look at him! How unlikely he appears to become a convert. He is an Asiatic slave of about the same grade as an ordinary East Indian sailor or heathen Chinese. He was, however, worse than the ordinary East Indian sailor, who is certainly free and probably an honest man, if he is nothing else. This man had been dishonest and he was daring, for after taking his master's property he was bold enough to make a long journey from Colosse to reach Rome. But everlasting love means to convert the man—and converted he shall be. He may have heard Paul preach at Colosse and Athens, but yet he had not been impressed. In Rome, Paul was not preaching in St. Peter's—it was in no such noble building. Paul was not

preaching in a place like the Tabernacle, where Onesimus could have a comfortable seat—no such place as that—but it was probably down there at the back of the Palatine Hill, where the praetorian guard have their lodgings and where there was a prison called the Praetorian. In a bare room in the barrack prison, Paul sat with a soldier chained to his hand, preaching to all who were admitted to hear him—and there it was that the grace of God reached the heart of this wild young man, and, oh, what a change it made in him immediately! Now you see him repenting of his sin, grieved to think he has wronged a good man, vexed to see the depravity of his heart as well as the error of his life. He weeps. Paul preaches to him Christ crucified and the glance of joy is in his eye—and from that heavy heart a load is taken. New thoughts light up that dark mind. The very face is changed and the entire man renewed, for the grace of God can turn a lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove.

Some of us, I have no doubt, are quite as wonderful instances of divine election and effectual calling as Onesimus was. Let us, therefore, record the loving-kindness of the Lord and let us say to ourselves, “Christ shall have the glory of it. The Lord has done it and unto the Lord be honor, world without end.”

The grace of God was conspicuous in *the character which it worked in Onesimus* upon his conversion, for he appears to have been helpful, useful, and profitable. So Paul says. Paul was willing to have had him as an associate and it is not every man that is converted that we should altogether choose as a companion. There are odd people to be met with who will go to heaven, we have no doubt, for they are pilgrims on the right way. But we would like to keep on the other side of the road, for they are cross-grained and there is something about them that one’s nature can no more delight in than the palate can take pleasure in nauseous medicine. They are a sort of spiritual hedgehogs—they are alive and useful and no doubt, they illustrate the wisdom and patience of God—but they are not good companions. One would not like to carry them in his bosom. But Onesimus was evidently of a kind, tender, loving spirit. Paul at once called him brother and would have liked to retain him. When he sent him back, was it not a clear proof of a change of heart in Onesimus that he would go back? Away as he was in Rome, he might have passed on from one town to another and have remained perfectly free. But feeling that he was under some kind of bond to his master—especially since he had injured him—he takes Paul’s advice to return to his old position. He will go back and take a letter of apology or introduction to his master, for he knows that it is his duty to make reparation for the wrong that he has done. I always like to see a resolve to make restitution of former wrongs in people who profess to be converted. If they have taken any money wrongfully, they ought to repay it. It would be well if they returned sevenfold. If we have, in any way, robbed or wronged another, I think the first instincts of grace in the heart will suggest compensation in all ways within our power. Do not think it is to be got over by saying, “God has forgiven me and therefore I may leave it.” No, dear friend, but inasmuch as God has forgiven you, try to undo all the wrong and prove the sincerity of your repentance by so doing. So Onesimus will go back to Philemon and work out his term of years with him, or otherwise do Philemon’s wishes, for though he might have preferred to wait upon Paul, his first duty was due to the man whom he had injured. That showed a gentle, humble, honest, upright spirit and let Onesimus be commended for it—no, let the grace of God be extolled for it. Look at the difference between the man who robbed and the man who now comes back to be profitable to his master.

What wonders the grace of God has done! Brethren, let me add—what wonders the grace of God can do! Many plans are employed in the world for the reformation of the wicked and the reclaiming of the fallen—and to every one of these, as far as they are rightly bottomed, we wish good success—for whatever things are lovely and pure, and of good report, we wish them God speed. But mark this word—the true reforming of the drunk lies in giving him a new heart. The true reclaiming of the harlot is to be found in a renewed nature. Purity will never come to fallen women by those hideous Contagious Diseases Acts, which, to my mind, wear, like Cain, a curse upon their forehead. Womanhood will but sink lower under such laws. The harlot must be washed in the Savior’s blood or she will never be clean. The lowest strata of society will never be brought into the light of virtue, sobriety and purity except by Jesus Christ and His gospel—and we must stick to that. Let all others do what they like, but God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. I see certain of my brethren fiddling away at the branches of the tree of vice with their wooden saws, but as for the gospel, it lays the axe at the roots of the whole forest of evil. And if it is fairly received into the heart, it fells all the poisonous trees at once—and instead of them, there spring up the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box tree together—to beautify the house of our Master’s glory. Let us, when we see what the Spirit of God can do for men, publish the grace of God and extol it with all our might.

II. And now, secondly, we have in our text and its connections, a very interesting INSTANCE OF SIN OVERRULED.

Onesimus had no right to rob his master and run away. But God was pleased to make use of that crime for his conversion. It brought him to Rome and so brought him where Paul was preaching—and thus it brought him to Christ and to his right mind. Now, when we speak of this, we must be cautious. When Paul says, “Perhaps he departed for a season, that you should receive him forever,” he does not excuse his departure. He does not make it out that Onesimus did right—not for a moment. Sin is sin, and whatever sin may be overruled to do, yet sin is still sin. The crucifixion of our Savior has brought the greatest conceivable blessings upon mankind, yet none the less, it was “with wicked hands” that they took Jesus and crucified Him. The selling of Joseph into Egypt was the means in the hand of God for the preservation of Jacob and his sons in the time of famine. But his brothers had nothing to do with that and they were, none the less, guilty for having sold their brother for a slave. Let it always be remembered that the faultiness or virtue of an act is not contingent upon the result of that act. If, for instance, a man who has been set on a railway to turn the switch forgets to do it, you call it a very great crime if the train comes to mischief and a dozen people are killed. Yes, but the crime is the same if nobody is killed. It is not the result of the carelessness, but the carelessness itself which deserves punishment. If it were the man’s duty to turn the switch in such-and-such a way, and his not doing so should even by some strange accident turn to the saving of life, the man would be equally blameworthy. There would be no credit due to him, for if his duty lies in a certain line his fault also lies in a certain line, namely, the neglecting of that duty. So if God overrules sin for good, as He sometimes does, it is none the less sin. It is sin just as much as ever, only there is so much the more glory to the wonderful wisdom and grace of God who, out of evil, brings forth good and so does what only omnipotent wisdom can perform. Onesimus is not excused then for having embezzled his master’s goods, nor for having left him without permission—he still is a transgressor—but God’s grace is glorified.

Remember, too, that this must be noticed—that when Onesimus left his master, he was performing an action, the results of which, in all probability, would have been ruinous to him. He was living as a trusted dependent beneath the roof of a kind master who had a church in his house. If I read the epistle rightly, he had a godly mistress and a godly master and he had an opportunity of learning the gospel continually. But this reckless young blade, very likely, could not bear it and could have lived more contentedly with a heathen master, who would have beaten him one day and made him drunk another. The Christian master he could not bear, so away he went. He threw away the opportunities of salvation and he went to Rome. And he must have gone into the lowest part of the city and associated, as I have already told you, with the very grossest company. Now, had it come to pass that he had joined in the insurrections of the slaves, which took place frequently about that time, as he in all probability would have done had not grace prevented, he would have been put to death as others had been. He would have had a short stay in Rome—half suspect a man and off with his head was the rule towards slaves and vagabonds. Onesimus was just the very man that would have been likely to be hurried to death and to eternal destruction. He had put his head, as it were, between the lion’s jaws by what he had done. When a young man suddenly leaves home and goes to London, we know what it means. When his friends do not know where he is, and he does not want them to know, we are aware, within a little while, where he is and what he is up to. What Onesimus was doing, I do not know, but he was certainly doing his best to ruin himself. His course, therefore, is to be judged, as far as he is concerned, by what it was likely to bring him to—and though it did not bring him to it, that was no credit to him—all the honor of it is due to the overruling power of God.

See, brethren, how God overruled all. Thus had the Lord purposed. Nobody shall be able to touch the heart of Onesimus but Paul. Onesimus is living at Colosse. Paul cannot come there, he is in prison. It is necessary, then, that Onesimus should go to Paul. Suppose the kindness of Philemon’s heart had prompted him to say to Onesimus, “I want you to go to Rome and find Paul out and hear him”? This evil servant would have said, “I am not going to risk my life to hear a sermon. If I go with the money you are sending to Paul, or with the letter, I shall deliver it, but I want none of his preaching.” Sometimes, you know, when people are brought to hear a preacher with the view of their being converted, if they have any idea of it, it is about the very last thing likely to happen, because they go there resolved to be fire-proof, and so the preaching does not come home to them—and it would probably have been just so with Onesimus. No, no, he was not to be won in that way. He must go to Rome another way. How shall it be done? Well, the devil shall do it, not knowing that he will be losing a willing servant thereby. The devil

tempts Onesimus to steal. Onesimus does it and when he has stolen he is afraid of being discovered and so he makes tracks for Rome as quickly as he can. And he gets down among the back slums and there he feels what the prodigal felt—a hungry belly—and that is one of the best preachers in the world to some people. Their conscience is reached in that way. Being very hungry, not knowing what to do and no man giving anything to him, he thinks whether there is anybody in Rome that would take pity on him. He does not know anybody in Rome at all and is likely to starve. Perhaps one morning there was a Christian woman—I should not wonder—who was going to hear Paul and she saw this poor man sitting crouched up on the steps of a temple. Perhaps she went to him and spoke about his soul. “Soul?” said he, “I care nothing about that, but my body would thank you for something to eat. I am starving.” She replied, “Come with me then,” and she gave him bread and then she said, “I do this for Jesus Christ’s sake.” “Jesus Christ!” he said, “I have heard of Him. I used to hear of Him over at Colosse.” “Whom did you hear speak about Him?” the woman would ask. “Why, a short man with weak eyes. A great preacher named Paul, who used to come to my master’s house.” “Why, I am going to hear him preach,” the woman would say, “will you come and hear him with me?” “Well, I think I should like to hear him again. He always had a kind word to say to the poor.” So he goes in and pushes his way among the soldiers. And Paul’s Master incites Paul to speak the right words. It may have been so, or it may have been the other way—that not knowing anybody else at all, he thought, “Well, there is Paul, I know. He is here a prisoner and I will go down and see what prison he is in.” He goes down to the Praetorian and finds him there, tells him of his extreme poverty and Paul talks to him. And then he confesses the wrong he has done and Paul, after teaching him a little while, says, “Now, you must go back and make amends to your master for the wrong you have done.” It may have been either of these ways, but at any rate, the Lord must have Onesimus in Rome to hear Paul. And the sin of Onesimus, though perfectly voluntary on his part, so that God had no hand in it, is yet overruled by a mysterious providence to bring him where the gospel shall be blessed to his soul.

Now, I want to speak to some of you Christian people about this matter. Have you a son who has left home? Is he a willful, wayward young man who has gone away because he could not bear the restraints of a Christian family? It is a sad thing it should be so—a very sad thing—but do not despond or even have a thought of despair about him. You do not know where he is, but God does. And you cannot follow him, but the Spirit of God can. He is going on a voyage to Shanghai. Ah, there may be a Paul at Shanghai who is to be the means of his salvation. And as that Paul is not in England, your son must go there. Is it to Australia that he is going? There may be a word spoken there, by the blessing of God, to your son which is the only word which ever will reach him. I cannot speak it. Nobody in London can speak it. But the man there will, and God therefore is letting him go away in all his willfulness and folly that he may be brought under the means of grace which will prove effectual to his salvation. Many a sailor boy has been wild, reckless, godless, Christless, and at last has got into a foreign hospital. Ah, if his mother knew that he was down with the yellow fever, how sad her mind would be, for she would conclude that her dear son will die away at Havana or somewhere, and never come home again. But it is just in that hospital that God means to meet with him. A sailor writes to me something like that. He says, “My mother asked me to read a chapter every day, but I never did. I got into the hospital at Havana, and when I lay there, there was a man near to me who was dying. And he died one night, but before he died, he said to me, ‘Mate, could you come here? I want to speak to you. I have got something that is very precious to me here. I was a wild fellow, but reading this packet of sermons has brought me to the Savior, and I am dying with a good hope through grace. Now, when I am dead and gone, will you take these sermons and read them? And may God bless them to you. And will you write a letter to the man that preached and printed those sermons, to tell him that God blessed them to my conversion and that I hope he will bless them to yourself?’” It was a packet of my sermons, and God did bless them to that young man who, I have no doubt whatever, went to that hospital because there a man who had been brought to Christ would hand to him the words which God had blessed to himself and would bless to his friend. You do not know, dear mother, you do not know. The worst thing that can happen to a young man is sometimes the best thing that can happen to him. I have sometimes thought, when I have seen young men of position and wealth taking to racing and all sorts of dissipation, “Well, it is a dreadfully bad thing, but they may as well get through their money as quickly as ever they can, and then when they have got down to begging they will be like the young gentleman in the parable who left his father.” When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in need, and he said, “I will arise and go to my father.” Perhaps the disease that follows vice—perhaps the poverty that comes

like an armed man after extravagance and debauchery—is but love in another form, sent to compel the sinner to come to himself and consider his ways and seek an ever merciful God.

You Christian people often see the little gutter children—the poor little Arabs in the street—and you feel much pity for them, as well you may. There is a dear sister here, Miss Annie MacPherson, who lives only for them. God bless her and her work! When you see them, you cannot be glad to see them as they are, but I have often thought that the poverty and hunger of one of these poor little children has a louder voice to most hearts than their vice and ignorance. And God knew that we were not ready and able to hear the cry of the child's sin, so He added the child's hunger to that cry, that it might pierce our hearts. People could live in sin and yet be happy, if they were well-to-do and rich. And if sin did not make parents poor and wretched and their children miserable, we should not see it and therefore we should not awaken ourselves to grapple with it. It is a blessing, you know, in some diseases, when the patient can throw the complaint out upon the skin. It is a horrible thing to see it on the skin, but still it is better than its being hidden inside. Oftentimes the outward sin and the outward misery are a sort of throwing out of the disease so that the eyes of those who know where the healing medicine is to be had is thereby drawn to the disease—and so the soul's secret malady is dealt with. Onesimus might have stayed at home and he might never have been a thief. But he might have been lost through self-righteousness. But now his sin is visible. The unprincipled one has displayed the depravity of his heart and now it is that he comes under Paul's eyes and Paul's prayers and becomes converted. Do not, I pray you, ever despair of man or woman or child because you see their sin upon the surface of their character. On the contrary, say to yourself, "This is placed where I can see it, that I may pray about it. It is thrown out under my eyes that I may now concern myself to bring this poor soul to Jesus Christ, the mighty Savior who can save the most forlorn sinner." Look at it in the light of earnest, active benevolence and awaken yourselves to conquer it. Our duty is to hope on and to pray on. It may be, perhaps, that "he therefore departed for a season, that you should receive him forever." Perhaps the boy has been so wayward that his sin may come to a crisis and a new heart may be given him. Perhaps your daughter's evil has been developed that now the Lord may convince her of sin and bring her to the Savior's feet. At any rate, if the case is ever so bad, hope in God and pray on.

III. Once more. Our text may be viewed as AN EXAMPLE OF RELATIONS IMPROVED. "He therefore departed for a season, that you should receive him forever." "*Not now as a servant, but a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more unto you?*" You know we are a long while learning great truths. Perhaps Philemon had not quite found out that it was wrong for him to have a slave. Some men who were very good in their time did not know it. John Newton did not know that he was doing wrong in the slave trade and George Whitfield, when he left slaves to the orphanage at Savannah, which had been willed to him, did not think for a moment that he was doing anything more than if he had been dealing with horses, or gold and silver. Public sentiment was not enlightened, although the gospel has always struck at the very root of slavery. The essence of the gospel is that we are to do to others as we would that others should do to us—and nobody would wish to be another man's slave—and therefore he has no right to have another man as his slave. Perhaps, when Onesimus ran away and came back again, this letter of Paul may have opened Philemon's eyes a little as to his own position. Maybe he began to doubt that he was a good master. He had trusted his servant and not treated him as a slave at all, but perhaps he had not regarded him as a brother. And now Onesimus has come back. He will be a better servant, but Philemon will be a better master and a slave-holder no longer. He will regard his former servant as a brother in Christ. Now, this is what the grace of God does when it comes into a family. It does not alter the relations. It does not give the child a right to be pert and forget that he is to be obedient to his parents. It does not give the father a right to lord it over his children without wisdom and love, for it tells him that he is not to provoke his children to anger, lest they be discouraged. It does not give the servant the right to be a master, neither does it take away from the master his position, or allow him to exaggerate his authority—but all round it softens and sweetens. Rowland Hill used to say that he would not give a halfpenny for a man's piety if his dog and his cat were not better off after he was converted. There was much weight in that remark. Everything in the house goes better when grace oils the wheels. The mistress is, perhaps, rather sharp, quick, tart—well; she gets a little sugar into her constitution when she receives the grace of God. The servant may be apt to loiter, be late up in the morning, very slovenly, fond of a gossip at the door. But if she is truly converted, all that kind of thing ends. She is conscientious and attends to her duty as she ought. The master, perhaps—well, he *is* the master and you know it. But when he is a truly Christian man—he has a gentleness, a suavity, and a considerateness about him. The hus-

band is the head of the wife, but when renewed by grace he is not at all the head of the wife as some husbands are. The wife also keeps her place and seeks, by all gentleness and wisdom to make the house as happy as she can. I do not believe in your religion, dear friend, if it belongs to the Tabernacle and the prayer meeting, but not to your home. The best religion in the world is that which smiles at the table, works at the sewing machine, and is amiable in the drawing-room. Give me the religion which blacks boots and does them well, cooks the food and cooks it so that it can be eaten. Measures out yards of calico and does not make them half-an-inch short. Sells a hundred yards of an article and does not label 90 a hundred, as many trades people do. That is the true Christianity which affects the whole of life. If we are truly Christians, we shall be changed in all our relationships to our fellow men and therefore we shall regard those whom we call our inferiors with quite a different eye. It is wrong in Christian people when they are so sharp upon little faults that they see in servants, especially if they are Christian servants. That is not the way to correct them. They see a little something wrong and oh, they are down upon the poor girls as if they had murdered somebody. If your Master, and mine, were to treat us in that style I wonder how we would get on? How quick some are in discharging their maids for small faults; no excuse, no trying the persons again—they must go. Many a young man has been turned out of a situation for the littlest trifle by a Christian employer, when he must have known that he would be exposed to all sorts of risks. And many a servant has been sent adrift as if she were a dog, with no sort of thought whether another position could be found, and without anything being done to prevent her going astray. Do let us think of others, especially of those whom Christ loves even as He does us. Philemon might have said, “No, no, I won’t take you back, Mr. Onesimus, not I. Once bitten, twice shy, sir, I never ride a broken-kneed horse; you stole my money. I am not going to have you back again.” I have heard that style of talk, have not you? Did you ever feel like it? If you have, go home and pray to God to get such a feeling out of you, for it is bad stuff to have in your soul. You cannot take it to heaven. When the Lord Jesus Christ has forgiven you so freely, are you to take your servant by the throat and say, “Pay me what you owe?” God forbid that we should continue in such a temper. Be pitiful, easily entreated, and ready to forgive. It is a deal better that you should suffer a wrong than do a wrong—much better that you should overlook a fault which you might have noticed, than notice a fault which you ought to have overlooked—

*“Let love through all your actions run,
And all your words be kind,”*

is said in the little hymn which we used to learn when we were children. We should practice it now, and—

*“Live like the blessed virgin’s Son
That meek and lowly child.”*

God grant we may, of His infinite grace.

I want to say this, and then I have done. If the mysterious providence of God was to be seen in Onesimus getting to Rome, I wonder whether there is any providence of God in some of you being here tonight? It is possible! Such things do happen. People come here that never meant to come. The last thing in the world they would have believed, if anybody had said it, is that they would be here, yet here they are. With all manner of twists and turns they have gone about, but they have got here somehow. Did you miss a train and so stepped in to wait? Did not your ship sail quite so soon as you expected, and so are you here tonight? Say, is that it? I do pray you, then, consider this question with your heart. “Does not God mean to bless me? Has He not brought me here, on purpose, that this night I may yield my heart to Jesus as Onesimus did?” My dear friend, if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall have immediate pardon for all sin and shall be saved. The Lord has brought you here in His infinite wisdom to hear that, and I hope that He has also brought you here that you may accept it and so go your way altogether changed. Some three years ago I was talking with an aged minister, and he began fumbling about in his waistcoat pocket, but he was a long while before he found what he wanted. At last he brought out a letter that was well near worn to pieces, and he said, “God Almighty bless you! God Almighty bless you!” And I said, “Friend, what is it?” He said, “I had a son. I thought he would be the stay of my old age, but he disgraced himself and he went away from me, and I could not tell where he went; only he said he was going to America. He took a ticket to sail for America from the London Docks, but he did not go on the particular day that he expected.” This aged minister bade me read the letter, and I read it, and it was like this—“Father, I am here in America. I have found a situation, and God has prospered me. I write to ask your forgiveness for the thousand wrongs that I have done you, and the grief I have caused

you, for blessed be God, I have found the Savior. I have joined the church of God here, and hope to spend my life in God's service. It happened thus: I did not sail for America the day I expected. I went down to the Tabernacle to see what it was like, and God met with me. Mr. Spurgeon said, 'Perhaps there is a runaway son here; the Lord call him by His grace.' And he did." "Now," said he, as he folded up the letter and put it in his pocket, "that son of mine is dead, and he is in heaven, and I love you, and I shall do so as long as I live, because you were the means of bringing him to Christ." Is there a similar character here tonight? I feel persuaded there is—somebody of the same sort—and in the name of God I charge him to take the warning that I give him from this pulpit. I dare you to go out of this place as you came in. Oh, young man, the Lord in mercy gives you another opportunity of turning from the error of your ways, and I pray you now, here, as you now are, lift your eyes to heaven, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and He will be so. Then go home to your father and tell him what the grace of God has done for you—and wonder at the love which brought you here to bring you to Christ.

Dear friend, if there is nothing mysterious about it, yet here we are. We are where the gospel is preached and that brings responsibility upon us. If a man is lost, it is better for him to be lost without hearing the gospel than to be lost as some of you will be if you perish under the sound of a clear, earnest enunciation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. How long have some of you been between two opinions? "Have I been so long time with you," says Christ, "and yet have you not known Me?" All this teaching and preaching and invitations—and yet do you not turn?—

*"O God, do You the sinner turn,
Convince him of his lost estate.*

Let him linger no longer, lest he linger till he rue his fatal choice too late. God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—PHILEMON.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—231, 248.**

Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software.

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