

## **“Profitable to You and Me”**

**By Paul R. Blake**

Onesimus ran away. He made a mistake. End of story? Certainly not.

Making hasty judgments; jumping to conclusions; what person has never acted in haste and regretted in leisure? Solomon warned against making a decision without knowing all of the facts. In Proverbs 18:13 the wise man said, “He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.” In 25:8, he wrote, “Do not go hastily to court; For what will you do in the end, When your neighbor has put you to shame?”

How happy we would be if every time we made a choice or took a stand, we heeded the Savior who said, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge with righteous judgment” (John 7:24). God told Samuel when the prophet was surprised to see Jesse's older, stalwart sons passed over for kingship, For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1Sam. 16:7ff).

God has the remarkable capacity to see into the hearts of men. He has the ability to see the conclusion of a matter before it is begun. He knows the end of a path simply by looking at the first step. We have not been granted that kind of talented judgment. In its place, God has given us His word which is designed to help us make good decisions. By studying its pages and applying its principles, we can “judge with righteous judgment.”

The development of good judgment is not an instantaneous process. In addition to preparing one's self for good judgment by means of habitual Bible study, one must also postpone making a decision long enough to do the following:

1) When confronted with a tough choice, ask your conscience “what would the Lord want me to do under the circumstances?”

2) If an answer does not present itself, go to trustworthy sources for guidance. Start with the word of God (Rom. 15:4). Profit from the experiences of devout Christians made wise by many years of service (Phil. 3:17).

3) Pray for wisdom asking in faith (James 1:5-6). Careful adherence to this plan will help prevent bad decisions and the attending painful penalties of those mistakes.

However, what does one do when he has failed to exercise righteous judgment and is suffering the consequences? It's too late to change the decision. Time is linear and unidirectional. We cannot go back and undo our errors. Yet, this does not mean that we have no choice but to collapse in despair allowing our sin to become our temporal identity and eternal destiny. When one stumbles and falls down, he cannot change the fact that he fell. What he can change is his prone position; he can get up. One who commits an error through poor judgment and then fails to repent, is like the man on the ground who says: “I've fallen, and I refuse to get up.”

Which brings us back to Onesimus, the runaway servant of Philemon. He made a mistake. Onesimus was a Phrygian slave who had wronged Philemon and then fled to Rome. While there, he met Paul, who taught him the truth.

It was a bad decision to commit a crime against Philemon. It was legal in that time for masters to kill servants who stole from them, and many non-Christian slave holders did precisely that. It was a foolish choice to run away from Philemon. Onesimus had a benevolent master in Philemon, a man whom Paul addresses affectionately and with confidence in his good character. If Philemon had been an evil man, Paul's letter would have said so. In a world that permitted slavery, Onesimus ran away from the only earthly master that could be counted on to treat him kindly and fairly. Onesimus was a fugitive. His third and perhaps fatal mistake would have been to remain on the run. Runaway servants, if not executed upon capture, were often sent to the Roman galleys where the life expectancy was about one year. He was in a terrible state, all due to his own hasty judgments.

Yet for all of that, it was not the end of the story for Onesimus. He met the apostle Paul who taught him the gospel that converts the soul and remits sin. Onesimus obeyed the gospel and tripled his servitude. He began to serve Jesus Christ and also ministered to the needs of Paul. But the consequences of this decision, made through righteous judgment, were enormous and far reaching.

First, Onesimus gained a family. Both Paul his teacher and Philemon his master became his brethren. Paul calls the runaway slave his son, begotten in his bonds.

Second, Onesimus received guidance. No longer would he be forced to make decisions based on his own limited judgment; he could now draw upon the direction of the scriptures and the counsel of fellow Christians like Paul and Philemon.

Third, Onesimus got what everyone wants who has ever regretted a mistake: a chance to correct the error. He couldn't go back to the days before he ran away, but he could go back and ask forgiveness of Philemon. Baptism did not remove the consequences of his sin, but becoming a Christian taught him that he could handle the consequences and go on to do the right thing as a child of God. As the apostle Paul said of him: "I appeal to you for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten while in my chains, who once was unprofitable to you, but now is profitable to you and to me" (Philemon 10-11).

End of story? Not quite. Paul further said to Philemon: "I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart" (Vs. 12). Paul's counsel to Philemon is that he not act in haste by refusing to receive and forgive Philemon. It would have been hasty judgment to mistreat the penitent servant. It would have been a bad decision to act with suspicion and mistrust toward the brother in Christ who corrected his mistake and was now faithfully serving the Lord. "Paul the aged" said to receive the slave as if he were bearing the apostle's heart. Clearly, this is righteous judgment.

### **A Moments Wisdom**

- A lot of people go through life running from something that isn't after them.
- Stop worrying about the potholes in the road and celebrate the journey!
- Quit worrying about your health. It'll go away.
- Worry often gives a small thing a big shadow.
- Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.
- I have learned to live each day as it comes, and not to borrow trouble by dreading tomorrow. It is the dark menace of the future that makes cowards of us.