

Our Reformation Heritage: The Just Living by Faith

Dr. J. R. Beeke

Reformation Sermon on Romans 1:16-17

Psalter 213:1-3
Read Romans 1:1-17
Psalter 358
Psalter 353:1, 3
Psalter 128

With God's help we ask your attention for Romans 1:16-17: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith."

Our focus today will be on the last part of verse 17, and we wish to consider with you *Our Reformation Heritage as the Just Living by Faith*. We will consider the doctrine of the just living by faith:

1. As foundational for the breakthrough of the Reformation
2. As foundational for the continuation of the Reformation
3. As foundational for present-day revival of Reformation truth

1. As foundational for the breakthrough of the Reformation

The last day of October marks another anniversary of the birth of the Reformation. The Reformation is formally dated from October 31, 1517—the day in which Martin Luther nailed on a chapel door in Wittenberg Ninety-five Theses he had written. These Theses were translated within weeks into most European languages, and spread throughout Europe in a few months. The Lord had been ripening Europe for the Reformation, and when these Theses were spread abroad, the

common people passed them from hand to hand. By the grace of God, the Reformation swept through much of Europe.

Today we are sons and daughters of the Reformation, at least in terms of our heritage. We must also examine if we are sons and daughters of the Reformation in our beliefs and in the daily practice of our lives. It is critical that we examine what God has done in ages past in the light of His Word, and then ask ourselves, “Are we being true to that biblical Reformed heritage?” Reformation Day is designed to revive within us an appreciation not only for what God has done in the past, but also to examine what He is doing with us, with our families, with our congregations in the present, as well as to examine what we are doing with His great Reformation truths.

Now, wherein does the greatness of the Reformation supremely lie? Our answer must be very simple: It lies in the restoration of the Holy Scriptures as the sole, inerrant, authoritative guide for the belief and practice of both the church and individual believers. Our Reformation heritage is the heritage of Scripture. With the restoration of Scripture, a great heritage developed that affected the church in many scriptural ways which we take very much for granted today.

The return of Scripture in the very first place brought the return of biblical preaching. Expository preaching once again gained primacy in worship services, rather than all kinds of liturgical devices.

The return of Scripture also served to promote sound doctrine. Catechisms and doctrinal standards, rich in content, flowed in the wake of a return to Holy Scripture. In our Dutch tradition, of course, we have learned to value the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession, the Canons of Dort—our doctrinal standards from the continent of Europe. In the British tradition, the Westminster Standards: the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Shorter Catechism, and the Larger Catechism; in the Swiss tradition, the First Helvetic Confession and the Second Helvetic Confession—these are all great confessions, speaking one mind in returning to the doctrines of Scripture. Thus, the apostolic doctrines of the New Testament and the doctrine of Augustine with regard to salvation came back to the fore with vibrant reality in the lives of

people. This occurred as people obtained the Bible, read it, searched it, and discovered the doctrines of grace alone, faith alone, Scripture alone, Christ alone, and the glory of God alone. Thousands embraced these truths by the power of the Spirit; they lived them; they shed their blood for them. This is our heritage today.

The return of Scripture also resulted in the restructuring of the church. The hierarchy of some fifteen offices invented by Roman Catholicism was rejected, and the church returned to a simple biblical organization and to biblical principles of discipline.

The return of Scripture also brought back the renewal of godly living and that on the right foundation of gratitude rather than merit. Good works now came to be viewed as flowing out of justification rather than as leading to justification.

The return of Scripture also promoted Christian education. Schools were established to teach scriptural truths. Christian educators aimed to teach little children to read the Bible. As Luther once said, "A plow boy armed with a Bible in one hand and my catechism in another would be able to defend the truths of God's Word against prelates and bishops and even the pope himself." Dependency upon the local priest for the interpretation of Scripture was nearly abolished. All this came out of the return of Scripture to the common man, blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Above all, the return of Scripture brought back the glory of God in the midst of His church. The traditions, ornaments, and idols of men gave way for the Word of God. Churches were whitewashed, idols were smashed. God alone was worshiped. Man was abased and God was exalted.

The return of Scripture brought back especially those biblical concepts that lie at the very center of the message of Scripture itself, particularly the doctrine of justification by gracious faith alone. That is what distinguishes the forerunners of the Reformation from the Reformers themselves. Why do we not call John Wycliffe, John Huss, Peter Waldo, Gregory of Rimini, Thomas Bradwardine, and other forerunners, Reformers? Because they never came to a clear grasp of this doctrine of justification by faith alone. This is what makes a

Reformer a Reformer. Every Reformer taught justification by faith alone.

Consequently, it was really around 1513, when Martin Luther was about thirty years old, that the Reformation was born in his heart, because then the words of our text, “The just shall live by faith,” opened his heart to the gospel and turned upside down his former teaching which stressed that salvation came at least partially through human effort.

The just shall live by faith is the gospel in a nutshell. Paul says in Romans 1 that it is this that he was anxious to bring to the Christians in Rome, but also to preach this gospel in Rome to Jew and to Gentile. For years Paul had wanted to come to the so-called eternal city, the city of Rome, but every time something seemed to happen which made it impossible for him to do so. Fearing that the Romans would begin to think he had no desire to be with them, Paul wrote this remarkable epistle in which, perhaps more than in any other book of the Bible, the doctrines of free and sovereign grace are systematically, judiciously, experientially, and persuasively unfolded step by step, following the order of misery, deliverance, and gratitude. The misery of man is expounded in chapters 1 through 3; deliverance, in chapters 4 through 8; gratitude, in chapters 9 through 16. The book of Romans, more than any other at the beginning of the Reformation, was read and reread. Numerous commentaries were written upon it. It used to be said, half truthfully, that no one could be a real Reformer if he had not written a commentary on Romans. The book of Romans represents the heart of the gospel, for here we see the glorious truths of the gospel set forth vividly and powerfully.

Paul wrote to the Romans to explain to them the gospel. After a powerful introduction, he writes to them, as it were, “Please do not think that I am trying to avoid you because I am afraid to come to your cultured city; for ‘I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ.’ I am not ashamed to bring it anywhere, not also to cultured people at Rome.” And of course, by saying he was *not* ashamed, Paul is using a literary device; he is using a negative to express a positive. He is saying as it were: “I would be glad to bring the gospel to you, for I glory in that gospel, I boast of that gospel. I am ready to preach that gospel

everywhere, because it is the best news that the world has ever heard. It is the evangel, the good news, the glorious news of Jesus Christ. It is the power of God unto salvation for Jews and Gentiles. Thus, I am not ashamed of, but I boast in the gospel of God. Dear Romans, that is the kind of gospel you need.” Paul goes on to say in Romans 1 that you and I, congregation, also need the kind of righteousness that this gospel presents, namely, the righteousness of God.

By speaking here of the righteousness of God, Paul does not mean in this particular case the *attribute* of God’s righteousness or justice. That is how Luther understood it at first. When reading Romans 1: 16-17 in his monastery cell, Luther became very troubled. The justice of God was a source of great fear for him. God was more of a tyrant than a God of love and mercy. He could not grasp how Paul could say that this was his boast, his glory, his joy, and that he could live out of the righteousness of God—“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.” Luther agonized over what that meant. He struggled and said to himself, “How can I live out of the righteousness of God, when I am spending my whole life trying to avoid the righteousness of God because the righteousness of God must condemn me?”

Luther had spent several years trying to meet the demands of divine righteousness. He had slept on cement for many nights in a row. He had denied himself all kinds of basic privileges of life, hoping that somehow he could satisfy God. He turned to mysticism; he tried confession to a priest. Weary of his endless confessions, the priest finally said to him, “Luther, why don’t you go out and commit some real sin once, and then come to me with your confession!” Luther was being led by the Holy Spirit to see his indwelling sin and did not yet know that the solution for all sin was exclusively in the free grace of God. He thought the solution had to involve patching up his life and establishing his own righteousness before a righteous God. And so he came to increasingly dread the righteousness of God.

For ten years Luther struggled with the righteousness of God in the face of his own unrighteousness. He had a spiritual counselor by the name of Johann Staupitz who remained in the Roman Catholic Church, but who himself had been deliv-

ered by the blood of Jesus Christ alone. Staupitz often found Luther walking back and forth in his cell, grieving and groaning over his sins. One time he told Luther, "Your vows will never be sufficient. Salvation is only to be found outside of yourself in Jesus Christ." Another time, when Luther was pacing the cell, wringing his hands and confessing, "My sins, my sins, my sins!", Staupitz simply quoted the Apostles' Creed: "I believe in the forgiveness of sins," and walked away. These things made a deep impression upon Luther, but he still could not grasp how a holy and a righteous God, who could have no compassion with sin, could ever look upon him in mercy.

Has this ever been your struggle, dear friend? No, I am not saying that we need to experience the ten-year struggle that Martin Luther went through. Luther himself would not say that. He once wrote to his congregation, "I am telling you about my struggles not because I would want you to imitate them, but because I would want to deliver you from them." And then he went on to say something like this: "If you take me as a pattern, you would be foolish. Flee directly, just as you are, with all your sins and all your needs to the blood-bought righteousness of the Son of God."

Finally, God broke through in our text words for Luther when he was about thirty years of age. It was as if in one moment the gospel was unveiled before his eyes, and he finally saw that Jesus Christ is the whole of a sinner's righteousness; that He has done everything for a sinner; that He has paid the price of sin; that He has obeyed the law. He later wrote that it was as if his soul "went through the open gates of Paradise." His soul was set at liberty in Christ.

Today, if someone is going to dedicate a statue that has been under cover, there is often a date set for its unveiling as the sculptor nears its completion. An official unveiling ceremony takes place where everyone will be able to see it for the first time. Similarly, when Luther saw that the just shall live by faith and not by works; that faith believes the gospel message that Jesus has done everything for a sinner who can do nothing—when he saw the basic truths of the gospel, and his poor soul was cast upon the righteousness of Christ as his only and sufficient hope for time and eternity, it was as if a sheet or

veil was thrown off the gospel. For the first time he saw with clarity the gospel grace of God in the person of Jesus Christ who is all and in all for sinners who are nothing at all.

You see, congregation, there are two things that you and I will never be able to do that have to be done for us: First, we can never fulfill the law, and we must fulfill the law—either by ourselves or by another doing it for us, because God would not allow into heaven anyone who has transgressed the law and was not forgiven. Secondly, we can never pay for the punishment of our sins, for they demand an everlasting hell. What Luther saw in those moments is that through the righteousness of the gospel, Christ had done those two things. He had obeyed the law perfectly for His people; that is what the Reformers later would call His *active obedience*. And Christ had paid for all the sin of His people; that is what the Reformers would later call His *passive obedience*. Through these two things Jesus satisfied the justice of God. Thus, by graciously believing these truths, a poor sinner could find all his righteousness in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, “for therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, The just shall live by faith.” Luther saw that that righteousness was available; yes, it was *complete*. He saw for the first time what Jesus meant when He said on the cross, “It is finished.”

But he also saw that that righteousness must be received by faith, by Spirit-worked gracious faith. He saw that that righteousness received by faith would be fully acceptable for the whole life of the believer, not only to make him right with God, but also to keep him right with God. “The just shall live by faith.” The just are not only saved by faith; they live by faith. Luther saw that the only way to be a Christian was to live by faith.

Today we too live in the New Testament dispensation when the veil is taken away; Christ is exposed to all who come under the gospel. But our eyes are blinded by nature; we do not have the faith we need to believe the gospel; we do not see that everything is already accomplished. Consequently, we keep busying ourselves, going about to establish our own righteousness.

By grace, Luther, in his so-called tower experience, em-

braced the righteousness of Jesus Christ, as he would later say, in its personal pronouns. He could now say, “Jesus is *my* righteousness; salvation has become reality for *me*.” Luther saw the righteousness of God with the eye of faith through the Scriptures. He would later write:

Here I was in my tower, reading and praying. I labored diligently and anxiously to understand these words of Paul, ‘the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel.’ I sought long and knocked anxiously, for the expression, *the righteousness of God*, blocked my way. As often as I read this expression, I wished that God had not made the gospel known at all. But then one day when I was meditating in the tower, I saw the difference between law and gospel for the first time in my life. The light broke through, and as I formerly hated the expression, “the righteousness of God,” I now regarded it as the most comforting word in all the Bible. In very truth, this language of St. Paul was to me the true gate to Paradise.

Thus Luther experienced two things which lie at the heart of the Reformation—two things which we must know: (1) We must know our unrighteousness uncovered, and (2) we must know the righteousness of Jesus Christ discovered.

“Therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith.... The just shall live by faith.” This became the hallmark of the Reformation which was spread to many other places and people. This doctrine was taken up by Calvin and Zwingli in Switzerland; by Knox in Scotland; by Bullinger, Beza, Bucer, and many others. This doctrine cost martyrs; hundreds were burned at the stake. This doctrine in turn became the seed of the church.

2. *As foundational for the continuation of the Reformation*

The first generation of the Reformation was a tumultuous time, but it was a blessed time. It was a time when people could no longer remain in the Roman Catholic Church out of principle, and at the risk of their lives joined the Protestant cause. But it wasn’t long before this great breakthrough became a dead doctrine. The second-generation Protestants—the children of many of the great Reformers themselves—became, for

the most part, cold and lax. They professed the doctrines, were sound in their orthodoxy, but they did not experience the great doctrines of the Reformation in their hearts. And so, by the 1600s things had become dry and cold and dead in many areas. But God raised up the Puritans in England, the Dutch Second Reformation divines in the Netherlands, and New England Puritans in America, to revive this Reformation truth—the just shall live by faith.

Thus, our text words are not only foundational for the breakthrough of the Reformation, but also for the continuation of the Reformation. The Dutch Second Reformation and the Puritan movement were dependent upon the Reformation. Many divines realized that things were becoming dry and dead. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, men arose who stormed the throne of grace for a revival in practice of the great and glorious doctrines of which Luther had confessed, “Doctrine is heaven.” Under the Spirit’s tutelage, Reformation doctrine and holy living of this doctrine were promoted by men like William Perkins and William Ames, John Owen and John Bunyan in England; Thomas Shepard, Thomas Hooker, and John Cotton in America; William Teellinck, Alexander Comrie, and Theodorus van der Groe in the Netherlands. Revival swept through many areas, as the vitality of this doctrine—*the just shall live by faith*—came to the fore again.

This renewal movement of English and Dutch Puritanism lasted for varying lengths of time in different places. It lasted most of the seventeenth century in many places, but by 1700 things had become cold and dry and dead again. Liberalism, the Enlightenment, and humanism began to sweep through Europe and North America. But the Spirit’s work came to the fore again—especially in the time of the Great Awakening in the 1740s, and from 1800 to the 1820s, when revival swept through much of America and there was a return to this same doctrine—*the just shall live by faith*.

3. Foundational for present-day revival of Reformation truth

Today, we desperately need another revival of Reformation doctrines. We are grateful to see in many areas an increased

spiritual concern to search the Scriptures, to know the truth, and to experience and put into practice the doctrines of grace. Our hearts are encouraged, and yet we are still far from putting these doctrines into practice as we ought. We still have so many remnants of Roman Catholicism which cleave to us and are contrary to the Reformed faith; for example, so many of us are still trying to establish our own righteousness. We are still not seeing the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith. So many do not know anything of the liberty of the gospel. So many are strangers of faith, and we blame God for it, or we go on with our indifference and do not see the urgency that Reformation truth be bound upon our hearts and lived in our lives. We need Reformation truth to sweep through our congregation. We need Reformation truth to sweep through our families and pierce our own hearts. We need to live and to die by this truth—the just shall live by faith. Luther said, “Faith is my life; without faith I cannot live; without faith, I would die.”

The just shall live by faith. Can you say that also—that without faith you would die? Do you grieve over how little faith you have? Do you yearn to have more faith in the gospel, in Jesus Christ, and in the truths of God?

Oh congregation, we do not need the dead orthodoxy of a “hard believism” that stifles and brings a soul under bondage, on the one hand; and we do not need the shallow Christendom of “easy believism” on the other hand; but we need the heart experience of “*God-believism*”—to believe in God and His Son, Jesus Christ, wrought by the Holy Spirit, and received by gracious faith. This believing is indeed impossible with man, but is possible, yes, sure with God. By the power of God’s miraculous grace, we may and must experience and live this great truth—the just shall live by faith.

APPLICATION

“The just shall live by faith.” To live out what he experienced in the tower really cost Martin Luther his whole life. In 1517 he posted the Theses; in 1521 he was excommunicated from the church. He was invited to go to the Diet of Worms. At the Diet, he was surrounded by numerous church authorities

who, after placing his books on a table in front of him, demanded that he recant his writings. The following day, Luther gave this famous answer:

Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason, I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other. My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise. God help me, Amen.

Following this noble confession, Luther was immediately banned. To be banned meant that if anyone found you they had a right to capture and kill you. But Frederick, anticipating Luther being banned, had arranged that Luther be kidnapped and brought to the Castle of Wartburg. While there, in one year's time, he did a mighty work of translating the Scriptures. The German Bible translated by Luther is even more widely accepted today in Germany than the King James Version is in North America. God had a purpose for everything He did, also in the life of Luther. But all his life Luther had to live out of this truth—*the just shall live by faith*. There were times he could not understand God's ways. There were times his faith waned and he slipped into despondent periods of unbelief. He once wrote that he had more trouble with the Anabaptists on his left than he ever had with the Roman Catholics on his right.

Luther also faced numerous periods of sickness. Some years he was sick most of the year; one year he battled sickness for ten months, and yet went on preaching and writing. Sometimes he could only preach about a third of the time because he was so sick, but he would keep on writing. He wrote ninety-four volumes, many of them from his bed. Also from his bed he gave directions for the Reformation—how to build; how to go forward—all the while experiencing *the just shall live by faith*.

Sometimes Luther was so overwhelmed by liberals on the left and the legalists on the right that he could hardly believe that God was directing all these things. One time he said to his wife, "I am afraid God is dead; it is not easy to build a church with sinful human beings." His wife pulled all the shades of their house that day, and when Luther came home, he rushed

to his wife and said, "Who died today?" She said, "Well, you said this morning that God was dead." This broke the bands of unbelief again. So you see, even though Luther had his depressions and his times of unbelief and doubts and fears, still it was this that kept his soul alive—*the just shall live by faith*.

When challenged by popes and emperors to renounce Paul's doctrine of justification by faith alone, without works, he once wrote:

I see that the devil is continually attacking this very fundamental article of justification by faith alone, and that in this respect he cannot and will not stop or slow down any of his attacks. Well, then I, Dr. Martin Luther, unworthy herald of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, do confess this article, that justification by faith alone, without works, justifies in the sight of God. And I declare that in spite of the Emperor of the Romans, the Emperor of the Turks, the pope, all cardinals, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, kings, princes, nobles, all the world, and all the devils of this world, this truth shall stand forever. And those who persist in opposing this truth will draw down upon their heads the flames of hell. Christ alone takes away sin. We cannot do so by all of our works, nor any of our works, but good works follow redemption as surely as fruit appears on the living tree. This is our doctrine and we will hold fast to it in the name of God until we die.

The just shall live by faith. It is all the gift of God. It is all the work of God. The just live by faith in God, by faith in His righteousness. Oh congregation, take away the righteousness of Jesus Christ and we can close the church doors. There is no purpose in going on without the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is nothing to live out of. Dear friends, you must be stripped of your righteousness and you must be brought to Jesus Christ. There is no other way to live and there is no other way to die, but upon Christ's righteousness alone.

The Roman Catholics were not against faith; they were not against grace; they were not against Scripture; they were not against the glory of God. But they said all these things must be combined with other things. There must be the glory of God

and honor to the pope; it must be faith *and* the works of man; it must be Scripture *and* tradition. But what we have been trying to lay before you is this truth—that you must lose everything from your side to find everything in Jesus Christ.

Sometimes we are encouraged when we may believe that the Holy Spirit is showing some fruit; other times we are discouraged. Sometimes we hear religious talk and even prayers that scarcely mention Christ or His righteousness. We can be ever so religious, but if we are not stripped of our own righteousness and do not know what it means to live out that struggling warfare of *the just shall live by faith*, we will perish in the flames of hell! There is no other righteousness. Luther said, “We need an alien righteousness,” and by that he meant a righteousness outside of us; and we need that righteousness brought home to our hearts. *The just shall live by faith*.

What do we need today? We need to embrace with both mind and heart the truth of justification by faith alone. We must not think or feel that we must just sit back and wait to see if God might do something at some time. In the meantime—well, we come to church and do what we can; we do our best, and we just hope for the best. My friend, with that kind of doctrine you will go to the place of the damned. You must be born again. You must lose all your righteousness and you must find righteousness in Jesus Christ. And that righteousness is available. It is offered to you. It is presented to you. You are invited to come to God just as you are, as a poor, wretched, miserable sinner, in all your sinfulness to receive by Spirit-worked faith the righteousness of God.

My dear friend, whose righteousness are you living out of? Are you still living by some righteousness that you produced? I warn you with love for your soul’s eternal welfare, it will never work—I repeat, establishing your own righteousness will never, never work. God is too holy and you are too sinful. Luther tried it for ten years. He did a thousand more things than you will ever do. He used to fast three days at a time without one drop of water or one bite to eat, and a voice inside would say, “Have you fasted enough?” He would go without sleep, and the voice inside would say, “Are you sleepless enough?” He would repent and go to the priest and confess,

and confess, and confess, and the voice inside would say, "Have you confessed enough?" Our righteousness will never be enough. Indeed, as soon as we think we have enough, we have not become Christians but Pharisees.

But the good news of the gospel, congregation, is that Jesus Christ's righteousness—not your righteousness—is enough, yes, more than enough. The righteousness of Jesus Christ is bread enough and to spare in the Father's house. The greater Joseph is yet alive, the storehouse is open for sinners, for beggars. Oh, go to the greater Joseph and say: "Lord, I need Thy righteousness. Teach me who I am. Teach me who Thou art, and who Thou art willing to be for poor sinners like I am."

Oh dear congregation, we love your souls and we long to see your souls saved by the righteousness of Jesus Christ. There is no other name that we can direct you to; there is no other righteousness that we can direct you to than this Name and this righteousness. We want to make crystal clear for you that this righteousness can meet your every need. This righteousness does everything for a sinner; it saves him and it keeps him saved, so that his whole life is our text, *the just shall live by faith*.

Seek this righteousness. Do not be content being unconverted. Ask God to go against you in order to save you, to go against your natural heart in order to wean you from your own righteousness and to drive you to Christ's righteousness.

Oh congregation, what will it be to be in an orthodox church, to be a son and daughter of the Reformation by inheritance, and yet never in your whole life to have grasped the foundational principles—with your mind or with your heart—of the Reformation itself; and then to be cast into hell because you clung to your own righteousness all your life! The sooner it becomes your fault that you are unconverted, the better. I know that is not easy to hear, but it would be good for you if your inability, your unconverted state, and your distance from God would all become your sin, and drive you to the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Seek the Lord while He is yet to be found; call upon Him while He is yet near. AMEN.

The Messenger of the Covenant

Rev. J. Greendyk

Psalter 395:1, 3, 4

Scripture: Malachi 3

Text Malachi 3:1 Advent Sermon

Psalter 186

Psalter 217:2, .3

Psalter 249:4-6

Congregation, the words of our text may be found in Malachi 3:1, where we read as follows: “And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant.” This text speaks about “The Messenger of the Covenant”:

1. The Messenger of God to man, and
2. The Messenger of man to God.

Malachi 3:1 must be viewed in light of the preceding verse, Malachi 2:17. Malachi, we know, was a prophet who labored in Israel during the time of Nehemiah. One of the great sins that the Israelites were committing at this time was unbiblical divorce. They were putting away their wives for pagan women. Thus Malachi is called by God to reform the church. He is called to reform Israel. Not only were the Israelites breaking the marriage covenant instituted by the Lord, but because the Lord did not immediately bring the threatened judgments upon this sin, a spirit of practical atheism took root.

Many of the priests of Israel as well as the people acted as if there were no God, because the Lord did not come with His judgments. In their blindness they convinced themselves that it was as if there were no God of Israel, no God of their fathers, namely, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob.

We can see this negative attitude in Malachi 2:17 where we read, “Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him?”

When ye say, “Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, where is the God of

judgment?” What the people were really saying is: “Where is God who has said that because of sin He will come with His judgments and destroy us? It seems like He does not exist because we are still allowed to go on in our way of life.” Israel had lost sight in the first place of the holiness of God. They had lost sight of the fear of God, that He is to be revered, and that He is a God of majesty and greatness. They had also lost sight of the fact that God is a God of justice who in no wise can clear the guilty.

Now we would think that Malachi actually begins to speak in the verse that we have before us, but it is Christ, through the mouth of Malachi. Christ says: “Behold,” and literally that means: take heed, stop, and consider because I will come with my judgments. I will perform that which I have determined regarding you as a wicked and adulterous generation. I will not allow you to think lightly of sin. You will have to give an account of all you do.

When Israel says, “Where is the God of judgment?”, Christ now says as it were, “I will give a very clear explanation regarding your question.” In answering the question that the Israelites ask in self-boldness, the Lord Jesus says: “Behold, give attention, listen to what follows.” He says not only, “Behold,” but He says, “Behold, I will send my messenger.” Christ says: Give good attention, those of you who live as practical atheists, who live as if there were no God of judgment, who will pour out His wrath and His indignation on you. But how wonderful, that the Lord Jesus Christ also says, “Behold,” to those who seek Him. “Behold,” to you that enquire after me.

There are people who say, “Where is the God of judgment?” There are people who doubt My existence, but at the same time there are people who are poor and needy, who seek Me *not* because they doubt My existence, but because they desire to live with the God of grace and mercy.

When we hear the words, “Behold, I will send my messenger,” that can be said in different ways. It can mean, “Behold, I am sending,” or it can mean exactly what it says, “Behold, I will send,” but it can also mean in the Hebrew, “Behold, I will in a short time send my messenger.”

Who is now that messenger that the Lord Jesus is speak-

ing of, boys and girls? Who was the forerunner of the Lord Jesus? Well, I think you all know that it was John the Baptist. What did John the Baptist preach when he began his ministry? He said, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). Did he mean that the judgment and the wrath of God was going to come? Did He mean that the last day of man's existence was going to come? No, when John the Baptist preached, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand," he was, as it were, opening the door to reveal unto the people that the Messiah would come forth. This text which says, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me," first, clearly reveals that it is Christ speaking; secondly, it reveals that it is John the Baptist being referred to; and thirdly, this text affirms the harmony of the Old and the New Testament since it is fulfilled in Matthew 11:10.

Christ says, "And he shall prepare the way before me." John the Baptist is the messenger who begins to preach: Repent and turn from your sins, ye wicked and perverse generation! He also preaches that there is the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.

Christ testifies that John the Baptist will begin to preach of that everlasting covenant that is ordered in all things and sure. He will unfold the great mystery of godliness, that God will be manifest in the flesh. He will reveal that Jesus Christ will come from the courts of heaven and descend into this world to bear the sins of His people. Then the Lord Jesus speaks unto those who are earnestly and diligently, fervently and prayerfully, as well as anxiously seeking after Him, and declares, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me."

Our text begins, "And the Lord;" notice that the name, "Lord," begins with a capital letter "L," but the other letters are all lower case. This refers literally to the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It refers to the Messiah, to Christ, the anointed of the Father that shall come forth.

What sweet words follow the text! Christ encourages those who are anxious for their souls. He encourages those who have been waiting upon the Lord with fervent prayer and who are ready to perish. He speaks to a people who are spiritually in

the land of darkness. He says, "Behold, the Lord shall come, whom ye seek." Oh, He shall come for you who see nothing but the mountain of your sin. He shall come for you who have to complain that your sins rise up against you prevailing day by day, but who also cry, "Oh God, wilt Thou in Thy mercy take them all away?" Jesus Christ has a word for His poor and needy ones. He shall come for that soul who cries like Bartimaeus, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me" (Luke 10:47). "And the Lord," whom you've come to realize you cannot do without, shall suddenly come to His temple. Oh, what words from the very lips of Christ for a weary soul! What words from the lips of Christ for a heavy-laden and burdened soul! What words from the lips of Christ, "And the Lord" whom ye seek shall come! Christ says as it were, "Fear not, sinner, for I know that ye seek Me. Fear not, poor, burdened, and struggling soul, I am Jesus whom ye seek. I shall come in the manger in Bethlehem and your eyes shall behold the King in His beauty. You shall indeed be refreshed and revived. You shall be raised up from the pit of self-made destruction, because you are seeking Me. And why are you seeking Me? Because I have first sought you. You are seeking Me because of the covenant of grace that was made in eternity. My Father has revealed that He has loved you with an everlasting love. In that covenant made in eternity, you are one of the jewels that I have seen displayed before Me by My Father, and so I have come to redeem and to deliver your soul."

Fear not, those of you who seek Jesus. He is the messenger of the covenant, "and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." What temple is being referred to? The second temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Joshua of which you can read in Ezra 3. The rebuilding of the second temple points to Christ as the only sure foundation for a sinner.

The messenger of the Father comes with glad tidings and says, "And the Lord whom ye seek!" He comes with glad tidings to your soul and declares by His angel, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:11)."

Our text says, "Whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple." What does that mean, congregation? It means liter-

ally that Mary and Joseph would present the Lord Jesus on the eighth day in the temple. Jesus' coming would be sudden, when no one was expecting Him. Is it not the same in the life of a child of God who is seeking, when he experiences that the way of hope from his side seems to be cut off?

Is it not the true seeker, who complains with holy complaints of what we read in the Scriptures: My way is hid from the Lord, and my judgment is past over for my God? Oh, my God has forgotten me and He has forsaken me, and that rightfully so, because I have sinned against Him? I have broken that covenant between God and myself, and I find that I am utterly unable to repair it.

But congregation, there is a Testator, there is a Surety, there is the Man of a better covenant. There is that covenant Head, Jesus Christ Himself, and He shall come suddenly. His name is, "the messenger of the covenant," or the ambassador of the covenant, but also the angel of the covenant. It will not be a messenger who comes to you, dear trembling soul, to deceive your soul; oh no, but a messenger who has loved you with an everlasting love. He is the messenger who is faithful and true. This messenger, Christ Jesus, is one who shall never lead his people astray, but shall lead them in the path of life and righteousness. He shall lead them by His Spirit to Himself as the messenger of the covenant, the messenger in whom is all their delight. You shall be led to the messenger to whom your heart is going out, to the messenger before whom you are expressing all the needs of your soul. You shall be led to that messenger who knows that you have a broken and a contrite heart, who knows that you have been humbled under a sense of your sin, and have a sense of the wrath of God. You shall be led to Him who, as the messenger of the covenant, is a messenger of mercy. He is the messenger of pardon and the messenger of peace, because His Father has set Him as the Head of that covenant, just as Adam was the head of the covenant of works.

Have we ever realized that in the covenant of works there were three things set forth? In the first place, there was the condition of obedience. If Adam obeyed perfectly, the Lord promised eternal life. Upon obedience, Adam, after a probationary period, would have attained to eternal life. But as in all

covenants, there is also a penalty. Upon disobedience or upon breaking of that covenant, the Lord also said that there would be a threefold death: temporal, spiritual, and eternal. The Scriptures reveal our breaking the covenant of works in Hosea 6:7 where it says, "But they like men," or literally it says, "And ye like Adam have transgressed the covenant." Thus every single one of us is a covenant breaker. But here in this text is set forth One who came to repair the breach, Jesus Christ Himself, and He is the Head of that covenant of grace. In the covenant of works Adam was our head and representative with the Trinity. But in the covenant of grace, which is spoken of in our text, God the Father represented the Trinity and Christ represented His elect. And so we find here the elect of God who are members of that covenant, and they shall seek Him with all earnestness and diligence.

Congregation, do not think that election is a doctrine to discourage you. Rather, acknowledge the Lord that there is an election, because how just and righteous He would have been to cast us all away and to leave us to perish in our misery! Election ought to be an encouragement for a seeking soul. Rather than looking at it as an obstacle, they view it as a wonder that there is an election. And why? Because with election there is the possibility to be saved. Election is therefore the friend of sinners. Election is not an obstacle, nor a hindrance. Do you know who makes it an obstacle and a hindrance? Our own evil heart, and Satan, who wants to turn the very character of God upside down. He wants us to view God as being harsh and cruel through His doctrine of election, rather than seeing God's election as something that should encourage us to seek. The devil darkens that sweet, gracious and comforting doctrine of election.

Now this doctrine of election, congregation, is part of the covenant of grace, because Christ, as the covenant Head, through the shedding of His blood, has also sealed the very benefits of this covenant so that nothing shall fail for those who seek after Him.

Therefore, seeking soul, "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple."

In examining this covenant of grace as found in the text, in

the first place, it is a covenant *of old*. In the heart of God the Father there was contemplation about how He may get His Hephzibahs back, the people in whom is all His delight. What a blessed thought! God the Father in eternity already considered how to secure the redemption of those whom He had loved with everlasting love.

We see not only that it is a covenant of old, but we see secondly, that it is a *sure* covenant. The covenant of works was broken by us through Adam, because of our disobedience, but this covenant of grace is sure in Jesus Christ and it shall endure to all eternity. It is called in Isaiah 55, “the sure mercies of David.” It is signed, sealed and ratified by Christ and His perfect work. It is so well-ordered that not one part of that covenant can ever fail.

In the third place, it is also a covenant that is *immutable* or unchangeable. The covenant of works was a covenant which God made with Adam. There was nothing in that covenant that Adam could say was ever against his flesh. The Lord sought Adam’s happiness, advancement, and the glory of His own Name in the covenant of works. That covenant was broken, but the covenant of grace is an unchangeable covenant. Neither time nor eternity can change it; neither life nor death can change it; neither things present nor things to come, nor angels nor principalities, nor powers shall be able to change or violate the covenant of grace. The covenant of grace is as old as eternity, and as everlasting as its Head, and therefore, the covenant mercies shall come unto those who seek the Lord in truth.

In the fourth place, it is also a *full* covenant. It is a full covenant because God is the portion of that covenant for His people. Christ is the Head, the meritor as well as the communicator of the covenant, by the Holy Spirit. The covenant is complete, and therefore the Holy Spirit is ready, willing and able to perform that which is in that covenant.

In the fifth place, the covenant of grace is a *gracious* covenant. It is a gracious covenant in contrast to the covenant of works which required you and me to perform something. The covenant of grace is a gracious covenant because everything is done already, and freely given to a sinner. There is nothing that a fallen sinner has to do. It is a covenant wherein

grace is the basis, grace is the condition, grace is the foundation and grace is the top stone. Therefore, congregation, it takes out of the hands of man what man would still try to do for his salvation. It is a gracious covenant, and therefore nothing of man's work is of value. What a hard lesson for a sinner to learn! Here is revealed the very covenant of grace which is so complete, so enduring, so gracious that David had to say, "God...hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire" (2 Sam. 23:5).

Oh congregation, what a rich covenant! It is this covenant which is the only foundation for a sinner's salvation. It is this covenant which is the hope of a lost sinner. It is this covenant, with Christ as its Head, that is unbreakable.

Finally, this covenant is *one-sided*. It is not a covenant that the Lord has made with man because man broke the first covenant. It is a covenant made from God's side with His only-begotten Son, and now for the fulfilment of this covenant, Jesus Christ had to come in the flesh. "The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant."

Our text says, "Even the messenger of the covenant." Congregation, that covenant is only solid, sure, everlasting, and full, because of Jesus Christ. He is the messenger of the covenant who comes with the gospel of peace. He is a messenger who excels all other messengers, namely, His undershepherds. Who can ever stand in the shadow of this holy, harmless, and undefiled Head of the covenant? He is that messenger who is worthy. He is that messenger who has favor with God and with man. He, as the Scriptures say, is that blessed potentate, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords.

Jesus Christ is not only God's messenger to sinners, but as we shall examine in our second thought: "The Messenger of man to God." Before we go further let us sing 217, all stanzas.

Christ is full of wisdom, for all the foolishnesses of those who seek Him in earnestness and truth. Christ as the Head of that covenant is the One who has all the skill to lead a bankrupt and broken hearted sinner unto Himself, by the drawing love of His Father and the drawing work of the Holy Spirit. He

is the messenger to a sinner, declaring that He is the repairer of the breach and the restorer of paths to dwell in. Therefore, Paul could write in Ephesians 2:13-14, "But now in Christ Jesus ye who were sometimes afar off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace."

The messenger of the covenant, Christ Jesus, is called in the Bible the one who is faithful and true. He shall never disappoint His Father. He shall never fail in His work. He shall seek, and He has sought, the glory of His Father. Because He is faithful and true, He is also desirous that no sinner miss the pardon that there is in the covenant of grace. Jesus as the messenger of the covenant has made it possible that God might be just, and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. His word is faithful and true, seeking soul in our midst, because He has said, "I come." I come to seek and to save that which was lost. I come for seeking souls who see every other way cut off. He is faithful and true and therefore can say unto you, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

But maybe you say, troubled and burdened soul, "Is He so qualified, is He so fit as to bear all my sins, all my guilt, all my failures, all my backslidings, take away all my enmity, and remove my rebellion? Is He so fit?" Oh yes, this messenger of the covenant, Christ Jesus, has been chosen by His Father. He is therefore qualified as the one anointed of His Father to perform all that a poor and a needy sinner needs. And how qualified is He? Hear His own word, "Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart." He came to fulfill that law of love, but also that law that condemns you. He has fully satisfied. He has paid the price with His own blood and therefore He is the messenger who seeks your welfare this moment. He is the Lamb that was slain from before the foundation of the world. This messenger is fully qualified, able, willing and ready to perform what you cannot perform. So desirous was this messenger to glorify His Father and to save the elect that He came in the rags of wretched humanity, that He might put an end to the war that rages between lost sons and daughters of Adam, and His gracious and holy Father. Christ is desirous to repair the breach between a holy God and a guilty sinner.

Christ, as the messenger, is also the one who, as the covenant Head, offers gracious terms of peace. He is that covenant Head who comes as the messenger of the gospel, through His undershepherds, declaring that He desires the return of enemies and rebels.

As the messenger of the covenant, Christ has an instructive word for us through Jeremiah who says in Jeremiah 3:13: "Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God." The Lord says to us: Acknowledge thy guilt, acknowledge thy vileness and lay down your weapons of enmity, for in Me there is fullness of mercy, in Me is fullness of pardon, in Me is fullness of peace. It is this messenger who seeks the welfare of sinners in the offer of the gospel. This messenger says, "Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth" (Isa. 45:22). This messenger also declares, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel," and shall this messenger of the covenant prevail with a sinner? Yes, He shall prevail because He is God and man. He is endowed with power, wisdom, and skill. He is righteous in all His ways, and therefore was obedient unto His Father. He has fully satisfied for the sins of all His people. He shall prevail as the representative of His church in the holy courts of His Father.

Thus we may say that He is not only the messenger of God to man but He is also the messenger of man to God. Why is He the messenger of man to God? Because Christ has said, "My Father heareth me always." The messenger whom ye seek shall not fail you. The messenger whom you are seeking with all your heart shall give an answer. And why? It is because He is the gracious, loving, and tender Head of the covenant. Christ not only had thoughts of peace for you in eternity, but He has also seen you in time as you have been agonizing upon your knees in prayer. He witnesses your walking under the load of sin and your crying both night and day, "God be merciful to me a sinner." He shall hear your cries because He has ascended as messenger of the covenant to the right hand of His Father. He is touched with the feelings of all the infirmities of His poor and His needy people. Shall the sighs, the groans, the fears, the doubts and the troubles of such seekers go unanswered? No, the messenger of the covenant has given the answer, "For the

oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set Him in safety from him that puffeth at him." He will set the troubled, terrorized, and fearing soul in safety. The messenger of the covenant, Christ Jesus, ever liveth at the right hand of His Father to make intercession for you, dear child of God. The messenger of the covenant shall not fail, because, even as He is before the throne of His Father, He hears your cry as He also heard the cries of the Israelites when they were in Egypt. What was their cry? Listen, "And the children of Israel sighed by reason of the bondage, and they cried, and their cry came up unto God by reason of the bondage. And God heard their groaning and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them" (Exod. 2:23-25).

Oh, poor trembling soul, who in this advent season cries out from the heart, "Oh, when shall He come unto me, for I seek Him, but I cannot find Him"? He shall come whom ye seek, and He shall come with the message of peace. He shall come with a word of comfort. The word from the messenger for your soul is, "Pour out your heart before Him, God is a refuge for you." Poor trembling ones who stand afar off and see that salvation is so impossible, Christ, the messenger of the covenant says, "Pour out your heart unto Me. Let Me hear your sighs. Let Me hear your cries. Let Me hear your groans." He hears the needy when they cry, He saves their souls when death draws nigh.

Congregation, for the needy ones in our midst, Christ shall never tire of the thousands of petitions that you lay at His feet, because he is a messenger that never slumbers and never sleeps. He wrestles night and day for His poor and His needy church. He knows about the sins that cling to you. He knows you desire grace. Christ knows you long for Him, and shall not the messenger of the covenant speak unto you and make it well? He is the one who takes your poor prayers, puts His own incense upon them, washes them in His blood and presents them unto His Father. We may say as one of our forefathers has said,

*He sweetens every humble groan,
He recommends each broken prayer.*

*Recline thy hope on Him alone,
Whose power and love forbids despair.*

This greater Boaz shall not be at rest until He hath finished the thing this day. Therefore my dear son and daughter of Jerusalem, sit still and wait upon God. He will surely come. He will not tarry.

Oh congregation, what a messenger is to be found in the covenant Head! "And the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come." He will come with His word of salvation and speak peace unto your soul. He will declare, "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." He will say, "I am thy salvation." Therefore, not one thing shall fail that He has spoken to you.

Congregation, we read in verse 2 of Malachi 3: "But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth?" Christ tells those who mock with Him, who do not believe on Him, who act as if there is no God, that there is a day coming that all who count the blood of the covenant an unholy thing shall perish. All your life you continued to set up your weapons of enmity against Him. Therefore, His message shall not fail regarding His enemies. What is that message? "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him." The message from the covenant Head to every unbelieving and unrepenting sinner who hears the gospel shall be, "It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for thee." The apostle Paul has so clearly defined what shall be the end of those who obey not the gospel in Hebrews 10:26-29: "For if we sin willfully after that we have received knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.... Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Congregation, these are the words of the messenger of the covenant: If ye fight against Me, your weapons shall never prevail. Oh, therefore, surrender at His feet, fall at His feet as a

guilty sinner and say, "Lord save me, else I perish." This messenger is God's provision for the salvation of fallen sinners. This messenger desires the ingathering of thousands of souls because He sees eternal torment approaching. He sees approaching everlasting wrath, and so He says, "While it is yet today, hear My voice. This is the day of your salvation. Now is the acceptable time."

One last word for the struggling, seeking soul who with all his heart says, "Oh that I knew where I might find Him!" What is your prayer? Is it not comprehended in this precious hymn:

*Pass me not, O gentle Savior, hear my humble cry,
While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by.
Let me at a throne of mercy, find a sweet relief;
Kneeling there in deep contrition, help my unbelief.
Trusting only in Thy merit, would I seek Thy face;
Heal my wounded, broken spirit, save me by Thy grace.
Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry!
While on others Thou art calling, do not pass me by.*

Did the Messenger of the covenant pass by Bartimaeus, pass by Manasseh, pass by the Jerusalem sinners, pass by Saul on the way to Damascus, pass by Lydia, pass by the Philippian jailor? No, and He shall not pass by you. "He which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." AMEN.

Onesimus

Rev. J. W. Kersten

Psalter 415: 6

Scripture: Philemon

Text: Philemon 10-12a

Psalter 386: 1, 2, 3, 5, 7

Psalter 255: 3, 4

Psalter 389: 1-4

What does God require of us? That we should believe in Him. God demands that all of us who are living under the gospel, believe. We are not living in the Old Testament time under the administration of the law as a servant of Moses, but as servants of the Lord Jesus Christ and His gospel.

So what is your evangelical duty required by God? That you believe His Word. If you do not believe you shall go lost forever for lack of faith. Thus God requires you to believe. What must you believe? All that the gospel requires, and that shall be required from all of us, namely, that Christ is *an all-sufficient and a willing Savior*. God does not require you to believe that Jesus Christ is your *personal* Savior! That is the gross error of free will teaching, for this is hidden within God's decree which will only be revealed out of His covenant of grace, unto His elect, through Christ. Thus God does not want you to search His decrees. He does not want you to penetrate His hidden, eternal counsel of peace. His decrees of election and reprobation are hidden from us. To be saved, God does not want you to believe that you are one of the elect, nor believe you are one of the reprobate. God never said, "Do this and you shall be elected," or "Do this and you shall be reprobated." Not at all! God never said that you must first of all believe in His decrees. His only demand is that you must believe that Jesus Christ is the all-sufficient and perfect Savior, and that He shall save to the uttermost all who go to God through Him.

There is so much confusion about these matters. Satan is

always busy misleading those who earnestly seek to be saved through the plain and joyful message of fleeing to Jesus to seek and to find salvation only in Him. There are concerned souls who say, "Oh, if I only knew that I was elected." That is wrong! You do not *need* to know this first. Moreover, what would you do if you had that knowledge? Some of God's people may come to know it, but in another way than you may think. Others say, "I fear that I am a reprobate." You must not even think about these matters because "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children" (Deu. 29:29).

What *is* revealed to us? That Jesus Christ is a *willing, a perfect, and an all-sufficient Savior*. It is revealed to us that never has one lost sinner who fled to Him been ashamed. It is revealed to us that everyone who ever fled to Him has received much more than he had ever dared to think, expect, or hope. Believe that! If you do not flee unto Jesus, if you do not petition Him for help, and if He does not wash your guilt and pollution, cure you, pay your debts, obtain your acquittal in God's tribunal, you shall be damned eternally.

Do you know what the first sermon of Christ was? "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:15). And His last sermon? "He that believeth not shall be damned" (Mark 16:16).

His gospel comes to all of you. It declares that God delights in it, that He gives His approval on your fleeing to His Son as a lost sinner. That is the gospel. This is the "good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people," according to the angel addressing the shepherds in Bethlehem's field. God means this! Dare you say that such a well-doing, glorious God should be insincere in His offer of grace?

If we, lost sinners as we are in Adam, helpless, unwilling and unable, enemies of free grace, flee unto Jesus *as we are*, God will crown it with eternal bliss. But alas, what a pity—be honest now, congregation—who *does* flee unto Him? Why do you not flee to Him? Probably because first you want to see, have, know, feel, or receive something before you will decide to come to Christ. You do not say so, but you act as if you would say, "Let us wait and see." If you wait till the cold hand of death touches you, it will forever be too late. Of all biblical

saints, only one received faith five or perhaps three minutes before his death, and that was the thief on the cross. So do not wait any longer. Christ Himself said, "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Tell me, what is it that holds you back? I know what it is. It is your hidden unwillingness, your enmity, your penchant for wickedness. That is your only problem. You know what Christ said: "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life." He never said, "You cannot come to Me." That is the root of your problem. Ask, oh please ask, the Lord for some light over your situation. Ask Him to cure you of your unwillingness. Oh, that you may flee to Him with all your lamentations and disabilities, with all your sins and wounds! May He grant you some holy exercises in outgoing acts of faith, to say with the blind Bartimaeus, "Thou Son of David, have mercy on me." He sat on the wayside, just as you now do, when Jesus passed by. Say to Him, "Lord, here I am, as I am. I know it, and I believe that Thou art a perfect Savior. Lord, cleanse and wash me in Thy blood, by Thy Spirit." Many will now say, "Yes, but does it go that easy?" Yes beloved, you need not merit anything, for Christ did it all.

Just how does it go then? Well, there is such a beautiful, plain story in the Bible which we have already read. Perhaps all of us can learn something from it. May the Lord use it to solve a riddle, to break some copper fetters, and to grant some liberty of faith.

We ask your attention for a runaway slave, *Onesimus*, as well as what became of him. Do you know what saved him? He fled to Paul the apostle and was rescued. We want to meditate on Paul's Epistle to Philemon, verses 10 through 12a: "*I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds: which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me: whom I have sent again.*"

This small letter from Paul to Philemon includes some remarkable contents. It is so short that it could have been written on a postcard or a small note. Concerning the contents, we wonder why it is so simple. It does not refer to any of the congregations, nor to God's kingdom. It is a personal letter from one brother to another brother in the Lord. So, what can we do

with such a small letter? Shall we ignore it and not preach about it? No, for even this short, personal letter has been inspired by the Holy Ghost.

This letter is addressed to a certain man named Philemon. He was a Greek and lived in Colosse. Colosse was in the vicinity of Laodicea where Paul, for a long time, had often preached the gospel. And God used his preaching to arrest, draw, and convert Philemon. The fruit of such divine activity could not stay hidden. Philemon, along with his wife and son, feared the Lord. They organized worship services in their home, their staff being present also. They prayed, sang, read, and spoke together about the ways of salvation.

It seems that Philemon must have been a wealthy man, for he owned some slaves. Not everyone could afford slaves at that time because they were very expensive. Philemon's slaves were obligated to attend his home-worship services. In this way Philemon sowed gospel seed, according to Ecclesiastes 11:1, "Cast thy bread upon the waters: for thou shalt find it after many days." Although this divine promise will not always be honored by God at *our* expected time, Philemon would witness its fulfillment. Later on, Onesimus, one of his slaves, showed himself to be a chosen vessel of the Lord.

I said *later on*, for at the time Onesimus misbehaved himself. Philemon once charged Onesimus to go to Rome, probably to promote his business, for he carried a great deal of money with him. But Onesimus never returned from Rome. What happened? Well, Onesimus liked it in Rome, the capital of the then known world and the residence of Nero. Onesimus forgot his Christian education. He found the gospel yoke too heavy. Christian living was too rigid for him. He decided to bid that narrow lifestyle farewell. He wanted to live his own life.

So for some time this went well. He had an ample supply of money and easily acquired friends. He lived a splendid life of luxury. He plunged headlong into the mire of sin. He did not think about death or eternity, nor about God and sin. His motto was, *Let us eat and drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die!*

Eventually (which should come as no surprise) this lifestyle led to disaster. And why? Well, prior to this he had known the truth, but he banished all serious thoughts from his

mind. Oh congregation, what is that wicked and evil power that inwardly *always* impels us to do wrong? We rebel against our upbringing, set aside all kinds of admonitions, and reject the sweetest invitations of the gospel; we break with everything and indulge in sin, even while we know the result: "Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

Onesimus had neither found nor received what he had expected to find in his sinful ways. He soon ran out of money; probably the underground world had robbed him. There he sits—as a beggar, down and out. And do you know the worst part of being a runaway slave? The magistrates could arrest him, and burn him with a hot iron, making him a marked man for his entire life; or even worse, they could throw him into the arena before the wild beasts to the delight of the elite of Rome. He found that they were already after him, and that oppressed him so much that he almost despaired. Finally he came to his wit's end. He did not know where to go anymore.

Then he came to himself and remembered his wrongdoings. He said to himself, "What a fool I am! What have I done? But it is too late now; there is no way back." He was poverty-stricken and reduced to the last extremity. He had nothing more to eat and the sword of justice pursued him. The end approached for Onesimus.

In this type of situation many fall down as rotten fruit and are crushed underfoot. Finally, in despair they destroy themselves, cutting off their own life and falling into eternal damnation. How did Onesimus fare? He knew that he must return to his master, but he did not dare, for Philemon was now his judge and he was guilty. He had a long list of debts. If he could settle them, he could go back. But that was just his problem—there was no way back, for that would cost him his head. So it was really hopeless. What else could he do? Should he stay sitting there on the fence with folded arms to wait and see, let come what comes? No, that too is impossible, for where could he stay? Where could he eat and drink?

Finally he made a very crucial decision. In earlier days he had heard talk about the apostle Paul. Perhaps he had heard Paul preaching in Laodicea. Paul was now in Rome, confined to

prison. So Onesimus fled to Paul. There he poured out his whole heart. He said as it were, "Such a one am I, Paul. I can only despair, for I deserve to be punished, but is there some way that I can escape? Can I escape my well-deserved punishment? Will Philemon receive me in his favor again?"

How will Paul respond to these questions? Will he reject Onesimus? Show him the door? Give him the cold shoulder? No. On the contrary, with his whole heart he grasped the opportunity to preach the gospel to this lost sinner, this criminal. "Listen, Onesimus. This is exactly your state before God. All of us, myself included, are runaways from God. He created us to be His servants, His "love-slaves," and He gave us many goods and duties to perform; that is, to serve, love, and honor Him. But we took it all and turned our backs to Him. We have all gone to Rome, to the world. We have spent all—yes, we have spoiled all. We have lived our life in pleasure, and wantonly nourished our hearts as a fattened ox for the day of slaughter. So we are all great thieves. All of us deserve capital punishment. All of us are subject to the punishment of eternal death. That is our situation, Onesimus."

Onesimus asked, "Paul, is there *no* way of escape? Can I never go back?" Paul began to instruct Onesimus. He told him that from our side it is absolutely impossible to return, for according to the law, Philemon had a full right to execute him. "Do you acknowledge that, Onesimus?" "Oh yes, it is true. I deserve it, and he is right."

Paul continued: "On the other hand, Onesimus, just think, has not Philemon been very good to you? He has never beaten or whipped you like other slave owners do. Did you have any complaints about the way he treated you? Did you have any right to run away from him?" Paul tried to make Onesimus ashamed by speaking good of Philemon. He said, "Oh Onesimus, what you did is terrible. Philemon has not deserved that from you. He gave you a very rewarding, honorable and responsible task, and what did you do?"

Onesimus was deeply ashamed, which is necessary, otherwise there would only be terror or panic. With many arguments Paul persuaded him. Onesimus now showed some evangelical repentance. What wisdom and tact Paul used in

trying to regain Onesimus! Much time also elapsed, for he wrote in his letter in verse 10, “whom I have begotten in my bonds.” You may believe that the two of them talked daily together. And the result? Onesimus could not stop visiting Paul.

But there is more. Onesimus asked: “Is it still possible to be restored into favor? I am so deeply fallen, so sinful, so guilty. I am without means to pay for my debt, for I have spent all. And I have a burning desire in my heart to lick the dust from Philemon’s feet. If I am allowed to go back, I am willing to accept my punishment, my just judgment, but I know it can never be.”

Paul said: “If you honestly feel that way, there is a possibility that I can do something for you that you cannot do. How much do you owe him? I promise to do what I can. I will use my influence so Philemon will accept my offer, but do not forget that he is your master; he owns you. Moreover, you cannot stay here forever, even though you may enjoy it. I would like to keep you here too; it is a joy to talk with you. But you have not sinned against me, so you must return to Philemon.”

Yes, Paul liked Onesimus. He wrote: *Onesimus is profitable to me*. Onesimus must, however, go back to his lawful owner. Paul did not want to destroy, but to fulfill the law. Everything had to be settled in a judicial way. Paul could not acquit Onesimus; Philemon must do that.

Thus, Onesimus started on his way back. Paul possibly sent his letter later on by means of Tychicus, his messenger, as other Scriptures allude. I think that Onesimus wanted Paul as a fellow traveller, but that was not possible for Paul was still in prison. Moreover, such a personal matter must be solved between the two persons involved. Onesimus had nothing to lose, for *all was lost already*.

In his letter Paul made a heart-stirring appeal to Philemon for love and forgiving mercy. He wrote as it were: “Onesimus was in time past unprofitable to you, but now he is profitable again. I beseech you for my son, whom I have begotten in my bonds. I send him again to you; receive him. I love him so much that I would have liked to keep him with me, so that instead of serving you, he could have served me in my gospel bonds. But I do not want anything without your approval. Put on my ac-

count all that he owes you. I, Paul, have written this with my own hand, I will repay it. I step in the breach between you and him, for he is now a special beloved brother to me. Charge me for all you have to claim from him. I shall pay all.”

So Onesimus returns. The runaway slave is home again. You can imagine what happened as he knocked on the door and fell on his knees. What did Philemon do? He admitted him into the family and into the congregation. What a surprise for Onesimus! Think only of the return of the prodigal son. Philemon gave Onesimus a place in his home and within his walls, and a name better than of sons and daughters. Why? Only by reason of the merits and intercession of Paul, God’s servant in the bonds of the gospel.

In this short letter of Paul, the entire way of true conversion is illustrated in a very plain manner. The Holy Spirit had a purpose in inspiring Paul to write it. All Scripture is given to our profit. The story of Philemon and Onesimus with Paul as mediator, points us to God and His elect sinners with Christ between them. God has begotten His people with the Word of His truth. He has given all of them to Christ as a reward for His work. In His passive and active obedience, Christ has deeply humbled Himself to save them. He prepares them for His everlasting righteousness and all-sufficient satisfaction. How? By reprovng them of sin, righteousness and judgment. He prepares them to acquiesce in their condemnation and to return to God, for they have sinned against God. Such reborn sinners are arrested, their eyes are opened, and become run-aways before God. They have defaced God’s image. They review their lives, saying, “What have I done? How could I have lived that way, and for such a long time?” They become so hopeless, so helpless, so wretched, and so foolish. Therefore they walk upon the world as unhappy ones. God’s holy law has arrested them, and they feel the weight of God’s judgment.

Will that be profitable for their soul? That depends on where it brings them. Initially their pride will be broken, for the law has taken a firm hold of them and sin becomes very bitter. They begin to live very carefully. Their soul labors with justice, death and judgment. And the fruit of it? Nothing! What? Nothing? No, not one fruit worthy of heaven. In time it passes

over like smoke from a chimney. The so-called pricks in their conscience leave nothing behind. Sometimes it looks as if it is a good work within them, for they may think that they have experienced a substantial change, but they are not *renewed*. When Samuel anointed Saul to be king, he said, “The Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou... shalt be turned into another man.” Saul was changed but not renewed. Such people have only some common conviction of sin in their conscience, without anything more. It is good for them to sing a low tune, to fear, but when the firm hold of the law lessens, they begin to live as before.

Real soul-saving work of God produces real fruit. Onesimus went to Paul. That is the crucial point. A person may have many experiences, but when God as their Judge says, “Pay me what thou owest,” what do they then stand in need of? The intercession of One who is greater than Paul. Onesimus had been drawn by cords of love and he surrendered completely. He went to Paul for advice because he could not return to Philemon. So the truly reborn soul also needs an ambassador, a messenger, and interpreter. Elihu said to Job that he needed “One among a thousand” to show him his uprightness. He needs a Surety who makes intercession, as king Hezekiah cried, “O LORD, I am oppressed; undertake for me.” Or as Judah did concerning his brother Benjamin when he said to father Jacob, “I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him.”

Often a sinner would like to return to God, but it is not possible because each sin—old guilt and new guilt and every sin that they observe every day anew—is repelled by that awesome majesty. Inwardly, they experience that God is not mocked and that they cannot take sin lightly. Sometimes they place themselves at His feet and they may say, “Oh God, canst Thou still forgive me for all my sins?” There are times that they have good intentions and have some love in their heart for the Being of God, but an unconditional “no” comes down from heaven. It cannot be done—there is no forgiveness without the shedding of blood.

And Lord’s Day 5, Question 12 says: “God will have His justice satisfied, and therefore we must make this full satisfac-

tion, either by ourselves or by another.” There they sit now, just like Onesimus. They *have* to return, but they *cannot*. Though Paul preached the gospel to Onesimus and gave him some promises, he said as it were, “Onesimus, you are a lost sinner; you have to accept and acknowledge that. While returning to Philemon, remember, it is up to him what he wants to do with you.”

Not the law but the gospel brings the soul to that point. The fruit of the law is anger, anguish, and fear. The letter (the law) kills. Under the law the soul struggles for self-preservation, but the gospel brings the soul to the point with Job—*I will make application to my Judge for I have sinned against Him*. This is the fruit of the gospel. Oh, when God’s precious promises are applied and when He opens His Word for such a deeply oppressed heart, if the possibility to be saved outside of himself in Christ is revealed when they may see that there is a Substitute, a Surety who is able to pay their guilt—what a clear way, what infinite room they then see! The whole world can then be saved, including themselves. Then there are times that they may forget their guilt, although they do not realize that they are not yet forgiven. The gospel reveals to them the Person of the Mediator in God’s promises, but still, they do not have Him as yet; they do not know Him personally. Yet His glory and His suitability, His all-sufficiency is made known to them. That is why they enter into some negotiations with Him and in soul labor concerning Him. What a precious life that is! They can never get enough of Him. No wonder the bride in Song of Solomon said, “My soul failed when he spake”!

Onesimus could not leave Paul. If possible he would have stayed with him forever. But to solve the problem permanently and completely, Onesimus *must* return to Philemon. Even so, Christ as the chief Prophet and teacher shall reveal the full secret counsel and will of God concerning our redemption. No, Christ does not encourage and comfort the soul by bypassing God’s justice. Step by step He shows the soul its unpaid bill of guilt. Nothing is settled yet for they have sinned against a well-doing God. This works an evangelical, godly sorrow of repentance not to be repented of, that is, repentance unto salvation.

Eagerly they want to return, and yet they dare not for they

have still so much slavish fear of death and judgment. As long as Onesimus could be with Paul, and as long as souls may negotiate with Christ, hearing His Word and promises, they are in a comfortable condition. They forget the harshness, the strictness of the law, and get some hope that somehow everything will be all right in the end. But Paul said, "No, Onesimus, it is imperative that you return from where you came." What does this mean? It means that we have to be brought back to Paradise, *we have to become Adam before God*. That doesn't mean a literal personification, but Adam's sin and guilt has to become ours. That would cause one to despair, would it not? For the soul cannot be redeemed with only seeing something of the beauty of Christ.

Do you know what the root of the problem is? I will answer that with another question: Against whom have we sinned? And who has to forgive, to acquit us? "It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth?" You see, God's justice comes to the foreground time and again. Oh, the inadequacy of it all! After all they may have learned, seen, and heard of the Mediator, they still cannot be saved, for the matter is not settled yet. There is still something wrong!

When you ask them, "Have you then never experienced anything?" They will ashamedly answer, "I dare not deny that, for the Lord has spoken to me, He has embraced me, He wiped away my tears; and I certainly believe that at one time He had begun a good work in me, but I still lack the real application of Him within my heart." Do you know what your problem is? There may have been some sweet negotiations, but you have not yet settled accounts with *Philemon*. It has to come from *him*. What then has happened? While you experienced some sweet dealing with the Lord Jesus, you tried to put Philemon into the background.

Oh, if such souls could always have some evangelical comfort, they would be comforted, refreshed, and strengthened. But Paul said, "No, Onesimus, you have to go back to Philemon, and I am staying here!" And the result? The Lord takes away all their foundations, their rest, their confidences, yes, all the frames of their heart. *They have to lose their conversion*. Till now they lived in a house of correction, of reformation.

tion. They wanted to *deserve* the graces they have seen in Christ. Perhaps without realizing it, they wanted to make themselves *worthy* to be saved with their sighs, tears, prayers, and good works, but that will not work either. Neither is it necessary, for “salvation is of the LORD,” Jonah said. And, “The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.” He said, “I am among you as he that serveth.” But that has to be learned!

Let us follow Onesimus now for a while. There he goes—the long tiresome way back, alone. If he had carried Paul’s letter, probably he would have tried secretly to read it, to get some comfort. But no, that was impossible, for Tychicus had the letter. Now Onesimus was alone again with his problem. He couldn’t talk with Paul now to get some encouragement. So he fell back upon himself again. The way back, yes, but what will come of it? It has been a long way, a dying way—a way of going down, losing all he ever thought he had experienced. Believe me, Onesimus died a thousand deaths on that way back.

And Philemon? Do you know what he said when Onesimus arrived? He said, “Onesimus, your guilt has already been paid a long time ago. The intercession of Paul has touched my heart. It has made a smooth way between you and me. Come in now, Onesimus. I have been waiting for you. I was longing to meet you again. I have already forgotten what you did to me.” So, see what happened, beloved; Philemon embraced Onesimus, the runaway slave. He kissed all his wrongdoings away: “You are now my beloved child and not a slave anymore.”

Beloved, this is exactly the experience of God’s people. In former times they may have experienced some unforgettable, precious exercises, but when it comes to the essence of the case, to meet God their Judge, it can be so very dark. They then say, “Did I take too much? Did I speak too much?” Suddenly they become aware that they have no foundation to stand on. Why do they miss that? Even in the exercises of the negotiations of faith with Christ, they still lack the application from God’s side. When their exercises are weak, they can miss Christ too easily. Their habitual labor of soul and their desires are still directed towards Christ. They love and need Him more and more, but with all that, they are not yet set free. What do they need most

of all? The same thing that Paul wrote about in regard to his personal experience to the Galatians, “But when it pleased God...to reveal His Son in me.” You see, the presentation of the Lord Jesus Christ as Surety and Mediator to be our personal Mediator between God and us—this is and remains a one-sided work of God, and of His free and sovereign grace!

We may have seen Christ often through the lattices of His gospel, while we still lacked the appropriation because He was not yet applied. It can be that we, in forgetting ourselves, have rejoiced in His glory, singing:

*How blessed, Lord, are they who know the joyful sound,
Who when they hear Thy voice, in happiness abound.*

But the next day they stand outside of it again; nothing of it is left. They have seen so much room in Christ, outside of themselves, that everyone, yes, the whole world could be saved. They spoke of it to everyone. But the next day, when someone asked, “How are you?” they said, “It is not for me. I am so miserable, so despicable, and so incorrigible. I am helpless.” They have had some glimpse of Him, but the point is that He still has not become *their Christ*. They have not yet experienced Christ’s adoptive act. And that is another matter, for He has yet to be *applied*. He has yet to be *given*, like Isaiah said, “Unto us a Son is given.” When that happens, everything turns around.

God comes to us, He who is the all-blessed One, full of majesty, the perfectly Holy One, yes, the righteous One. Through His Word He will reveal His eternal counsel of peace, the eternal transactions within the Trinity. He says, “Ah, poor sinner, it has been settled already in eternity. You have tried, promised, and struggled to pay your guilt by yourself, but that has all been in vain, for I do not need your payments. It has already been paid in full, long ago on Golgotha.” He gives them “a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth, saving he that receiveth it.” Rejoice because your name is written in heaven, in the Book of Life and the Lamb. You have been known and loved from eternity and have been included in Christ, and that is all effectually executed now in time within your heart. You did not need to do anything for it, for it is all *out of, through, from, in and unto God*.

APPLICATION

That blessed secret has to be learned in a way of losing everything from our side. For many souls the ultimate problem is the way back to God. The only thing is that you have to become before God what you are, namely, a poor, lost, undone sinner. Sometimes you feel so bad about yourself, and guilty, that you say with tears, "O God, I am so displeased with myself, that I abhor myself." But the next night you sleep well and forget it again. Your soul's labor is so superficial. It remains only on the surface; it does not leave any fruit behind. I advise you, do not lean upon it. There is only one Person to lean upon. "For there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." Only in Him is salvation. Remember, all of us are runaway slaves. We have willfully, with malicious intent, withdrawn ourselves from the dominion of our Creator and Maker. Fools that we are!

And do you, unconverted ones, still fancy that in the end all will be made well? Do you still go on in your sinful ways? How is it possible? I cannot comprehend it because you *know better!* What is that evil power that has you in such a tight grip, that destroys your passions, poisons you inwardly, that makes you so rebellious, and drags you along into eternal damnation? What is it? It comes from the fact that we broke away from God and have surrendered ourselves to the devil.

How is it that the most serious admonitions have no result? Though you know better, you blindfold yourselves and do not want to return. You do not even want to be converted. When God lays His kind invitations, His offer of grace, at your feet, you feel inwardly that you must agree with it, but still you say, "And yet I do not want it!" So it will be no small wonder when finally you will topple from your mount of your preoccupation with self into the unfathomable depth of the lake of fire and brimstone. That will be the result, for it cannot be otherwise. And now I have one question: *Will that not then be your own guilt?*

Do not try to penetrate God's holy decrees. You have to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ—that is all. Soon death will climb through your windows and God will show you that you once have stolen all His benefits from Paradise, that you lived

with them wantonly. You did not care for all these things. You live as if there is no God, as if His Word is not the truth. If you want to go on this way, not taking sin and the gospel seriously, the Lord says, "Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?"

Be ye reconciled with God. If not, the Lord will not spare you. His anger and His jealousy shall smoke against you, and all the curses that are written in the Book shall lay upon you, and the Lord shall blot out your name from under heaven. The blame will be entirely yours. Have you deserved it then, or not? Do not dare to say no! Today, if you hear His voice, "Harden not your heart, as in the provocation" (Ps. 95:8). "Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding" (Ps. 32:9).

With what does God charge you? Only to believe that Christ is an all-sufficient Savior. Why do you delay? Why do you still go on in your own way, following your own devices, living your own life?

No, not all of you live indifferently in sin and world conformity. I know that there are some among you who are earnestly concerned about your sins. But upon what are you waiting? Why is there no breaking through? Well, the fact is that you do not want it. A pulpit prayer of fifteen minutes is too long for you, and some biblical chapters take too much time for you to read. So it is still true, as we read in Romans 3, "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one." And *the blame is ours!*

Still, the Lord is free and He makes Himself free from all of us. Steadily He knocks at the door of our hearts, saying as it were, "I charge you to believe in the Name of My Son. That I will approve of. In that is My *only* pleasure, and it will lead you into *everlasting* happiness, into the heritage of My elect."

Beloved, I want to stir you up. Please, *use the means of grace.* But if you want to resist the admonition and say with Onesimus, "Such a strict life is too much for me; I do not want

to bow under the yoke of Christ,” then your blood shall be upon your own head, for you go on *knowing better*. God will one day blame you for it; He will hold it against you because, despite our deep fall, we are still rational human beings.

Are there some among you who, like Onesimus, are fleeing to Paul—unto Him who is much more than Paul, namely, Christ? Oh, I know there are some here who have been moved by many emotions, but their legs have never been broken like Mephibosheth’s. They have never fled to God. They have never poured out their burdened hearts at His bosom. They have never cried over their misery and unworthiness. They rest upon all kinds of so-called experiences. But listen once more to me—*that is not the real foundation to rest upon*. If it is soul-saving, it is only a fruit of Christ. For the Holy Ghost brings a brokenhearted sinner toward the Fountain of salvation. He leads them with weeping and supplications, making room for Christ within their hearts. God will make Christ for them *wisdom, justification, sanctification and redemption*.

There may be some here who say, “Yes, I may not deny that; it is like that in my life. I have had such times, but everything is such a riddle to me.” Paul said to Onesimus, “It cannot remain like this.” You would have liked to continue that life of yours, because it was so good to have communion with the Lord Jesus. You could tell Him everything, He was so friendly, He comforted us, and He defended us, but then the time came that He said, “There is still something that must be cleared up. You must go back, because God has a claim on you.” Not only does divine justice *condemn*, but it also has a *claim* upon us, and to surrender unto divine justice unto condemnation can be easier at times than waiting.

When the gospel works powerfully, then everything can be so smooth; then there is no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus. There is, however, something else that follows, and that has to do with *sanctification*. If God ever breaks His people, He breaks them in the way of sanctification. That is His righteous claim because God is so worthy, and sorrow then becomes much greater than fear. This is a result of the applied gospel. You feel the ground sinking away from under your feet for you move from the *workhouse* into the *poorhouse*. The

greatest miracle will be whether you ever can be saved, for your whole life can be explained in what Isaiah says, “As a beast goeth down into the valley...so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name.” *He must increase, but I must decrease.*

Now concerning His just claim, how is your life? Oh, that way back, to be identified into Adam! It is a dying life, a cutting off of life—not only in justification, but even more daily in sanctification, as Paul once said, “I die daily.” Philemon said, “Oh Onesimus, listen. It has been settled already a long time ago, before you knew of it; for here, I will show you Paul’s letter.” So God will instruct His people that their salvation is a *holy, divine necessity* from His side, because *He wants to save them*. Why? “This people have I formed for myself; they shall show forth my praise.” AMEN.