

A PASTORAL VISIT

NO. 3103

A SERMON
PUBLISHED ON THURSDAY, JULY 30, 1908.

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

***“The Church in your house.”
Philemon 1:2.***

SOME interpreters have supposed that a small congregation met for worship in a room in Philemon’s house and there is a tradition that such was the case for some considerable time. The Churches established by Paul were, at their commencement, for the most part small. Obligated—for the sake of peace and to avoid persecution—to meet in out-of-the-way places where they were not likely to be seen by foes, the retired house of some well-known friend, perhaps that of the minister, if it had a room conveniently large, would be the natural place for Believers to gather together in those early Churches. Philemon, therefore, might literally have had a Church in his house and a congregation might have gathered there. It strikes me that there would be a great deal of good done if persons who have large rooms in their houses would endeavor to get together little congregations. There are many, even of our poorer friends, who live in neighborhoods of London destitute of the means of Grace, who might promote a great blessing if they occasionally opened their houses for a Prayer Meeting or religious assembly. We need no consecrated places for the worship of God—

***“Wherever we seek Him, He is found,
And every place is hallowed ground.”***

Certainly our text does not give any countenance to the calling of certain buildings “Churches.” Buildings for worship, whether erected by Episcopalians or Dissenters, are frequently called “Churches.” If I ask for “the church” in any town, I am forthwith directed to an edifice, probably with a spire or a steeple, which the inhabitants call “the church.” Why, they might as well point me to a signpost when I asked for a man—a *building* cannot be a Church! A Church is an assembly of faithful men and it cannot be anything else. I cannot see how such a piece of architecture as we now call “a church” could very well have been in Philemon’s house—it must have been a large house if it had such a thing in it for an ornament. The fact is, it is a misnomer, a misuse of language, and we must mind that we do not get into it. For my own part, I like the good old-fashioned name of “Meeting House” as well as any. It is a place where the people of God meet and although “Meeting House” does not sound very smart, nor fine, nor fashionable—and that is everything, nowadays, with many people—yet it is far better than misusing language as it is misused when bricks, stones and mortar receive a title belonging exclusively to godly men and women!

However, it appears that Philemon had a Church in his house—a Church largely, if not exclusively, composed of his own family. He was privileged to possess a godly wife—the beloved Apphia—their sons and daughters walked in their parents' footsteps. And their servants and even their visitor, Archippus, were members of this Church which was in the house of Philemon.

I. Now let me attempt to describe A CHURCH IN A HOUSE, meaning, all the while, to be asking you WHETHER YOU HAVE A CHURCH IN YOUR HOUSE.

A Church, according to the New Testament, consists of converted persons, or persons who profess to be converted. No visible Church is absolutely pure. A Church must be taken upon its own profession, consisting as it does of persons who avow themselves to be followers of and Believers in Christ, having been converted from darkness to light by the Spirit of God. Well, then, I see, in a family where there is a Church, a godly father and a godly mother rejoicing over converted sons and daughters—and glad and able to entrust their household affairs to Christian servants. It cannot be a Church, whatever profession may be made, unless there is the Grace of God there. It may be nominally such, but it cannot be really so. A family is not born a Church and the little ones born into the family are not born into the Church. They must be born-again before they can be members of the Church—there must have been the work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of the members of the family before they can form a Church in the house.

But it strikes me that a number of converted people are not necessarily a Church. In order to form a Church, *they must worship together.* Happy is the household which meets every morning for prayer! Happy are they who let not the evening depart without uniting in supplication! Brothers and Sisters, I wish it were more common—I wish it were universal, with all professors of religion—to have family prayer! We sometimes hear of the children of Christian parents who do not grow up in the fear of God and we are asked how it is that they turn out so badly. In many, very many cases, I fear there is such a neglect of family worship that it is not probable that the children are at all impressed by any piety supposed to be possessed by their parents! Family prayer in our old Puritan households was a matter of very great importance. Let me tell you what Philip Henry used to do. He was a minister and of course had more time to give to it than many of you in business have. But he went through the whole Bible in course, expounding it, chapter by chapter, and accompanying it by prayer and singing. One reason he gave for singing was that it was like Rahab's tying the crimson line in the window—everyone who went by would know what she had done—and he said that the sound of singing at family prayers was a distinct confession that that family loved and worshipped God! He called his children together on Thursdays and catechized them upon the General Assembly's Catechism and upon the lessons through which they had gone during the week.

Perhaps you will think that this was very dreary work, but what will you say when I tell you that that good man's son, Mr. Matthew Henry, wrote his famous *Commentary* from the notes which he took of his father's expositions at morning and evening prayers? Young lads do not take notes of dreary things, you may depend upon it! Catch them at that, if you can. We do not find our boys taking down heavy sermons, but they have no objection to putting down anything which strikes and interests them. That family of Mr. Henry, to which I have referred, was so well ordered that very often visitors to the house who were unconverted when they went there, were converted during their visit! Now I do not suppose that you could, all of you, expound the Scriptures like that! And you could not all, perhaps, sing. But I do think we might, all of us, manage to come together once a day at least—twice, if possible—for the worship of God in the household. Remember what Matthew Henry says—"They who pray in the family, do well. They who read and pray, do better. But they who sing, and read, and pray, do best of all." If we want to bring up a godly family who shall be a seed to serve God when our heads are under the clods of the valley, let us seek to train them up in the fear of God by meeting together as a family for worship. I do not see how there can be a Church without worship—and I do not see how there can be a Church in a house unless there is constant worship in the family.

But there must be something more than this before there can be a Church. A Church is not merely a company of people meeting for worship—*there must be some bond of unity*. A load of bricks is not a house—the bricks must be fitly framed and cemented together—and then they grow into a house. So a Church is fitly framed together and grows into a holy temple for the Lord. Now, dear Friends, there must be a knitting of hearts among Christians in families. Of course, they will love each other from the ties of the flesh, but they should also love each other from the higher ties of the Spirit. There is no reason why, without breaking through any of the gradations that must necessarily exist in society, there should not be a bond of unity taking in the whole family—master, mistress, children and servants. In the olden times, in the days of such men as Abraham, the servants were a part of the family. Nowadays, people change their servants once a month and there are some servants who stay too long even then! But it strikes me that good masters and good mistresses make good servants—and where love and kindness are shown, it will not always, nor often, be the case that the servants will be a social evil. Instead of that, they will be a great benefit. And a wise, prudent, Christian servant becomes as much a part of the household as even a child. To make a Church, there must be a feeling of union. I should like to see the clan-feeling in our families in which every servant would stand up for the master's honor, and everyone would seek the good of the entire family—and even when the children were grown up and scattered, it would be well to see them still duly respecting the ties of Christian kindred and seeking to promote the good and the unity of the whole.

And to make a Church, *there must be oversight*. A Church is not a complete Church without a pastor, its elders and its deacons. A Church in the house will have its elders. There need not be any election of these because they are already elected. The parents will naturally take the oversight of the little Church that is in the house. If you want a pastor, the father should be the priest in his own house. He is the most fitting teacher, expounder and example. Then who are to be your deacons? Why, those who have to go out to the factory, when the bell rings in the morning, and who help to provide food for the household! And there is another we must not forget—that gentle one who goes so noiselessly about the house to see after her husband and children, and who produces a thousand happy thoughts by that kind way of hers. Sometimes the oversight of the household will fall to the lot of the eldest son, or daughter, but sometimes some long-abiding servant, some old housekeeper virtually becomes the presiding genius. There must be oversight and God sometimes graciously sends to families those who are more advanced in spiritual things who become, as it were, the officers of the Church in the house.

A Church in the house must, of course, *be furnished with instruction*. One of the first reasons why there is a Church at all is to teach the members. We are formed into Churches for mutual edification. Ah, dear Friends, how much youthful piety receives edification in those households where the parents set a godly example! Wonderful is the influence of the mother upon her son. You recollect the case of the mighty Byron, who seems to have been a sort of fallen angel who flew across the sky like a thunderbolt from a Satanic hand. What was his mother? Why, a very passionate woman who frequently threw the tongs at her own son in her passion! Of course she had a wild and passionate son. Look, on the other hand, at the meek and gentle bard of Olney, pouring forth notes that were almost fit for Heaven. What sort of mother had Cowper? You know her character well, as her son has described it in the lines beginning—

“Oh, that those lips had language!”

Let Christian parents, forming a Church in their house, look to the formation of the character of their children, especially their converted children—and let them not overlook their converted servants! With an ardent and a longing desire, strive to build them up in the faith and help them to grow in Divine Grace and in the knowledge of the Lord. You Christian fathers ought to take care, as far as your means allow, to provide your children with instructive books. I do not mean dull books, but good, interesting books, at once instructive and attractive, that may teach them the way of God more perfectly. Whenever you have the opportunity, let drop a word which will strike the child’s attention and remain in its heart. Just as I, as a preacher, would never miss an opportunity of saying anything here which I met with in the week, and which I thought you ought to hear, so let the Christian father be studying each day how he may instruct the Church in his house in the fear of the Lord more perfectly!

I think I have now described the Church so far as its organization is concerned, but I cannot very well describe it all. You must go and live in the midst of such a Church to understand thoroughly what it is like. Mr. Talkative, in *“The Pilgrim’s Progress,”* was a very fine fellow abroad and had a great deal to say about religion. But what was he at home? Ah, nothing could be said of him *there* worth the hearing! Where there is a Church in the house, every member strives to increase the other’s comfort, all seek to promote each other’s holiness, each one endeavors to discharge his duty according to the position in which he is placed in that Church. And when they meet together, their prayers are earnest and fervent, and all their actions are not the actions of a worldly family, but of those who have tasted that the Lord is gracious!

One thing more. *A Church is really worth nothing at all if it does not try to extend itself.* And a Church in a house is no true Church if it is satisfied without endeavoring to bring in every member of the family. If you have half a dozen converted, but there are seven of you, never leave off praying till you have the seventh! And if, in God’s mercy, He has given you ten out of eleven, there are ten reasons why you should be in earnest for the conversion of the eleventh. Plead with the Master till your little Church shall have swallowed up the whole of your congregation! A happy day will it be for us when the Church in the Tabernacle fills every pew, but you may come at your results sooner than we can come at ours. May the day soon come when the Church in your house shall include every person in the family, not one being left out! What a happy world it would be if there were such a Church in every house! It would be Heaven begun below! The angels might then mistake earth for Heaven and linger so long that they would need to be recalled to Paradise, making the mistake that they were already in Paradise! Oh, may we live to see the day when walking down a street in London, we shall hear, at the appointed hour in every house, the song of praise and know that no door will be locked for the night till first the Lord has been asked to keep watch and ward over the slumbering household!

II. Having thus described a Church in a house, I propose what I cannot often accomplish among you, though I wish I could, and that is TO PAY YOU A PASTORAL VISIT.

I am going to knock at your door, take a chair and sit down, and ask you a few simple questions. The first is, *Have you a Church in your house?* “No,” says one, “I am the only converted one in the house.” Ah, dear Friend, I can understand the difficulty of your position, but I can also rejoice in the hopefulness of your being there, trusting that it is a token for good to the house! Now that the Lord has sent one spark of fire there, may there soon be a flame! “Well,” says another, “we have several Christians in our house, but I cannot say that there is a Church here.” I like your honesty, my Friend, but may I tell you what I suspect is the reason why there are so many houses that have Christians in them, but no Churches? It often is because those Christians are inconsistent. Why, if some of you were not professors of religion, you would be very decent sort of people—but being professors, the way in which you act and speak

is detestable! You may think this strong language, but I know it is true. There are some families where the father, instead of exhibiting the gentleness and kindness of a Christian, well-near scares the children from the very thought of godliness! There are some households where the wife is a gadding busybody, whose slovenliness and dirt might well disgust her husband at the very thought of going to the House of Prayer. There are some children professing godliness who have not yet learned the Commandment which tells them to obey their parents! And there are some professedly Christian servants who are eye-servers, not remembering what Paul has said to such. One of the worst evils we have to deal with, as Christians, is the evil of inconsistency at home! Whenever I see a professed Christian walking among his household as though he were a tyrant, letting no one come near him, without affection or kindness and simply a domineering master, I ask—Where is the Grace of God in that man? And I ask the same question with respect to other faults. O Beloved, do make your households happy! You cannot make them holy if you do not shine with genial cheerfulness. And you Christian people in households, do seek to act so that you may not be a disgrace to your profession, but may form a true Church in the house where you dwell together.

While I thus speak, perhaps you will say that I am exposing too much of that domestic economy over which you judge it convenient to drop a veil. It is my duty to tell you the truth plainly, so listen to it attentively. “Well,” someone says, “I thank God that I have a Church in my house.” Then I thank God, too, and we will together praise and bless Him for His great mercy. But I must now ask you, *Who are the members?* “Well, there is Father.” Oh, I am so glad, because your father has so much to do with the management and if he who holds the reins cannot drive, there will be some mistakes. I am glad your father is converted. “Ah!” says one, “but my father is *not* converted.” Then, I am sorry. O Father, I beseech you, let your child’s prayer come into your ears as well as into God’s ears! You will be a curse to your family if you are not a blessing! And I know you do not want to be a bane to your offspring. But with some of you, the father is converted and the mother is converted, too. I am glad of that, because parents—and mothers in particular—have a sweet influence on the family and the little ones. Well, then, let us see. Is John converted? Is the eldest son yet made a partaker of Divine Grace? “Yes.” Oh, then that is a mercy, because elder brothers have so much to do, by their example, in inclining younger brothers rightly or wrongly. And Emily—is she converted? That is a happy thing, if it is so, for she, also, will have a great influence for good upon the younger ones. Now where does it stop? I hope it does not stop at the servants—are they converted? Happy is the master who has Christian servants! And I speak experimentally when I say this. It is a great comfort to you to have those about you who really do fear God.

Yes, but we must not forget any who are in the household. I must ask you, *Who are they who are not converted?* The very little ones, of course, are too young to understand, so we will leave them in the hands of a

Covenant God and plead with Him for them. But are there not some who can understand, but who are not yet converted? “Ah,” says the mother, “do not ask me about that,” and she brushes away a tear. And the father says, “It is a painful subject.” Yes, it is a painful subject, but we must mention it, because some of them are here tonight. You would not willfully give your parents pain, young man, would you? I know your desire is to comfort them and there can be no greater joy to them than to know that their children are walking in the Truth of God. And among the servants, there is the nursemaid—is she brought in? And there is the kitchen-boy—do not leave him out! A Church in a house is not complete till it comprises everybody in the house, from the dishwasher up to the master. Yes, and if there is a friend staying there, the Church is not complete till the friend is also converted. Now, I cannot expect you all to answer me, but I still hope that you will do it quietly to yourselves. How many members are there in the Church in your house? Who are members and who are not?

Then, by your leave, I shall ask you another question, and that is, *As you have a Church consisting of so many members, what are you doing for Christ?* It is no use having a Church that is not doing anything. As a family, are you seeking to extend the bounds of Messiah’s Kingdom within your own sphere? Dr. Guthrie advocates Territorial Missions and a very admirable scheme it is to advocate. And I give him all honor for it, but I will tonight take the liberty of advocating Home Missions. I do not mean missions that have to do with anything outside, but missions to the kitchen, the parlor, the drawing-room and every room up to the attic—missions in which every single one in the family shall be concerned. I hope that, as a Church in the house, you will not have a neglected district in the house. Some of you go out tract-distributing—begin at home! Some of you preach—begin to preach at home. Hard work that, because those to whom you preach know how you practice! If you cannot preach at home because your practice runs counter to your preaching, do not preach at all—for a man has no right to talk and instruct others if he cannot, at least in some measure, live out what he teaches!

III. Before leaving, however, I venture to GIVE A LITTLE ADVICE AS TO THE WAY OF HAVING A CHURCH IN A HOUSE.

It must be brought about, of course, by Divine Grace. The Holy Spirit is the great Agent, but still He uses means. You young woman—yes, you—you are thinking about being engaged to that young man. You are a professed Christian, but he is a worldling. Now, do you ever expect to have a Church in your house at that rate? And may I ask you—do you know what you are doing? I see some of you are smiling. Well, you may smile as much as you can now, for you will never have much smiling after, I can tell you that! If you want to wither your happiness forever, you have only to go and be yoked with an unbeliever. I have known some Christian women who have forgotten the Divine precept and have been married to ungodly men. And I have seen godly men married to ungodly women. And mark this—my experience has not been very long, but it has

been very wide—I never knew any good come of it. I have always seen misery as the result and in nine cases out of ten, backsliding has followed—often final, too—proving that the person committing that sin had no Grace at all! We do not often talk about these things when we are preaching, but we ought to talk about them a great deal more than we do. I do beseech you, young Christian people, if you hope to have God’s blessing, take care that you do not get “unequally yoked with unbelievers.”

Then, supposing the house is already started, I have this advice to give. *If you want to bring in others of the family who are not converted, make them happy.* There are a great many more flies caught with honey than with vinegar, and there are a great many more persons brought to God by love than there are by pitiless declamations. “The love of Christ constrains,” not only after we are saved, but it is often the constraining means of bringing us to be saved. Let us imitate Puritan theology in its soundness and Puritan living in its holiness, but not in its gloom—if, indeed, it was gloomy, which I very much question. Let the Christian family be the most cheerful household anywhere! And if I might venture on the advice, let me say, *never make Sunday doleful and sad.* Some people do. Why, I think Sunday should be to the household the bright day of the week—the day when the father is at home—the day when the mother is not at work—the day when John comes home to spend a few hours—the day when they all go to the House of God and sing—

***“I have been there, and still would go
’Tis like a little Heaven below.”***

Oh, make your households to be like flower gardens—plant no thorns and root out all ill weeds of discontent! Depend upon it, household happiness is a great means of promoting household holiness!

And let me entreat you, dear Friends, to *be much in prayer for those who are not converted.* “Yes,” says the mother, “my unconverted boy is gone away from home.” Well, but your prayers can follow him! See the case of Philemon and Onesimus. [See Sermon #1268, Volume 21—THE STORY OF A RUNAWAY SLAVE—Read/download the entire sermon, free of charge, at <http://www.spurgeongems.org>.] Onesimus had run away with some of his master’s money, but his master sent his prayers after him and, by-and-by, there came a sheriff’s officer to arrest him—not one of Caesar’s officers, but one of God’s. It was the Apostle Paul who, in the preaching of the Word of God, arrested the runaway servant and he went back to his master saved! How do you know but that your son will come home converted? How do you know, Mother, but that you will yet see your daughter rejoicing in Christ? Never cease praying for them till the breath is out of their bodies, but continue in supplication till they are brought into the Church in your house!

But O you Christians who wish to make a Church in your house, *do not let your own inconsistencies mar any good work in others!* Above all, *do not have any disagreements among yourselves.* Talk not in such a way that good impressions, once happily made, become wretchedly marred. I have heard of a wife walking home with her husband from a place of worship. He was an ungodly man. She had often prayed for him and he

went with her to hear the sermon. She had been praying that he might be blessed and yet, in walking home, she was foolish enough to begin criticizing the sermon. She asked him how he liked it and he made no answer. She began pulling it to pieces, till at last he stopped her and said, "My dear wife, you have often prayed to God that I might be blessed. God has blessed that sermon to me this morning and I cannot bear to hear you speak of it as you have been speaking." I know this is a fault with many Christians—not that we ministers care at all what you say about us, except for the evil you often do in spoiling to others that which does not happen to suit your fastidious taste, for you may in that way be doing the devil's work.

IV. The last thing I want to say to you is this. LOOK ONWARDS A MINUTE.

When Halyburton lay a-dying, he said, among other joyous expressions, "I bless God that I have a father in Heaven! I bless God that I have a mother in Heaven! I bless God that I have ten brothers and sisters in Heaven! I am the last of the family and I shall be in Heaven within an hour!" This was a glorious thought! What a happy meeting theirs would be! Spirits "are neither married nor given in marriage," nor are social ties respected there, but still, I cannot conceive of Halyburton's family but as making up a constellation like the Pleiades, all meekly and gently shining together to the praise of God!

I saw in a house, the other day, a very singular picture of the Resurrection. It was supposed to represent the resurrection of a Christian family. The artist was not very imaginative, but still he had done it pretty well. The big stone that covered the tomb was just broken in halves and you saw coming up at the top some of the little ones, those latest buried. There were three or four of them stretching their wings upwards. Of course, this represented as much the resurrection of the soul as of the body in the artist's mind, it was rather a complicated metaphor. Then there were the father and mother, and a number of grandchildren—and I was glad to see that there were the grandfather and grandmother, both coming up from one tomb, and going up together to the Throne of God. I only hope that, though some of us may be buried in distant lands and—

***"Our graves are scattered far and wide,
By fount, and stream, and sea"—***

yet, practically, we may rise together when the last trumpet sounds, an unbroken family!

I may be excused, perhaps, for referring to God's singular mercy to my own household. What a blessing it is to my father and mother now that they can rejoice in six of their children walking in the Truth of God who have given themselves up to the Lord Jesus! The Lord has been graciously pleased to bring them in, one by one, and all who have now reached years of discretion, so as to be able to understand the Gospel, have believed in Jesus Christ! And in generations that have gone by, my grandfather could say the same, and *his* father could say the same of his house! We have been a race of those whom God has blessed. May it be

your privilege, also, beloved members of this Church! I cannot wish you a greater blessing. If I knew how to bestow the greatest blessing upon you, I think my knowledge would not amount to more than this, that, being yourselves saved, you might have all your families walking in the Truth of God and, speaking after the manner of men, why should it not be the case with you? Prayer, earnest and mighty prayer, gets no denial from the Throne of God!—

“Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,”

and claims its fulfillment, “for the promise is unto you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even to as many as the Lord our God shall call.” God’s eternal purpose stands fast and fixed, we know, but when He moves His people’s hearts to pray, He intends to bless. We will be more earnest in praying for one another than we have been. We will be more earnest in praying about our children than we have been. And may God grant us Grace so that we may, all of us, be able to say that we have a Church in our house! “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ”—this is the foundation of the Church and they who have believed are members of Christ’s Church and so see His face in the midst of the one family in Heaven and earth, which is named by Him as “the general assembly and Church of the first-born, which are written in Heaven.” God grant that, of this Church, both we and ours may all be members!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: PHILEMON.

Verse 1. *Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.* This is one of Paul’s private letters, though it has the stamp of Inspiration upon it. It was not written concerning Church business, nor to teach some great doctrinal Truth of God, but there was a runaway slave who had come to Rome and who had been converted under Paul’s ministry. Paul was sending him back to his master—and this was the letter which he was to take with him, to make some sort of apology for him and to ask his master to receive him with kindness and to forgive his fault. Every word of this Epistle is very wisely put. Paul begins by calling himself “a prisoner of Jesus Christ.” Who would not grant him his desire when he was wearing a chain for Christ’s sake? If a letter were to come to you from some beloved minister whom you knew to be lying in a dungeon and likely soon to die, you would be greatly touched if you noticed the traces of the rust of his chains on the letter. “Paul, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.”

1, 2. *And Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer, and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the Church in your house.* He joins Timothy with himself to give double weight to the message. Probably Timothy was well known to Philemon and much respected by him, so he puts Timothy’s name that there might be two to plead with him. Then, notice the loving titles with which Paul addresses Philemon—“our dearly beloved, and fellow laborer.” Probably the person whom Paul called, “beloved Apphia” was Philemon’s wife, so he writes to her, also, for perhaps the wife was the more tender-hearted of the two, so she might put in a good word for Onesimus—and

her husband would all the more readily grant Paul's request. He also mentions Archippus, who was either the pastor of the Church at Colosse, or an Evangelist who stayed occasionally at the house of Philemon. So he mentions him with all the rest of the household who met there for worship and so made up the Church in the house.

3-7. *Grace to you, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God, making mention of you always in my prayers, hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints; that the communication of your faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. For we have great joy and consolation in your love because the hearts of the saints are refreshed by you, Brother.* Paul recalls how much Philemon had done in the comforting of persecuted and poor saints. And when you are about to ask a favor of anyone, it is well to show your gratitude for what you or others have already received from him.

8, 9. *Therefore though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin you that which is convenient, yet for love's sake I rather beseech you, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now, also, a prisoner of Jesus Christ.* He says in effect, "I am an Apostle and I am your spiritual father, so I might have spoken with authority to you and have said, 'It is your duty to do this.' But I am not going to do anything of the kind. I am going to plead with you and beseech it of you as a kindness and a favor. Pay a loving tribute to my old age and, besides that, I am a prisoner shut up in the dungeon for Christ's sake—hear the clanking of my chains, and grant my request for love's sake."

10. *I beseech you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds.* "He came to hear me preach in the prison. He has been listening to me while I am still a captive and he has been given to me, as another son in the Gospel, to be a comfort to me in my bonds. I beseech you for him."

11, 12. *Which in time past was to you unprofitable, but now profitable to you and to me: whom I have sent again.* "He was your slave, and therefore I have sent him back to you."

12. *You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart.* "Look upon him as though he were my very heart and receive him as you would receive me if I could go to you."

13, 14. *Whom I would have retained with me, that in your place he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the Gospel: but without your permission would I do nothing; that your benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.* "I would have kept him," says Paul, "for I need someone to be my companion, to comfort me in my distress. But I would not do it without asking your permission, lest I should seem to take advantage of you. Though I know that you would willingly consent to it, yet, nevertheless, that it might be perfectly voluntary on your part, I have sent him back to you, that you may do as you will with him."

15-17. *For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that you should receive him forever; not now as a servant, but above a servant, a beloved*

Brother, especially to me, but how much more unto you, both in the flesh, and in the Lord? If you count me therefore a partner. “If you have true fellowship and communion with me”—

17. *Receive him as myself.* How beautifully this is put all through! It very much reminds me of our Lord Jesus Christ, who seems to say to the Divine Father, “This poor child is in fellowship with Me. Receive him, therefore, as Myself.” And this is just what God does in the case of repenting and believing sinners—He receives them just as if He could see Christ in them.

18. *If he has wronged you, or owes you anything, put that on my account.* How generously this is put by this poor prisoner at Rome and how gloriously, in this, he is like our Master who stands as Surety for us!

19. *I, Paul, have written it with my own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to you how you owe unto me even your own self besides.* Paul had been the means of Philemon’s conversion, so he was immeasurably in debt to the Apostle. But Paul only gently reminds him of the fact as a reason why he should deal kindly with Onesimus for his sake.

20. *Yes, Brother, let me have joy of you in the Lord: refresh my heart in the Lord.* “You have refreshed others, then, surely, you will not now let me be without refreshment! You have been very kind to all sorts of saints, then you cannot be unkind to the man who is your own spiritual father.”

21. *Having confidence in your obedience I wrote unto you, knowing that you will do more than I say.* This is delicately yet forcibly put, and we feel certain that Philemon must have done as Paul wished, even though we have no record of the fact.

22-25. *But withal prepare me also a lodging: for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you. There salute you Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus; Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow laborers. The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307*

**PRAY THE HOLY SPIRIT WILL USE THIS SERMON
TO BRING MANY TO A SAVING KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST.**

THE STORY OF A RUNAWAY SLAVE NO. 1268

**DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.**

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

NATURE is selfish but Grace is loving. He who boasts that he cares for nobody and nobody cares for him, is the reverse of a Christian, for Jesus Christ enlarges the heart when He cleanses it. None so tender and sympathetic as our Master and if we are truly His disciples, the same mind will be in us which was also in Christ Jesus. The Apostle Paul was eminently large-hearted and sympathetic. Surely he had enough to do at Rome to bear his own troubles and to preach the Gospel. If, like the priest in the parable of the good Samaritan, he had, “passed by on the other side,” he might have been excused, for he was on the urgent business of that Master who once said to His 70 messengers, “Salute no man by the way.”

We might not have wondered if Paul had said, “I cannot find time to attend to the needs of a runaway slave.” But Paul was not of that mind. He had been preaching and Onesimus had been converted—and from now on he regarded him as his own son. I do not know why Onesimus came to Paul. Perhaps he went to him as a great many scapegraces have come to me—because their fathers knew me. And so, as Onesimus’ master had known Paul, the servant applied to his master’s friend, perhaps to beg some little help in his extremity. Anyway, Paul seized the opportunity and preached Jesus to him and the runaway slave became a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ!

Paul watched him, admired the character of his convert and was glad to be served by him. And when Paul thought it right that he should return to his master, Philemon, he took a deal of trouble to compose a letter of apology for him, a letter which shows long thinking, since every word is well selected. Although the Holy Spirit dictated it, Inspiration does not prevent a man’s exercising thought and care on what he writes. Every word is chosen for a purpose. If he had been pleading for himself, he could not have pleaded more earnestly or wisely. Paul, as you know, was not accustomed to write letters with his own hand, but dictated to a secretary.

It is supposed that he had an affection of the eyes and, therefore, when he did write, he used large capital letters, as he says in one of the Epistles, “You see how large a letter I have written unto you with my own hand.” The Epistle was not a large one, but he probably alluded to the largeness of the characters which he was obliged to use whenever he, himself, wrote. This letter to Philemon, at least part of it, was not dictated, but was written by his own hand. See the 19th verse. “I, Paul, have written it with my own hand. I will repay it.” It is the only note of hand which I re-

call in Scripture, but there it is—an I O U for whatever amount Onesimus may have stolen!

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

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

I. But, first, let us look at Onesimus as AN INSTANCE OF DIVINE GRACE. We see the Grace of God in his *election*. He was a slave. In those days slaves were very ignorant, untaught and degraded. Being barbarously used, they were for the most part, themselves sunk in the lowest barbarism. Neither did their masters attempt to raise them out of it. It is possible that Philemon’s attempt to do good to Onesimus may have been irksome to the man and he may, therefore, have fled from his house. His master’s prayers, warnings and Christian regulations may have been disagreeable to him and therefore he ran away.

He wronged his master, which he would scarcely have done if he had not been treated as a confidential servant to some extent. Possibly the unusual kindness of Philemon and the trust reposed in him may have been too much for his untrained nature. We know not what he stole, but evidently he had taken *something*, for the Apostle says, “If he has wronged you, or owes you anything, put that on my account.” He ran away from Colosse, therefore, and thinking that he would be less likely to be discovered by the ministers of justice, he sought the city of Rome which was, then, as large as the city of London is now, and perhaps larger.

There, in those back slums, such as the Jews’ quarter in Rome now is, Onesimus would go and hide. Or among those gangs of thieves which infested the imperial city, he would not be known or heard of any more, so he thought—and he could live the free and easy life of a thief. Yet, mark you, the Lord looked out of Heaven with an eye of love and set that eye on Onesimus! Were there no *free men*, that God must elect a *slave*? Were there no faithful servants, that He must choose one who had embezzled his master’s money? Were there none of the educated and polite, that He must look upon a barbarian? Were there none among the moral and the excellent that Infinite Love should fix itself upon this degraded being who was now mixed up with the very scum of society?

And what the scum of society was in old Rome I should not like to think, for the upper classes were about as brutalized in their general habits as we can very well conceive! What the lowest scum of all must have been, none of us can tell. Onesimus was part and parcel of the dregs of a sink of sin. Read Paul's first chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, if you can, and you will see in what a horrible state the heathen world was, at that time. And Onesimus was among the worst of the worst! And yet Eternal Love, which passed by kings and princes and left Pharisees and Sadducees, philosophers and magi to stumble in the dark as they chose, fixed its eyes upon this poor benighted creature that he might be made a vessel to honor, fit for the Master's use!—

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

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

Grace, also, is to be observed, in the next place, in the *conversion* of this runaway slave. Look at him! How unlikely he appears to become a convert. He is an Asiatic slave of about the same grade as an ordinary Lascar, or heathen Chinese. He was, however, worse than the ordinary Lascar who is certainly free and probably an honest man, if he is nothing else. This man had been dishonest and he was daring, for after taking his master's property he was bold enough to make a long journey from Colosse to reach Rome. But Everlasting Love means to convert the man—and converted he shall be!

He may have heard Paul preach at Colosse and Athens, but yet he had not been impressed. In Rome, Paul was not preaching in St. Peter's—it was in no such noble building! Paul was not preaching in a place like the Tabernacle, where Onesimus could have a comfortable seat—no such place as that—but it was probably down there at the back of the Palatine Hill, where the praetorian guard have their lodgings and where there was a prison called the Praetorian. In a bare room in the barrack prison Paul

sat with a soldier chained to his hand, preaching to all who were admitted to hear him—and *there* it was that the Grace of God reached the heart of this wild young man, and, oh, what an immediate change it made in him!

Now you see him repenting of his sin, grieved to think he has wronged a good man, vexed to see the depravity of his heart as well as the error of his life. He weeps. Paul preaches to him Christ crucified and the glance of joy is in his eye—and from that heavy heart a load is taken! New thoughts light up that dark mind! The very face is changed and the entire man renewed, for the Grace of God can turn a lion into a lamb, the raven into a dove! Some of us, I have no doubt, are quite as wonderful instances of Divine election and effectual calling as Onesimus was. Let us, therefore, record the lovingkindness of the Lord and let us say to ourselves, “Christ shall have the glory of it. The Lord has done it and unto the Lord be honor, world without end.”

The Grace of God was conspicuous in *the character which it worked in Onesimus* upon his conversion, for he appears to have been helpful, useful and profitable. So Paul says. Paul was willing to have had him as an associate and it is not every man that is converted that we should altogether choose as a companion. There are odd people to be met with who will go to Heaven, we have no doubt, for they are pilgrims on the right way. But we would like to keep on the other side of the road, for they are cross-grained and there is something about them that one’s nature can no more delight in than the palate can take pleasure in nauseous medicine. They are a sort of spiritual hedgehogs—they are alive and useful and, no doubt, they illustrate the wisdom and patience of God—but they are not good companions. One would not like to carry them in his bosom.

But Onesimus was evidently of a kind, tender, loving spirit. Paul at once called him Brother and would have liked to retain him. When he sent him back, was it not a clear proof of a change of heart in Onesimus that he would go back? Away as he was in Rome, he might have passed on from one town to another and have remained perfectly free. But feeling that he was under some kind of bond to his master—especially since he had injured him—he takes Paul’s advice to return to his old position. He will go back and take a letter of apology or introduction to his master, for he knows that it is his duty to make reparation for the wrong that he has done.

I always like to see a resolve to make restitution of former wrongs in people who profess to be converted. If they have taken any money wrongfully, they ought to repay it. It were well if they returned sevenfold. If we have, in any way, robbed or wronged another, I think the first instincts of Grace in the heart will suggest compensation in all ways within our power. Do not think it is to be got over by saying, “God has forgiven me and, therefore, I may leave it.” No, dear Friend, but inasmuch as God has forgiven you, try to undo all the wrong and prove the sincerity of your repentance by so doing.

So Onesimus will go back to Philemon and work out his term of years with him, or otherwise do Philemon’s wishes, for though he might have preferred to wait upon Paul, his first duty was due to the man whom he

had injured. That showed a gentle, humble, honest, upright spirit and let Onesimus be commended for it—no, let the Grace of God be extolled for it! Look at the difference between the man who robbed and the man who now comes back to be profitable to his master. What wonders the Grace of God has done! Brethren, let me add—what wonders the Grace of God can do! Many plans are employed in the world for the reformation of the wicked and the reclaiming of the fallen—and to every one of these, as far as they are rightly bottomed, we wish good success—for whatever things are lovely and pure, and of good report, we wish them God speed.

But mark this word—the true reforming of the drunk lies in giving him a new *heart*! The true reclaiming of the harlot is to be found in a renewed *nature*! Purity will never come to fallen women by those hideous Contagious Diseases Acts, which, to my mind, wear, like Cain, a curse upon their forehead! Womanhood will but sink lower under such laws. The harlot must be washed in the Savior's blood or she will never be clean! The lowest strata of society will never be brought into the light of virtue, sobriety and purity except by Jesus Christ and His Gospel—and we must stick to that. Let all others do what they like, but God forbid that I should glory save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I see certain of my Brethren fiddling away at the branches of the tree of vice with their wooden saws, but, as for the Gospel, it lays the axe at the roots of the whole forest of evil! And if it is fairly received into the heart it fells all the upas trees at once—and instead of them, there spring up the fir tree, the pine tree and the box tree together—to beautify the house of our Master's Glory! Let us, when we see what the Spirit of God can do for men, publish the Grace of God and extol it with all our might!

II. And now, secondly, we have in our text and its connections, a very interesting INSTANCE OF SIN OVERRULED. Onesimus had no right to rob his master and run away. But God was pleased to make use of that crime for his conversion. It brought him to Rome and so brought him where Paul was preaching—and thus it brought him to Christ and to his right mind. Now, when we speak of this, we must be cautious. When Paul says, "Perhaps he departed for a season, that you should receive him forever," he does not excuse his departure. He does not make it out that Onesimus did right—not for a moment! Sin is sin, and, whatever sin may be overruled to do, yet sin is *still* sin!

The crucifixion of our Savior has brought the greatest conceivable blessings upon mankind, yet, none the less, it was "with wicked hands" that they took Jesus and crucified Him. The selling of Joseph into Egypt was the means in the hand of God for the preservation of Jacob and his sons in the time of famine. But his brothers had nothing to do with that and they were, none the less, guilty for having sold their brother for a slave. Let it always be remembered that the faultiness or virtue of an act is not contingent upon the result of that act.

If, for instance, a man who has been set on a railway to turn the switch forgets to do it, you call it a very great crime if the train comes to mischief and a dozen people are killed. Yes, but the crime is the same if *nobody* is killed. It is not the *result* of the carelessness, but the carelessness, itself, which deserves punishment. If it were the man's duty to turn the switch

in such-and-such a way, and his not doing so should even by some strange accident turn to the saving of life, the man would be equally blameworthy. There would be no credit due to him, for if his duty lies in a certain line his fault also lies in a certain line, namely, the neglecting of that duty.

So if God overrules sin for good, as He sometimes does, it is none the less sin. It is sin just as much as ever, only there is so much the more glory to the wonderful wisdom and Grace of God who, out of evil, brings forth good and so does what only Omnipotent Wisdom can perform. Onesimus is not excused, then, for having embezzled his master's goods nor for having left him without permission—he still is a transgressor—but God's Grace is glorified. Remember, too, that this must be noticed—that when Onesimus left his master, he was performing an action, the results of which, in all probability, would have been ruinous to him.

He was living as a trusted dependent beneath the roof of a kind master who had a Church in his house. If I read the Epistle rightly, he had a godly mistress and a godly master and he had an opportunity of learning the Gospel continually. But this reckless young blade, very likely, could not bear it and could have lived more contentedly with a heathen master, who would have beaten him one day and made him drunk another! The Christian master he could not bear, so away he went. He threw away the opportunities of salvation and he went to Rome. And he must have gone into the lowest part of the city and associated, as I have already told you, with the very grossest company.

Now, had it come to pass that he had joined in the insurrections of the slaves which took place frequently about that time, as he in all probability would have done had not Grace prevented, he would have been put to death as others had been. He would have had a short stay in Rome. I half suspect a month and off with his head as was the rule towards slaves and vagabonds. Onesimus was just the very man that would have been likely to be hurried to death and to eternal destruction. He had put his head, as it were, between the lion's jaws by what he had done. When a young man suddenly leaves home and goes to London, we know what it means. When his friends do not know where he is, and he does not want them to know, we are aware, within a little while, where he is and what he is up to.

What Onesimus was doing, I do not know, but he was certainly doing his best to ruin himself. His course, therefore, is to be judged, as far as he is concerned, by what it was *likely* to bring him to—and though it did not bring him to it, that was no credit to him—all the honor of it is due to the overruling power of God! See, dear Brothers and Sisters, how God overruled all. Thus had the Lord purposed. Nobody shall be able to touch the heart of Onesimus but Paul. Onesimus is living at Colosse. Paul cannot come there, he is in prison. It is necessary, then, that Onesimus should go to Paul. Suppose the kindness of Philemon's heart had prompted him to say to Onesimus, "I want you to go to Rome and find Paul out and hear him"?

This evil servant would have said, "I am not going to risk my life to hear a sermon. If I go with the money you are sending to Paul, or with the letter, I shall deliver it, but I want none of his preaching." Sometimes, you

know, when people are brought to hear a preacher with the view of their being converted, if they have any idea of it, it is about the very *last* thing likely to happen, because they go there resolved to be fireproof. And so the preaching does not come home to them—and it would probably have been just so with Onesimus. No, no, he was not to be won in that way! He must go to Rome another way. How shall it be done?

Well, the *devil* shall do it, not knowing that he will be losing a willing servant thereby! The devil tempts Onesimus to steal. Onesimus does it and when he has stolen he is afraid of being discovered and so he makes tracks for Rome as quickly as he can! And he gets down among the back slums and there he feels what the prodigal felt—a hungry belly—and that is one of the best preachers in the world to some people! Their conscience is reached in that way. Being very hungry, not knowing what to do and no man giving anything to him, he thinks whether there is anybody in Rome that would take pity on him.

He does not know anybody in Rome at all and is likely to starve. Perhaps one morning there was a Christian woman—I should not wonder—who was going to hear Paul and she saw this poor man sitting crouched up on the steps of a temple. Perhaps she went to him and spoke about his soul. “Soul?” said he, “I care nothing about that, but my body would thank you for something to eat. I am starving.” She replied, “Come with me, then,” and she gave him bread and then she said, “I do this for Jesus Christ’s sake.” “Jesus Christ!” he said, “I have heard of Him. I used to hear of Him over at Colosse.” “Whom did you hear speak about Him?” the woman would ask. “Why, a short man with weak eyes. A great preacher named Paul, who used to come to my master’s house.” “Why, I am going to hear him preach,” the woman would say, “will you come and hear him with me?” “Well, I think I should like to hear him again. He always had a kind word to say to the poor.” So he goes in and pushes his way among the soldiers. And Paul’s Master incites Paul to speak the right words.

It may have been so, or it may have been the other way—that not knowing anybody else at all, he thought, “Well, there is Paul, I know. He is here a prisoner and I will go down and see what prison he is in.” He goes down to the Praetorian and finds him there, tells him of his extreme poverty and Paul talks to him. And then he confesses the wrong he has done and Paul, after teaching him a little while, says, “Now, you must go back and make amends to your master for the wrong you have done.” It may have been either of these ways, but, at any rate, the Lord must have Onesimus in Rome to hear Paul. And the sin of Onesimus, though perfectly voluntary on his part, so that God had no hand in it, is yet overruled by a mysterious Providence to bring him where the Gospel shall be blessed to his soul.

Now, I want to speak to some of you Christian people about this matter. Have you a son who has left home? Is he a willful, wayward young man who has gone away because he could not bear the restraints of a Christian family? It is a sad thing it should be so—a very sad thing—but do not despond or even have a thought of despair about him! You do not know where he is, but God does! And you cannot follow him, but the Spirit of God can! He is going on a voyage to Shanghai. Ah, there may be a Paul at

Shanghai who is to be the means of his salvation! And as that Paul is not in England, your son must go there. Is it to Australia that he is going? There may be a word spoken there, by the blessing of God, to your son which is the only word which ever will reach him!

I cannot speak it. Nobody in London can speak it. But the man there, will, and God, therefore, is letting him go away in all his willfulness and folly that he may be brought under the means of Grace which will prove effectual to his salvation. Many a sailor boy has been wild, reckless, godless, Christless and at last has got into a foreign hospital. Ah, if his mother knew that he was down with the yellow fever, how sad her mind would be, for she would conclude that her dear son will die away at Havana or somewhere, and never come home again. But it is just in that hospital that God means to meet with him!

A sailor writes to me something like that. He says, "My mother asked me to read a chapter every day, but I never did. I got into the hospital at Havana, and, when I lay there, there was a man near to me who was dying. And he died one night, but before he died, he said to me, 'Mate, could you come here? I want to speak to you. I have got something that is very precious to me here. I was a wild fellow, but reading this packet of sermons has brought me to the Savior, and I am dying with a good hope through Grace. Now, when I am dead and gone, will you take these sermons and read them? And may God bless them to you. And will you write a letter to the man that preached and printed those sermons, to tell him that God blessed them to my conversion and that I hope he will bless them to yourself?'"

It was a packet of my sermons, and God *did* bless them to that young man who, I have no doubt whatever, went to that hospital because there a man who had been brought to Christ would hand to him the words which God had blessed to himself and would bless to his friend! You do not know, dear Mother, you do not know. The worst thing that can happen to a young man is sometimes the best thing that can happen to him! I have sometimes thought, when I have seen young men of position and wealth taking to racing and all sorts of dissipation, "Well, it is a dreadfully bad thing, but they may as well get through their money as quickly as ever they can, and then when they have got down to begging they will be like the young gentleman in the parable who left his father."

When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in need, and he said, "I will arise and go to my father." Perhaps the disease that follows vice—perhaps the poverty that comes like an armed man after extravagance and debauchery—is but love in another form, sent to compel the sinner to come to himself and consider his ways and seek an ever merciful God! You Christian people often see the little gutter children—the poor little Arabs in the street—and you feel much pity for them, as well you may. There is a dear Sister here, Miss Annie MacPherson, who lives only for them. God bless her and her work! When you see them you cannot be glad to see them as they are, but I have often thought that the poverty and hunger of one of these poor little children has a louder voice to most hearts than their vice and ignorance! And God

knew that we were not ready and able to hear the cry of the child's sin, so He added the child's hunger to that cry, that it might pierce our hearts.

People could live in sin and yet be happy, if they were well-to-do and rich. And if sin did not make parents poor and wretched, and their children miserable, we should not see it and, therefore, we should not awaken ourselves to grapple with it. It is a blessing, you know, in some diseases, when the patient can throw the complaint out upon the skin. It is a horrible thing to see it on the skin, but still it is better than its being hidden inside. Oftentimes the outward sin and the outward misery are a sort of throwing out of the disease so that the eyes of those who know where the healing medicine is to be had is thereby drawn to the disease—and so the soul's secret malady is dealt with.

Onesimus might have stayed at home and he might never have been a thief! But he might have been lost through self-righteousness. But now his sin is visible. The scapegrace has displayed the depravity of his heart and now it is that he comes under Paul's eyes and Paul's prayers and becomes converted! Do not, I pray you, ever despair of man or woman or child because you see their sin upon the surface of their character. On the contrary, say to yourself, "This is placed where I can see it, that I may pray about it. It is thrown out under my eyes that I may now concern myself to bring this poor soul to Jesus Christ, the mighty Savior who can save the most forlorn sinner."

Look at it in the light of earnest, active benevolence and awaken yourselves to conquer it! Our duty is to hope on and to pray on. It may be, perhaps, that, "he therefore departed for a season, that you should receive him forever." Perhaps the boy has been so wayward that his sin may come to a crisis and a new heart may be given him. Perhaps your daughter's evil has been developed that now the Lord may convince her of sin and bring her to the Savior's feet. At any rate, if the case is ever so bad, hope in God and pray on!

III. Once more. Our text may be viewed as AN EXAMPLE OF RELATIONS IMPROVED. "He therefore departed for a season, that you should receive him forever." *"Not now as a servant, but a Brother beloved, specially to one, but how much more unto you?"* You know we are a long while learning great truths. Perhaps Philemon had not quite found out that it was wrong for him to have a slave. Some men who were very good in their time did not know it. John Newton did not know that he was flying wrong in the slave trade and George Whitfield, when he left slaves to the orphanage at Savannah, which had been willed to him, did not think, for a moment, that he was doing anything more than if he had been dealing with horses, or gold and silver.

Public sentiment was not enlightened, although the Gospel has always struck at the very root of slavery. The essence of the Gospel is that we are to do to others as we would that others should do to us—and *nobody* would wish to be another man's slave—and therefore he has no right to have another man as his slave. Perhaps, when Onesimus ran away and came back again, this letter of Paul may have opened Philemon's eyes a little as to his own position. Maybe he began to doubt that he was a good master. He had trusted his servant and not treated him as a slave at all,

but perhaps he had not regarded him as a brother. And now Onesimus has come back. He will be a better servant, but Philemon will be a better master and a slave-holder no longer. He will regard his former servant as a Brother in Christ.

Now, this is what the Grace of God does when it comes into a family. It does not alter the relations. It does not give the child a right to be pert and forget that he is to be obedient to his parents. It does not give the father a right to lord it over his children without wisdom and love, for it tells him that he is not to provoke his children to anger, lest they be discouraged. It does not give the servant the right to be a master, neither does it take away from the master his position, or allow him to exaggerate his authority—but all round it softens and sweetens.

Rowland Hill used to say that he would not give a halfpenny for a man's piety if his dog and his cat were not better off after he was converted. There was much weight in that remark. Everything in the house goes better when Grace oils the wheels. The mistress is, perhaps, rather sharp, quick, tart—well, she gets a little sugar into her constitution when she receives the Grace of God! The servant may be apt to loiter, be late up in the morning, very slovenly, fond of a gossip at the door. But if she is truly converted, all that kind of thing ends. She is conscientious and attends to her duty as she ought. The master, perhaps—well, he is the master and you know it. But when he is a truly Christian man—he has a gentleness, a suavity, a considerateness about him.

The husband is the head of the wife, but when renewed by Grace he is not at all the head of the wife as some husbands are. The wife also keeps her place and seeks, by all gentleness and wisdom to make the house as happy as she can. I do not believe in your religion, dear Friend, if it belongs to the Tabernacle and the Prayer Meeting, but not to your home. The best religion in the world is that which smiles at the table, works at the sewing machine, and is amiable in the drawing-room. Give me the religion which blacks boots and does them well, cooks the food and cooks it so that it can be eaten! Measures out yards of calico and does not make them half-an-inch short! Sells a hundred yards of an article and does not label 90 a hundred, as many trades people do!

That is the true Christianity which affects the whole of life! If we are truly Christians we shall be changed in all our relationships to our fellow men and, therefore, we shall regard those whom we call our inferiors with quite a different eye. It is wrong in Christian people when they are so sharp upon little faults that they see in servants, especially if they are Christian servants. That is not the way to correct them. They see a little something wrong and, oh, they are down upon the poor girls as if they had murdered somebody! If your Master, and mine, were to treat us in that style I wonder how we would get on? How quick some are in discharging their maids for small faults! No excuse, no trying the persons again—they must go.

Many a young man has been turned out of a situation for the littlest trifle, by a Christian employer, when he must have known that he would be exposed to all sorts of risks. And many a servant has been sent adrift as if she were a dog, with no sort of thought whether another position could be

found, and without anything being done to prevent her going astray. Do let us think of others, especially of those whom Christ loves even as He does us. Philemon might have said, "No, no, I won't take you back, Mr. Onesimus, not I. Once bitten, twice shy, Sir. I never ride a horse with broken knees. You stole my money! I am not going to have you back again." I have heard that style of talk, have not you? Did you ever feel like it? If you have, go home and pray to God to get such a feeling out of you, for it is bad stuff to have in your soul! You cannot take it to Heaven.

When the Lord Jesus Christ has forgiven you so freely, are you to take your servant by the throat and say, "Pay me what you owe?" God forbid that we should continue in such a temper! Be pitiful, easily entreated, ready to forgive. It is a deal better that you should suffer a wrong than *do* a wrong—much better that you should overlook a fault which you might have noticed, than notice a fault which you ought to have overlooked—

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

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

***"Live like the blessed virgin's Son
That meek and lowly Child."***

God grant we may, of His infinite Grace! I want to say this, and then I have done. If the mysterious Providence of God was to be seen in Onesimus getting to Rome, I wonder whether there is any Providence of God in some of you being here tonight? It is possible. Such things do happen. People come here that never meant to come. The last thing in the world they would have believed, if anybody had said it, is that they would be here, yet here they are.

With all manner of lyrists and turns they have gone about, but they have got here somehow. Did you miss a train, and so stepped in to wait? Did not your ship sail quite so soon as you expected, and so are you here tonight? Say, is that it? I do pray you, then, consider this question with your heart. "Does not God mean to bless me? Has He not brought me here, on purpose, that this night I may yield my heart to Jesus as Onesimus did?" My dear Friend, if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall have immediate pardon for all sin and shall be saved! The Lord has brought you here in His infinite wisdom to hear that, and I hope that He has also brought you here that you may accept it and so go your way altogether changed.

Some three years ago I was talking with an aged minister, and he began fumbling about in his waistcoat pocket, but he was a long while before he found what he wanted. At last he brought out a letter that was well near worn to pieces, and he said, "God Almighty bless you! God Almighty bless you!" And I said, "Friend, what is it?" He said, "I had a son. I thought he would be the stay of my old age, but he disgraced himself and he went away from me, and I could not tell where he went, only he said he was going to America. He took a ticket to sail for America from the London Docks, but he did not go on the particular day that he expected."

This aged minister bade me read the letter, and I read it, and it was like this—"Father, I am here in America. I have found a situation and God has

prospered me. I write to ask your forgiveness for the thousand wrongs that I have done you and the grief I have caused you, for blessed be God, I have found the Savior! I have joined the Church of God here, and hope to spend my life in God's service. It happened thus: I did not sail for America the day I expected. I went down to the Tabernacle to see what it was like, and God met with me. Mr. Spurgeon said, 'Perhaps there is a runaway son here. The Lord call him by His Grace.' And he did. "Now," said he, as he folded up the letter and put it in his pocket, "that son of mine is dead and he is in Heaven, and I love you, and I shall do so as long as I live, because you were the means of bringing him to Christ."

Is there a similar character here tonight? I feel persuaded there is—somebody of the same sort—and in the name of God I charge him to take the warning that I give him from this pulpit! I dare you to go out of this place as you came in! Oh, young man, the Lord in mercy gives you another opportunity of turning from the error of your ways, and I pray you now, here—as you now are—lift your eyes to Heaven, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner," and He will be so. Then go home to your father and tell him what the Grace or God has done for you—and wonder at the love which brought you here to bring you to Christ!

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

***"O God, You the sinner turn,
Convince him of his lost estate.
Let him linger no longer,
Lest he linger till he rue his
Fatal choice too late."***

God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

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

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.