

A WONDER OF GRACE

6. Onesimus *The Runaway Servant*

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By C. H. Spurgeon

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Onesimus was a runaway servant in Rome, but he had been converted under Paul’s preaching in that great city, and henceforth the apostle regarded him as his own son. I do not know why Onesimus when he reached Rome found his way to Paul. Perhaps he went to him as a great many scapegraces have come to me — because their fathers or relatives knew me; and so, as Onesimus’s master had known Paul, the servant applied to his master’s friend, perhaps to beg some little help in his extremity. Anyhow, Paul seized the opportunity and preached the gospel 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 became intensely attached to him. When he 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, which we now call “the Epistle to Philemon” Paul, as you know, was not accustomed to write letters with his own hand, but dictated to an amanuensis. It is supposed that he had an affection of the eyes, and therefore when he did write he used large capital letters, for as he says in one of his shorter epistles, “Ye 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 eighteenth and nineteenth verses — “If he have wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand. I will repay it.” It is the only note of hand which I recollect 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 sympathise with new converts when we find them in trouble through past wrong-doing. It is not ours to say that it serves them right, but see how we can extricate them from their difficulties. Let us try and set the fallen ones on their feet again, and give them, 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 Onesimus, who had been a slave for a season, would abide with Philemon all his lifetime, and be no more a servant but a brother beloved.

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 endeavour 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 could scarcely have done if he had not been treated to some extent as a confidential servant. Possibly the unusual kindness of

Philemon, and the trust he reposed in his slave 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 hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine 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 London now is, and perhaps larger. There in those back slums of the Jews quarter Onesimus could hide; or he would obtain shelter amongst those gangs of thieves which infested the imperial city. He thought that he would not be known or be heard of any more and he could live the free and easy life of one who has no ties and no particular calling. Yet, mark you, the Lord looked out of heaven with an eye of love, and set that eye on Onesimus. Oh that he may look on any reckless youth who has left his father's house because he cannot bear the just restraints of the parental rule.

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 needs 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; and what the lowest must have been, none of us can tell. Bad as we now are, society is by no means so unutterably vile in its habits as in the days of Nero and Caligula: indeed, men would not tolerate in the most filthy haunts of vice the deeds which were then done openly by all ranks. The world was deeply depraved, 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, fixed its eye upon this poor benighted creature that he might be made a vessel to honour, fit for the Master's use.

This is ever the way of grace, it glories in selecting those whom human partiality would have passed by, that it may abase the

pride of man and reveal the sovereignty of God.

“I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion,” are sentences which roll like thunder alike from the cross of Calvary and from the mount of Sinai. The Lord is a sovereign and doeth as he pleases. Let us admire that marvellous 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 Chinee.” He was, however, worse than the ordinary Lascar who is certainly free, and probably an honest man, if he is nothing else: this man was a slave and a thief and was without home and family, for after taking his master’s property he had left all associations of the town in which he had been brought up, and had run away to Rome. He was like a derelict vessel, without owner and helmsman, drifting to sure destruction, with no man to care what became of him. But everlasting love means to convert the man, and converted he shall be. He had probably heard Paul preach at Colosse, but he had not been impressed by the word. At Rome, Paul was not preaching in St. Peter’s: it was in no such noble building, but it was probably down there at the back of the Palatine hill, where the Praetorian Guard had their lodgings, and where there was a military 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 runaway, the embezzler of his master’s goods. What a change it made in him immediately! Now you see him repenting of his sin, grieved to think he has wronged a good master, vexed at his folly, and confounded as he beholds the depravity of his heart as well as the error of his life. He weeps as Paul preaches of judgment to come: the glance of joy is in his eye: as he hears of redeeming love: and from that heavy heart a load is taken. New thoughts light up his dark mind; his heart is relieved from despair his face is changed, and the entire man renewed, for the grace of God has in his case

turned the lion to a lamb, the raven to 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 hath done it; and unto the Lord be honour; world without end."

The grace of God was conspicuous in *the character which it wrought 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 this is greatly in his favour: 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 have no wish for much of their company on the road. They are cross-grained, crabbed and cantankerous with something about them that one's nature can no more delight in than the palate can take pleasure in nauseous physic. 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 called him "my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds," and even says "Receive him, that is mine own bowels." He said that he would have retained him that he might have ministered to him in the bonds of the gospel, had he not thought it better to have his masters full consent first. When Paul bade him return, was it not clear proof of change 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 obligation 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 feels that it is his duty to make reparation for the wrong that he has done. A resolve to make restitution of former wrongs is a test of sincerity in people who profess to be converted. If they have taken money or goods wrongfully they ought to repay it; it were

well if they returned sevenfold. If we have in any way robbed or wronged another, 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 restitution. So Onesimus was content to go back to Philemon, and work out his term of years with him, or do as Philemon's wishes, for though he might have preferred to wait upon Paul, his service was due to the man whom he had injured. That showed a gentle, humble, honest, upright spirit; and let Onesimus be commended for it: nay, let the grace of God be extolled for it. Look at the difference between the man who robbed his master and ran away and the new man who came of his own accord to be profitable to the master he had defrauded.

What wonders the grace of God has done! 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 drunkard lies in giving him a new heart; and the real reclaiming of the harlot is to be found in a renewed nature. Let others do what they will, 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 root of every tree in the whole forest of evil, and if it be fairly received into the heart it fells all the upas trees at once, and causes instead of them the fir tree, the pine tree, and the box tree together, to spring up and flourish, to beautify the house of our Master's glory. Let us, since we see what the Spirit of God can do for men, publish abroad the gospel of the grace of God, and extol the Lord with all our might.

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. His dishonesty drove him to Rome, and so led him to the spot 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 thou shouldest receive him for ever," he does not apologize for the absconding of Onesimus, but he generously suggests a reason for his master's forgiving him the wrong. He does not make it out that Onesimus did right — not for a moment. Sin is sin, and, whatever it may be overruled to do, yet sin is still evil and only evil. The crucifixion of our Saviour 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 of the preservation of Jacob, and his sons, in the time of famine; but his brethren were none the less guilty for having sold him 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 good results, 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; only there is so much the more glory to the wonderful wisdom and grace of God who, out of evil, brings forth good. Onesimus is not excused, then, for having embezzled his master's goods, nor for having left him without right; he still is a transgressor, but God's grace is glorified.

Remember, too, that when Onesimus left his master he was performing an action the results of which, in all probability,

would have been ruinous to himself. 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. He threw away the opportunities of salvation, and he went to Rome, and he doubtless went into the lowest part of the city, and associated, as I have already told you, with the most depraved 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. Short shrift was given to rebel slaves in Rome: half suspect a man and off with his head was the rule towards slaves and vagabonds. Onesimus was just the very man that would have been likely to be hurried to death and to eternal destruction. 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, where he is and what he is at. 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 ruin that was no credit to him, but all the honour of his rescue was due to the overruling power of God.

See, 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 needful, then, that Onesimus should be brought 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 naughty servant would have said, "I am not going to risk my life to hear a sermon. If I go with a letter I shall deliver it, but I want none of his preaching." Sometimes, when persons are brought to hear a preacher with the view of their

being converted, if they have any idea that such is the object, it is about the very last thing likely to happen, because they go there resolved to be fireproof against the gospel, and so the preaching does not come home to them: and it would probably have been so with Onesimus. No, no, he was not to be won in that way, he must be drawn to Rome by some other method. 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 yields to the temptation, and then, fearful of being discovered, he makes tracks for Rome as quickly as he can, and gets down among the back slums, and there he feels what the prodigal felt — a hungry belly, which to many is one of the best preachers in the world: their conscience is reached through their being made to feel the result of their wrong-doing. Being very hungry, not knowing what to do, and no man giving anything to him, he considers whether there is anybody in Rome that would pity him. He does not know a single person in the city, and is likely to starve. Perhaps one morning a Christian woman was going to hear Paul, and seeing this poor man sitting fainting upon the steps of a temple, 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 as she did so 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 go with me?” “Yes, I think I should like to see the man 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 the apostle to speak the right word. It may have been so, or it may have been the other way — that not knowing anybody else, he remembered that Paul was there a prisoner, and went to the prison to ask his help. He goes down to the Praetorium and finds him there, tells him of his extreme poverty, and Paul reasons with him and so he becomes a

Christian. It may have been in either of these ways that the man's heart was won; 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, was yet overruled by a mysterious providence to bring him where the gospel was blest 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 wilful, 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 much less 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 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 sailing? There may be a word spoken there by the blessing of God to your son which is the only word that will ever reach him. I cannot speak it; nobody in London can speak it; but a man in the far-off land will be directed to do so; and God, therefore, is letting your boy go away in all his wilfulness 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 from home, and that she will not even have the mournful privilege of weeping over his grave. Yet, perhaps, the mother's fears are all groundless, for it is just in that hospital that God means to save her boy. A sailor writes to me somewhat as follows. He says, "My mother asked me to read a chapter of the Bible every day, but I never did. I got into the hospital at Havannah, and, when I lay there, a man near to me was dying; but before he departed he said to me, 'Could you come here? I want to speak to you. I have got something here that is very precious to me. I was a wild fellow, but reading this packet of sermons has brought me to the Saviour, 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 those sermons, to tell him that through them I have learned to die in peace.” It was a packet of my sermons, and God was pleased to make them useful to that young man, so that he became a Christian. I have no doubt whatever that he was sent to the hospital by a gracious providence that there he might receive the books which the Holy Spirit would employ in his regeneration. You do not know, dear mother, you do not know the deep designs of divine grace. The worst thing that can occur 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 it may by a roundabout process lead to repentance. They will get through their money very quickly, and when they have come down to beggary they will be like the young gentleman in the parable who returned to his father because he could not live away from him.” When he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land, and he began to be in want, and he said, “I will arise and go to my father.” Perhaps the disease which often follows upon vice — perhaps the poverty that comes like an armed man after extravagance and debauch — is but love in another form, sent to compel the sinner to come to himself and consider his ways, and seek the 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. 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. God knew that we were not ready and able to hear the cry of the child’s soul, and so he added the child’s hunger of body to that cry, that he might pierce our hearts. People could live in sin, and be happy, after their own fashion, 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 so clearly see it, and therefore we should not arouse ourselves to grapple with it. It is a benefit in some diseases when

the patient can throw the complaint out upon the skin: and oftentimes outward sin and outward misery are a sort of throwing out of the disease of natural depravity, so that the eye of those who know where the healing medicine is to be had is thereby drawn to the mischief, and the soul's secret malady is dealt with. Onesimus might have stopped at home, and he might never have been a thief, and yet he might have been lost through self-righteousness. But now he has absconded his sin is visible. The scapegrace has displayed the depravity of his heart, and now it is that he comes under Paul's eye and Paul's prayer, 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 made sadly visible to my eye, that I may the more earnestly concern myself to bring this poor soul to Jesus Christ, the mighty Saviour, who can save the most forlorn sinner." Look at vice with the eye of earnest, active benevolence, and rouse yourselves to conquer it. Our duty is to hope on and to pray on. So long as life lingers in the object of our prayer. We cannot tell the designs of God, but we may rest assured that believing prayer cannot fail. 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 the Lord may convince her of sin and bring her to the Saviour's feet. At any rate, if the case be ever so bad, hope in God, and pray on.

Thirdly, our text may be viewed as AN EXAMPLE OF RELATIONS IMPROVED, "He therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever; *not now as a servant, but a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee?*" we are a long while learning great truths. Perhaps Philemon had not found out that it was wrong for him to hold a slave. Some men who were very good in their time did not know the sin of it. John Newton did not know that he was doing wrong by engaging in the slave trade, and George Whitfield, when he left slaves, which had been willed to him, to the orphanage at Savannah, 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 precept 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 hold another man in bondage. Perhaps, when Onesimus ran away and came back again, this letter of Paul may have opened Philemon's eyes as to his own position. He may have been an excellent master, and have trusted his servant, and treated him not as a slave, but as a confidential servant; but perhaps he had not regarded him as a brother man; and now Onesimus has come back he will be a better servant, but Philemon will also 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 refuse obedience to his parents; it does not give the father a right to lord it over his family 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, naturally rather sharp, quick, tart; but her constitution is marvellously sweetened when she receives the grace of God. The servant may be apt to loiter, may be late up of a morning, very slovenly, fond of a gossip at the door; but, if she is truly converted, all that kind of thing comes to an end. She is conscientious, and attends to her duty as she ought. The master, when he is a truly Christian man, has gentleness, a suavity, and considerateness about him. The husband is the head of the wife, but when renewed by grace he is a very loving head. The wife also keeps her place, and seeks, by 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 chapel and the prayer-meeting, and not to your home. The best religion in the world is that which smiles at the table, works at the sewing machine, and is pleasant in the chimney corner and in the drawing-room. Give me the religion which blacks boots, and shines them well; cooks the food 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 ninety as a hundred, as many trades-people do. That is true Christianity which affects the whole of life. If we are truly Christians we shall be changed in our relationships to our fellow men, and hence 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. Some mistresses see a little something wrong, and they are down upon the poor girls, as if they had been guilty of murder or high treason. If your Master, and mine, were to treat us in that style, I wonder how long we should be found in his service. How quick some are in discharging their maids for small errors. No excuse, no trying her again: she must go, and where she goes is no concern of ours. Is this doing as a Christian should do? Many a young man has been turned out of a situation for the veriest trifle by a Christian employer, who must have known that he would expose his servant to all sorts of risks: and many a domestic 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 don't take you back, Mr. Onesimus, not I. Once bit, twice shy, sir. I never ride a broken-kneed horse. You stole my money; I am not going to have your finger in my till a second time." I have heard that style of talk, have not you? Did you ever feel like it yourself? If you have, go home and pray to God to get such a feeling out of you, for it is bad stuff to harbour in your soul. You cannot take such hard selfishness to heaven, and it is a great defilement to you on earth.

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

I want to bring forward one more point, and then I have done. If the mysterious providence of God was to be seen in Onesimus getting to Rome, may there not be a providence in your reading this booklet at this time, or in your being at this hour where you may hear the gospel? People come to the tabernacle who never meant to come. If anyone had prophesied that they would listen to the gospel they would have poured contempt upon the prophecy, and yet they come. With all manner of twists and turns they have gone about, but they have been landed where the truth is proclaimed. Did you miss a train, and so stepped in to a service to while away the time? Was the sailing of your ship delayed when you little expected it, and so were you able to hear a sermon? I do pray you, then, consider this question with your own heart. "Does not God mean to bless me? Has he not given me an opportunity to yield my heart to Jesus as Onesimus did?" My dear friend, if thou believest on the Lord Jesus Christ, thou shalt have immediate pardon for all sin, and shalt be saved. The Lord has brought thee in his infinite wisdom where thou canst hear his loving invitation, and I hope that he has also brought thee where thou wilt accept it, and so go thy way altogether changed. Some three years ago I was talking with an aged minister: 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 nigh worn to pieces, and as he unfolded it he exclaimed, "God Almighty bless you! God Almighty bless you!" 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 the ship did not sail on the day appointed." This aged

minister bade me read the letter, and I read it, and it ran 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 Saviour. 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 on the day I expected to start, and having a leisure hour I went down to the Tabernacle to see what it was like, and there God met with me. Mr. Spurgeon said, ‘Perhaps there is a runaway son here. The Lord call him by his grace.’ And he did call me.” “Now,” said the old gentleman, 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.” Do I speak to a similar character, or does one of that sort read these pages? The Lord in mercy gives you another opportunity of turning from the error of your ways. I pray you lift your eye at once to heaven, and say, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” and he will accept you. Believe in the sinner’s Saviour and he will be your Saviour. Then go home to your father and tell him what the grace of God has done for you, and make him wonder at the love which brought you to Christ.

Thus have we brought before you another wonder of grace? Our soul longs, yea, even faints to hear of others in like manner reclaimed. O poor unsaved souls, by the love of Jesus we pray you turn unto him and live. God save you by his Holy Spirit. Amen.

The sixth of seven booklets.

