GREAT LOVE XVIII

But without thy mind would I do nothing; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly. Philemon 1:14 (KJV)

When we read the book of Philemon, it is pretty obvious that Paul’s desire for Philemon is that he forgives Onesimus for running away and leaving him short-handed. Onesimus was a slave that Philemon likely had money invested in. Though we do not see this as ethical today, at that time by running away, Onesimus was seen as stealing from Philemon. Can you see that Philemon might not be delighted to see Onesimus? It is thought that Onesimus and Paul had both been imprisoned in Rome at the same time. While together Onesimus had been saved and become an active Christian. Paul would have asked him to stay and minister to some of his own needs and ministry but felt the greater good would be for Onesimus and Philemon to become one in the family of God.

How does this work? First Paul wanted to be totally upfront with Philemon. He obviously had great love and respect for Philemon. Any shady deals were out of the question. Paul carried a lot of respect by Philemon; he therefore did not want to do anything that would mar his Christian influence. Greater still, Paul knew what a joy it was to have Onesimus as a brother in Christ and did not want Philemon to miss that opportunity. There is a term that we use rather loosely today and that is “share the love.” When we share opportunities for people to love we lose nothing in fact we gain. When my oldest granddaughter was a baby she stayed with her great grandparents. To be honest I was a little afraid that she might love them more than Kathie and me. Having seen the way she loves them and the way they love her, it has made me want to be that kind of great grandparent when given the opportunity. They have filled her life with great stories. A few years back when we had snow, Grand-daddy (great grandfather) tied a rope to Sterling and would let her slide down the long bank in their backyard. He couldn’t hold on so they both slid down the bank into the branch. Grand-mommy had to dry both of them out. I love that story.

Second, Paul wanted Philemon to get the full experience of letting love be his sole motivation for taking Onesimus back. “That thy benefit” would not be of necessity. Philemon was obligated enough to Paul that he should take Onesimus back on Paul’s request alone. That would not give Philemon the benefit that he really needed. Many Christians today are missing out on the true Christian benefits because they are serving out of obligation and not out of love. Others are serving to have a good reputation or to maintain a good reputation. That too is the wrong reason for serving the Lord. Sad to say, some may serve to get monetary gain. That is not love. Jesus left his reputation to love us. His only gain was the joy of loving us. He owed us nothing, had no obligation but loved us anyway. That is Great Love!!! You have never lived until you have truly loved.

Yours in Christ,

Brother Randy Burtram