**“What is Required”**

Psalm 1

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

**Philemon 1-21**

Luke 14:25-35

 Pentecost 13, Sept. 3-4, 2022

From the apostle Paul, in a particular context yet in all contexts and to all us Christians: “Though I am bold enough in Christ to **command** you to **do what is required**, yet **for love’s sake I prefer to appeal to you**.”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

**Bridge**

One day all **good Christians** will hear from Jesus that we have **done well in this life**. “He will say ‘Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For **when I was hungry, you gave …, thirsty, you gave …, a stranger, you welcomed …, naked, you clothed …, sick, you visited …, in prison, you came …**’, and we’ll answer, ‘Lord, **when did we? We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty**.’”

We will not boast of our works, but **know that we have been made, so are,** “blessed of the Father, saved by grace through faith, not of our own doing, but gifted that by God” but beholden to “seek first always God’s kingdom and His will and righteousness” and **DO THINGS IN THAT**. We are people of **God-given vocations to “live up to”**, fathers and mothers, obedient children, citizens and neighbors and brothers and sisters far beyond natural bloodlines, and **faithfulness** and **usefulness** **with divine consequence** has to have become our desire …

… and, in that, we are **repentant upon failures** and conscious of most of those, humble before men and God always because we know the expectations, yet our shortcomings.

**Text**

“The law is written in man’s hearts” so very human knows right from wrong. When we worry about our kids or society, be assured that right and wrong are both **well defined** and well known if neglected. It’s a lie, then (and everyone knows it) that the spectrum of human choices and directions is “**relative** to situations” and “determined individually by everyone in their context choosing based on their own happiness”. Right and wrong is **absolutely one or the other**, and as Psalms 1 begins (the very first one) “**blessed** **are** the **walkers of the correct way**” and “**judged and, indeed, perishing are** the ones who walk in the way of the **wicked and unrepentant sinners**”.

One entire book of the Bible (yet just one short letter from the apostle Paul to a slave-owner named Philemon), reminds of the **duty of doing the right thing**. “**Do what is required**” Paul says (in case any should forget), which was what Moses also had to remind through Deuteronomy and Jesus in the Luke 14 text. “Though I am bold enough in Christ to command you to **do what is required**”, Paul wrote to Philemon (and told also to the escaped slave Onesimus): “Though I am bold enough in Christ to **command you to** **do what is required**, for love’s sake I prefer to **appeal to you** to **DO WHAT’S REQUIRED**”.

Slave ownership wasn’t really a wonderful vocation two thousand years ago. It wasn’t a wonderful vocation two hundred years ago (no matter what southerners might tell you), but it also wasn’t so great two thousand years ago. And slave wasn’t an honor to be either during any of those times in history. The circumstances, then, of the exhortations of Paul to do what’s right wasn’t gentler upon them then than in our time and circumstances.

Obviously, we want **our kids** to do what’s **right** in today’s challenging contexts of supposed sexual identity issues, racial disarrays, the variety of opinions about the life of children in wombs, and of marriage and who should be couples, and chastity, and so much the more. **We’d** prefer (each one of us) to act **appropriately** no matter what the situation and surrounding is. Slave owners to slaves isn’t an easier situation than you and yours, so (in anything), the same “appeal” or “command” applies from Paul to Christians who really must be Christian. Today, we have a serious amount of cultural divide, and some could say that it’s not a far cry from slavery and slave ownership, from some oppressed to many oppressors, from majorities to minorities, form those inflicted upon (or, at least, feeling like they are) to ones inflicting. It’s just a matter of topics.

To that, none of the three (Paul nor Moses nor Jesus) don’t say here “change the world”, but “**pick up the crosses of your particular circumstances of vocational responsibility and, just, do faithfully (right rather than wrong) your duties in those contexts**”. Jesus is not proposing (by the way) that we “hate our own fathers and mothers and wife and children and brothers and sisters, or even ourselves”, but that we **“do all that’s Godly required”** without excuses of circumstance or rights that we’d choose to demand but, instead, be responsible to **proper choices and walks** over and above **anything** that could tug us toward an **improper decision or action**.

If there’s one thing that ought to be **completely clear from today’s texts** it’s that **there is right and wrongs**. There is, really, no **relativity** based on situational and contextual factors of this earth that can change the requirement away from just keeping us **on the correct path**. In today’s readings, there is no room for “**OK** **sometimes rationalizations**” or some arguments that there are many gradations of gray in choices or “we should adapt to modern times because progress means progress”, embracing tolerance and “Progressivism” as a love (which it is not), nor is the fulfilling of **“wants at all costs**”. Ethical decisions aren’t made towards things that **can be physically done** but in **doing without things that are wrong and inappropriate** and **doing with things that are of God**.

God calls directly **particular things** **“good and righteous”** and **other things outside of that “wicked” and a walk the “way of the unrepentance of being a practicing sinner”**. In a highly divided society like what we’re living in, there’s a better chance that **both sides of an opinion argument are wrong** than that there’s a “situational alrightness to diverse thoughts”. But if you measure everything against God’s Word and will, there’s (virtually always) a more appropriately “righteous” position than what the counter holds. Natural arguments can be made from the nature of nature, yet authority must ultimately sit someplace. And all must (if the world’s going to be honest of **divine Source**) decide that the ultimate “yes” or “no” on things (“right” or “wrong” that’s written in all men’s heart) has to be with **God’s delivered-to-us Word**.

**Paul** told the slave, Onesimus, to **return to his position and duty** as, currently, Philemon’s slave. He sent along with him a letter to Philemon, though, with a plea that he be a slave owner that’s **good to his charge**, **also receiving Onesimus as a** **brother too** **in Christ Jesus**. **Moses** called the **great decision** between “life and good, death and evil, blessing and cursing, begging all to **choose life that you and your children may live**”. **Jesus** explained that **worthiness or unworthiness for the kingdom of God literally depends upon continuing to make and do from correct choices**.

**Application**

In spite of our vocational failures to do our duty, Jesus **pleads to the Father** for us (**appeals to the Heavenly Father** for us). Paul was an appropriate mediator to a relationship that needed mending, and provided a way by which that relationship could have an entirely different attitude both directions though duties may not look entirely different. **Forgetting our duty** to stay home and **be, thankfully**, God’s special creation and people with Him as focus and not ourselves as the center of everything, we’re **like runaways from an always caring and Good Owner who should not, ever, cause us consternation and a desire for independence away from Him**.

Here's where **Jesus is Paul’s “letter of petition” / “plea” and even “command” and “appeal”** **because our sin does run us away from God**. The Promise of the Gospel is **the Father’s deliverance of us from our rebellion by providing the Sacrifice sufficient to reverse it all**. The Lord Jesus does not write a **distant** letter “appealing” to His Father for us but carries His marked hands and feet and side into Heaven’s Throne Room to present and ever hold before God’s eyes why His attitude upon us (who are in Christ) can be with mercy and grace. **Our crosses and duties are bearable because Jesus bore the heaviest**. “God **this RIGHT and GLORIOUS and ONLY way** loved the world: **giving His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life**”.

The story of Philemon and Onesimus goes on beyond, just, Paul’s letter of intervention and mediation. Likely it wasn’t always “smooth sailing”, but **clarified** it was and **remembered for its duty**. And **God is Good on His duty to us** (that He’s graciously Promised to do with us / to work out “Good for us who are in Christ”, no matter the circumstance). **Disciples we are of each other (God to us and us, by edict, to Him)**. **He’s worthy of His post … and we must be worthy of ours**. May **that relation be our ultimate pleasure**. In +Jesus’ name. Amen.