

GRACE GAZETTE

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Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

ONESIMUS

For I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds. Philemon 1:10

I am not sure if anyone has ever counted exactly how many different individuals whose names are recorded in the Bible. It is a considerable number, especially, as we look at the Old Testament. Many, (actually most,) of them seem quite insignificant to us and we often skip over them lightly, puzzled at their proper pronunciation. Yet every one of them is quite significant in the purpose of Almighty GOD. There are no “random” individuals who have ever lived upon the Earth. Each one was created by the LORD to fulfill an exact purpose according to HIS sovereign will. *“Calling a ravenous bird from the east, the man that executeth my counsel from a far country: yea, I have spoken it, I will also bring it to pass; I have purposed it, I will also do it.” (Isa 46:11)*

That seems like an unquestionable statement, yet many balk at it, especially when the subject of man’s free will is brought up. We are certain that all men do exactly as they desire to do with the ability that they possess. The LORD ordained that the first man Adam would do exactly as he did, and at the same time Adam did exactly as he desired to do. Judas was born for the purpose of betraying the LORD, yet at the same time he desired to betray the LORD. When this subject is brought up there will usually be many who will object; as if it were possible for men to do something which is contrary to the sovereign purpose of GOD to magnify the glory of HIS grace in the redemption of sinners.

Some will posit the argument that a man cannot be held accountable unless he has a sovereign “free will”. The truth is that the LORD has decreed that men will be accountable as well as marking out their steps to perform HIS perfect will. *“O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.” (Jer 10:23) “The preparations of the heart in man, and the answer of the tongue, is from the LORD.” (Prov 16:1) “Man’s goings are of the LORD; how can a man then understand his own way?” (Prov 20:24)*

Many grow angry at such statements and by doing so demonstrate the utter folly of man. Paul addressed this matter in no uncertain terms when he said, *“Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?” (Rom 9:20-21)* It is impossible that any man could ever bring the LORD into question. Men, in their natural state, have no standing before the LORD and are, every one, totally dependent upon HIS mercy to deliver them from the certain destruction that their actions deserve. Thus, Paul reiterates what the LORD told Moses, *“Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.” (Rom 9:18)* What can any man do but put his hand over his mouth and hope that he might be shown mercy and turned from his sinful way.

So, when the question is asked, “Does GOD cause men to sin?”, we answer that men love sin and apart from HIS grace visited upon them they will go on in that way which they desire, which leads to destruction. James answered this question, *“Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.” (Jas 1:13-15)*

The glorious TRUTH that the LORD has sent men into the world to proclaim is that HE has made a REMEDY for sin through the blood and righteousness of JESUS CHRIST. Blessed is the man who is given faith to lay hold upon this REMEDY, bowing at HIS FEET in repentance. None shall do so who is not given a desire to seek the LORD while HE may be found. Yet everyone who desires to embrace this SAVIOR, calling upon HIS NAME shall surely be received, for the grace of GOD is demonstrated in this fashion. *“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the LORD, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end. Then shall ye call upon me, and ye shall go and pray unto me, and I will hearken unto you. And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.”* (Jer 29:11-13)

Paul writes to Philemon, concerning, a former indentured servant, Onesimus, who had escaped from servitude to him and perhaps had defrauded or even stolen some money from Philemon when he left. We don't have a lot of information about Onesimus, but his name appears twice in the epistle to the Colossians and twice here in the epistle to Philemon. In both books he is credited as the penman of these epistles sent by Paul.

We can see by Paul's testimony that he had great confidence in Onesimus, even sending him as an emissary along with Tychicus to the Colossian church. (see Col. 4:7-9) Surely his name would ever remain in obscurity but for the fact that GOD had chosen him as a vessel of honor, to hear the gospel from the lips of Paul, and to be given the gift of faith wherein he would embrace the TRUTH as it is in JESUS. (see Phil. 1:10)

Though he was, either by birth or indebtedness, made a servant in the house of Philemon according to the predestined purpose of GOD, yet according to that same ordination, he was brought to escape that servitude, in order that he might become a free-man in CHRIST. He was given an appointment which he could not disregard, even though his purpose in escaping from Philemon's house was not of a noble nature. We might also observe that he did not leave Philemon's house with the thought in mind of seeking the LORD. Yet our observation would cause us to surely conclude that while he was not seeking the LORD, yet the LORD sought him and directed his every step to bring him to that place wherein he might hear and believe. *“Thou broughtest us into the net; thou laidst affliction upon our loins. Thou hast caused men to ride over our heads; we went through fire and through water: but thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place.”* (Psa 66:11-12) Even in the same fashion in which the LORD *“must needs go through Samaria”*, because one of HIS sheep would be coming to the WELL there.

The LORD's purpose was to bring Onesimus out of natural bondage in the house of Philemon, and then to return him to the house of Philemon as a true servant of GOD, whose desire was not to escape but to serve Philemon as a brother in CHRIST. To this end Paul besought Philemon to receive him as such and to love him as brother in CHRIST. *“Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ; Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men: Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening: knowing that your Master also is in heaven; neither is there respect of persons with him.”* (Eph 6:5-9)

In all of the accounts of the scriptures, the LORD would show us CHRIST. If one should ever desire to know what a true servant is, he must look unto HIM who gave us an EXAMPLE that we should follow HIS steps. *“For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.”* (2Cor 8:9) In order to save those whom HE loved with an everlasting love, HE willingly laid down HIS life for them, thus girding HIMSELF as their SERVANT. Apart from grace to behold this truth, it seems utterly fantastic and is totally outside of the realm of man's ability to grasp. HE who knew no sin, yet becoming sin for us.

Nothing compelled HIM, but love to those given to HIM from before the foundation of the world. HE gained nothing by this transaction yet willingly underwent the curse and grief attached to the sin of those HE so loved. Is this not the very definition of a SERVANT. Onesimus gladly entered into servitude to Philemon, because he was his brother in CHRIST. Do we not see CHRIST in him? *“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.”* (Gal 5:13) Are you the servant of CHRIST and HIS brethren? mam