

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 reforma-

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.