

# Love's Actions

## By Michael Cocoris

Cocoris:

How are you this morning. Wet? Did you get wet last night? Dry? Tired? You heard enough lectures this week? Want to hear one more. All right. I once had a very interesting Professor. He took his classroom and put it in his living room. When I was in seminary he couldn't do all of his classes like that. But he took one of them. One of his favorite and he met in his home several evenings a week. That professor was Dr. Haddon Robinson. And he taught the subject of homiletics. Now when I was a seminary student that was one of my favorite subjects I want to preach. So I eagerly attended that class in his home. One night after the class was over and most of the fellows had managed to get in their cars and head home some of us hung around so that we could squeeze every last drop of truth that we could out of this professor. Now I'm not sure how we got onto the subject but somehow we moved from the subject of homiletics to the subject of love. And that night in that living room. Dr. Robinson told me something that I had never heard before. He gave us a definition of love.

Now mind you at this point I'd finished college. I was I believe in the fourth year of seminary. I was married. I had. I think at that point two children and I have three. And yet I had never in all of my experience ever really understood what love really is. What he said was this. The Greek word for love in the New Testament is agape. And that word is not an emotion. It is a choice. It is an act of the will and the definition that he gave us that night was this. That love is doing what is best for the other person. Even if that means a sacrifice to yourself. Some of you are writing

that down so let me repeat it. Love is choosing to do what is best for the other person. Even if that means a sacrifice to yourself. Now since that night I have become very interested in the subject of love and I have discovered that Dr. Robinson was exactly right.

There are actually four different Greek words for love. Agape is the one I just gave you. And it is the highest form of love in all of the Bible. It is the word that is used of God's love to us. It is the word that is used of our love one to another. It is the word that is used for a husband loving his wife. There other words phileo is the word from which we get our word. Philadelphia - delphia being brother, phileo being love. So it's the City of Brotherly Love. Last time I was there they told me it was the city of brotherly shove. There is the word Eros from which we get our word erotic. We usually relate that to a physical or base kind of love. And then there is a word - erotic by the way does not occur in the New Testament - the first two do - there is a fourth word which also does not occur in the New Testament except I think once in compound form. But it is the words storge which refers to a family kind of love. In English we use one word for love to refer to loving your mother loving your father loving your brother loving your sister loving your wife loving your country loving your dog loving ice cream loving the Dallas Cowboys [laughter]. We just have one [laughter] you caught that - how about the Los Angeles Dodgers? [laughter] I do believe we can divide this crowd.

At any rate the Greeks weren't that bankrupt when it came to words for love. They had four different words but the point that hit me that night. The point I've never quite been able to get

over is that love is not an emotion. It is an act of the will. If you if you will. It's a choice that you make whereby you choose to do what is best for the one you love even if that means a sacrifice to yourself. Now while all of that is true it is rather general there's a sense in which it is almost abstract and that what we need to do is bring that abstract concept of love down into the concrete. We need to get specific and particular spell out for me if you will. The acts of love. What does love do in very specific concrete terms?

Now to answer that kind of a problem we could turn to many passages in the New Testament but I would like for us today to consider the Little Book of Philemon that this I believe is a book on love and in the body of the book Paul gives us in depth and detail some of the specifics of what is involved in love and of course he does that by way of illustration. So this is not so much a didactic teaching of the concept as it is an illustrative communication of the concept.

So train with me if you will to the Little Book of Philemon and let's begin with verse 8 Paul says

"Therefore though I might be very bold in Christ to command you what is fitting, yet for love's sake I rather appeal to you being such a one as Paul the aged and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I appeal to you for my son or Onesimus whom I have begotten while in my chains who once was unprofitable to you but now is profitable to you and to me I am sending him back. You therefore receive him. That is mine own heart whom I wish to keep with me that on your behalf

he might minister to me in my chains for the gospel. But without your consent I wanted to do nothing that your good deed might not be by compulsion as it were but voluntary. For perhaps he departed for a while for this purpose that you might receive Him forever no longer as a slave. But more than a slave as a beloved brother especially to me. But now how much more to you both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you count me as a partner receive him as you would me. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything put that on my account. I Paul am writing with my own hand. I will repay - not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. Yes brother let me have Julie from you in the Lord refresh my heart in the Lord having confidence in your obedience, I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say. But meanwhile also prepare a guest room for me. For I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you."

Now this is the body of the book and as I have mentioned now several times an ancient letter consisted of a salutation, a Thanksgiving, a prayer, the body and then at the conclusion that was personal greetings and a benediction. Thus far we have looked at the salutation in the first three verses. We've looked at the Thanksgiving and the prayer many times. Those are long enough to be considered individually but in this book they are linked together. That's versus four to seven. And now the body of the book is versus 8-22.

It is very apparent of what Paul is doing. You cannot read this without seeing what he is saying very very simply is I am sending back Onesimus, would you please receive him. As I recall he

uses the word received three times in this passage. He keeps saying that: Receive him. Receive him. Receive him. Beyond that if you were to break down these verses, 8-22 into some subdivisions I think you would discover that there is an appeal in verses 8-11. Then there is a request in versus 12-17. And then there is a promise in verses 18 to 22. So what I'd like to do is move through these verses and specifically those three parts. But at the same time let's keep in mind that the subject of this book is Love and that what permeates all of these verses is love - it just seeps through the cracks as it were. And in the process of going through these verses Paul is giving us I think some very concrete specifics on what love is. So with all that in mind let's begin.

The first thing he says is this. Verse 8. Therefore though I might be bold in Christ to command you what is fitting. Now obviously what he's going to do is request that you receive Onesimus this runaway slave back. And what he says is I could command you to do that. I could come as an apostle. I could come to you even as a brother but remind you that this is your duty. He says I could command you to do what is fitting. And the idea is that that is proper. That it is right and I could come and say look that's the right thing to do. Now do it. Now, I don't want to discount this too quickly. Don't pass over it. Paul did not hesitate to do that very thing in other of his epistles. There were times when he wrote someone and he clearly said as an apostle I'm telling you to do this and you are to obey because that carries with it the authority of God himself. First Corinthians chapter five for example. There was a problem of incest in the congregation and they had not dealt with it and Paul commands them in the strongest possible terms to deal with it. And

in short order. So don't take this lightly. He means I could very well tell you that it is the right thing for you to do.

In the first place there was a legality involved that the Roman government. Beyond that it's the right thing to do spiritually and I can command you to do that. Let me suggest that there is a sense in which all of us who know Jesus Christ are obligated Biblically to obey those who have the authority over us. Granted they're not apostles but the scripture teaches we're to obey the elders who rule over us. Hebrews chapter 13 says that you are to obey those that have the authority over you and that of course is talking about the elders in a congregation. In our own church we have a constitution and a church covenant as most churches do. And as in other churches that's built in to the covenant and constitution.

For example in our particular church the covenant says "having read the articles of faith constitution and bylaws of the Church of the open door I do promise and humbly reliance upon divine grace and upon the power of the Holy Spirit that I will endeavour to walk worthy as a follower of Christ forsaking all known sin and seek His will for my life. I agree to be loyal to the interests and objectives of this church to seek its purity and prosperity and to seek to do some definite Christian work. I shall be subject to the discipline of the church and contribute to its support and so forth".

Our constitution says something similar - there is built into it a covenant and I won't bore you with all of that but part of what it says is "We the members of the church to affectionately welcome you into the fellowship of the church and the blessing of the Gospel and covenant together" and part of what we covenant together is this that "we will submit to the loving oversight and discipline of the members and officers of the church of Christ and that we will give as God has prospered us". Now I'm simply saying that there is a sense in which that's perfectly legitimate and perfectly proper.

But look at the passage. Paul says therefore though I might be bold in Christ. To command yet for love's sake. Verse nine I rather appeal to you. Paul says I am not going to command this. I am going to request this. I am going to appeal to you. You might notice that verse 8 starts out with a little word "therefore" what is the connection between these verses and that which has gone before. And the answer is that in that prayer that he just prayed and versus 47 he said you have demonstrated acts of love; you have demonstrated that you are a loving person. Now based on that I'm not going to command you. Therefore I'm going to request that you receive Onesimus back. Or to put the same thing another way in versus 47 he pleaded FOR Philemon before the throne of grace and now in verses 8 and what follows he appeals TO Philemon to manifest Grace. But be all that as it may he is clearly appealing to Philemon.

Now. One other observation and I'll make the point you will look at this. He is not only appealing to buy Lehman he's doing it in a very personal way. Look again at verse 9 he says yet

for love's sake I rather appear to you being such a one as Paul the aged and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. I appeal to you for my son Onesimus whom I have begotten while I was in my chains who was once unprofitable to you but now is profitable to you and to me. Just look at this appeal. It's to receive on us for love's sake but he's making it very very personal. You can just pick out an versus 9, 10 and 11 all the personal appeal that Paul uses. He says for example I am Paul the aged he's coming to you. He's coming to file Lehman as an old man. One commentator estimates that at this point in Paul's life which is about 61AD that Paul was 60 years old. So he is saying I am coming. Not as an apostle but as an aged man. I am coming not as an elder officially, I am coming as an elderly man personally.

Well look again he says in verse 9 being such a one as Paul the aged and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ. In other words I am coming to you not only as an elderly man in a very personal way. I'm coming to you as one who is as a servant of Christ suffering imprisonment. He is making this very personal. Again he says in verse 10 I appeal to you for my son Onesimus. In verse nine he comes as a prisoner in verse 10 he comes as a father. And by the way he says in verse ten whom I have begotten while in my chains. That's the third time at this point in the Epistle that he has mentioned his chains. Some have suggested that at this point he is getting very tender and perhaps almost emotional. He is saying look I'm an old man. I'm in prison, and I'm coming to you for my son. You can almost see the tears welled up in his eyes. Maybe even trickle down his cheek. He's being very tender and very personal at this point. He says also. In verse eleven whom was once unprofitable to you but now it's profitable to you and to me. This is actually a play on words for the word Onesimus means profitable or helpful. And up until this

point Onesimus had not lived up to his name. And what Paul is saying in verse eleven is he was once unprofitable to you. He was a runaway. He was a renegade. He was a rebel. But now he says he is profitable not only to you but to me.

The basis of the appeal in verse 11 is friendship. It can be a friend to you. He can be profitable to you. He can be profitable to me. So just notice all the various appeals that Paul makes. He's doing it for love's sake. But it's a very personal appeal. I come as an old man as a prisoner as a father as a friend. I am asking you to receive Onesimus back. So verses 8-11 is his appeal. But let me tell you what I think I see in this from the standpoint of love. What I see in this is that Paul is getting personally involved. That's the first point I'd like to make in our study today. That love participates. Love gets involved. Love rolls up its sleeves love gets its hands dirty. Love is not aloof. Love is not standoffish. Love does not back away. Love gets involved with the mess. If you're going to be loving you'll have to get involved.

God so loved the world. That he wrote out a check so he wouldn't have to get personally involved. No. God so loved the world that he who knew no sin became - imagine the holiness and purity of God - He became sin. Now that's involvement. That's participation and that's what love is. Gets involved. Once a lawyer came to Christ and said What is the greatest commandment? He said the love the Lord your God and the second one is like unto it to love your neighbor as yourself. And the smart alec lawyer trying to get him in a trap said who is my neighbor and the Lord told a classic story in all of literature on the good Samaritan and in the

story he tells of the religious crowd; the Levite and the like who passed by rather than getting involved. And then came the Samaritan - that outcast from a Jewish point of view. The half breed - from the Jewish point of view. They hated the Samaritans and the Samaritan is the one who came along, saw the man bleeding by the side of the road. And stopped and helped. Took him to the end took money from his own pocket to pay the bill. Now mind you that's the story Jesus Christ told to illustrate what love is.

You cannot read that story without seeing that the issue is that the Levite and the Samaritan would not get involved. And the Samaritan did. So if you want to know very specifically what love does. It gets involved with other people. Indifference doesn't. Love does. You can not love in the biblical sense of the term. Without getting involved with people. It just cannot be done. You can't love by long distance. That's kind of tough. If you're gonna do it in the biblical sense of the term now the first part of this passage is the appeal. He elaborated on that in depth.

But beginning at verse 12 he gets down to the request proper. And he says this: I am sending him back. You therefore receive him. That is my own heart whom I wish to keep with me. That on your behalf he might ministered to me and my chains for the gospel but without your consent. I want to do nothing. But your good deed might not be by compulsion as it were but voluntarily. For perhaps he departed for life for this purpose that you might receive Him forever no longer as a slave but more than a slave as a beloved brother especially to me. But now how much more to you both in the flesh and in the Lord.

Now the appeal is simple. He is requesting that you receive Onesimus back but there is much much more here than just that. For one thing Paul is saying in these opening verses of this section I wish that I could keep him. That's what I'd like to do. I've led him to Christ he has become my son. We've become very close. He has become profitable to me and I would like to keep him and as a matter of fact knowing you Philemon as I do. I know that you wouldn't mind me doing that. You're a loving person and you're very dedicated to me. By the way there is the implication later in the passage that Paul led family men to Christ. And he could have said you know you owe me one. And he said but I'm not going to do that. And the reason I'm not gonna do that is because it would be by compulsion and I don't want you to do this because you're forced to do it. To force you to do this would be a violation of the law of love.

By the way let me just insert here that God does not force people to do things. When you feel compelled something's wrong. When you feel driven. Something's not right. Satan puts pressure on people. God leads. God guides. God does not drive. God does not force. The whole idea of leading - being led of the spirit or God guiding demands our voluntary participation. So Paul is saying I'm not going to force you to do this. That would be wrong. Rather I'm going to ask you to do this for love's sake. But now after having said that he says this and I want you to notice it carefully. He says in verse 15. Perhaps he departed for awhile for the purpose that you might receive Him forever no longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a brother.

Let me explain to you what's going on in this passage. It's really heavy. The laws governing these things at this point in time and the law said that the slave owner had absolute authority over the slave. As a matter of fact there were penalties severe penalties for running away. And when you were caught the slave owner could literally do anything he wanted to to you he could beat you severely. Now when you understand all of that this verse of scripture becomes awesome. Not only that the implications are as we shall see that when Onesimus ran away he undoubtedly robbed Philemon of money. I mean after all he was a slave he didn't have any money and he had to have some money for travel and passage to Rome. Where did he get it. Well he probably stole some things from Philemon so you can imagine that any ordinary slave owner at the time would have been angry and very mad so that at best as a Christian what would you do. Well maybe not beating right? Not killing which also was within his prerogative.

But look at what Paul says, look at this. He says in verse 18 he departed for this purpose that you might receive him for forever no longer as a slave but more than that as a brother. But look at verse 16 as a beloved brother. Paul is saying receive him - that's the request but receive him as a brother. Wow. That's heavy. Let me pause here before make the application and point out that this kind of thing happened in the ancient world. On other occasions as a matter of fact archaeologists have dug up a letter written by a friend of a slave owner in behalf of a runaway slave. That the slave owner would receive the slave back. And I want to read you that letter. It says this. It's very enlightening as compared to what Paul is doing.

He said "Your freeman with whom you told me you were vexed came to me throwing himself down before me clinging to my feet as if they had been yours. He was profuse in his tears and his entreaties. He was profuse also in his silence. In short he convinced me of his penitence. I believe that he is indeed a reformed character because he feels that he has done wrong. You are angry. I know and you have reason to be angry. This I also know. But mercy wins the highest praise just when there is the most righteous cause for anger. You loved the man and I hope you will continue to love him. Meanwhile it is enough that you should allow yourself to yield to his prayers. You may be angry again if he deserves it and this you will be more readily pardoned if you yield now concede something to his youth, something to his tears, something to your own indulgent disposition do not torment him less you torment yourself at the same time for it is torture to you. When one of your gentle temperament is angry I am afraid lest I should appear not to ask but to compel if I should add to my prayers to his yet I will add them to the more fully and unreservedly because I scolded the man myself with sharpness and severity" and I could go on and on and on.

But the point is this he is saying consider the man's youth, consider his tears, consider your own disposition. Now that is the letter from an unregenerate man to another unregenerate man to receive an offended friend and the slave. Conversely Paul says this and I said all of that so you get it in contrast. Onesimus left you. He ran away. Probably robbed you and he came to Rome and I led him to Christ. Now I want you to receive him as a beloved brother and I'm appealing to you on the basis of love. In other words, love pardons.

In the first part of this passage Paul got very personally involved and pleaded for love's sake that Paul even do this. But when you get to the request proper what Paul is doing is saying receive this man as a brother pardon him. Forgive him for what he's done to you and accept him as a beloved brother. Love pardons. Now. I think if you want to live a loving lifestyle. What you're going to have to do is learn to forgive and we'll talk about that per second in very concrete terms.

All of us have expectations of other people. And the closer a person is to us the higher our expectation of them. When they don't come through with our expectations what we do is get our feelings hurt. We develop hard feelings toward them and there becomes a rift in the relationship. Now this can happen on a very small level over a minor matter. Or it can happen in a large degree over a major issue. But the principle is the same because we don't get our way or they didn't live up to our expectations. We develop hard feelings toward someone who has not done what we thought was right. Or worse. They actually clearly offended us. Now. I guarantee that if you harbour hard feelings and it becomes resentment and bitterness that that will do nothing but damage you in the long run. That if you're going to live a loving lifestyle what you're going to have to learn to do is forgive people. Even little bitty things. Love gets involved with people love participates and then love pardons. Love forgives.

That's the essence. It's at the heart. It's the whop and woof of what love is all about. God loved us. Took care of our sin and based on the death of Christ forgives us so the death of Jesus Christ is at one in the same time: The demonstration of the love of God and the demonstration of the forgiveness of God. God proved Romans 5:8 says his love and that while we were yet centers Christ died for us. And that's the basis of forgiveness. You can not in the New Testament separate these things. So if you're gonna be loving you've got to constantly be forgiving and I believe while that begins with a choice, agape, That when it is done ideally in the New Testament sense of the term it gets to phileo - meaning there are emotions involved.

And this is something I've not always been aware of. Matter of fact that told you a moment ago that when I first discovered what love was I discovered that it was primarily a choice, an act of the rule whereby you chose to do what is best for the other person. I have since discovered that while all of that is true. The Bible also wants us to have phileo toward one another. Peter says let brotherly love continue. And that's phileo and that is an emotional word so that you are to have tender feelings toward other people.

Matter of fact that the Greek word sometimes translated compassion. The old King James its bowels of mercy has about it an emotional taint. There is clearly an emotion about that word. Now this verse and this passage demonstrates illustrates all of that magnificently. Paul says receive this fella as a beloved brother. Am I making sense? Am I coming through? Let me try

one more time. Is there anybody in your life that right now you have some ill feelings toward. Can you think of anybody like that.

That's too convicting [audience laughter].

Has there ever been anybody in your life that you were a little ticked at?. That's like asking do you breathe air? Remember how you felt? All right. And I just I want you to I want you to just identify with that for a second now. Is there somebody in your life that you're very close to? I mean somebody that just the very thought of that person brings warm fuzzies to your heart [audience laughter]. Yeah they like that. You know somebody like that? There's a fella over here that's in love. He's going hehehee those eyelids are dancing you can tell [laughter].

All right. Onesimus was a mere slave who ran off. And that produced - you can be sure - hard feelings. And Paul comes along and leads Philemon to Christ. And they develop a very personal and warm and intimate relationship. Now with all of that in mind read this passage. He says Verse 13 for perhaps he departed for life with this purpose that you might receive Him forever no longer as a slave but more than a slave. A beloved brother. I want you to receive him just like you would me. I want you to choose to forgive him. And I want you to embrace him like you wrote a long lost brother. Now that's heavy but that's what love does. It accepts.

The enemy as a brother or I should say perhaps the offended the offender as a brother perhaps that would be even better. But Paul again makes it very personal. He says in verse 16 especially to me. But now how much more to you both in the flesh and in the Lord. He was only profitable to you in the flesh. Meaning physically as a servant but now he can be profitable to you in the flesh as a servant and in the Lord spiritually. So the point is he is saying that you are to receive him not as a slave but as a brother the point being love pardons. And part of the pardon is you receive the person back as a brother.

There's one other part to this passage and there's one other spiritual truth that we dare not miss. In verse 18 going through verse 22 he adds a promise. He says in verse 18. By the way I left that verse 17 if you count me as a partner receive him as you would me. That was the point I was making I just didn't read the verse. Now let's read verse 18. But if he has wronged you or owes you anything put that on my account. I Paul am writing to you with my own hand. I will repay. Not to mention to you that you owe me even your own self besides. Yes brother let me have Joy from you in the Lord refresh my heart and the Lord having confidence in your obedience. I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say.

But meanwhile also prepare a guest room for me for I trust that through your prayers I shall be granted to you. Now what this passage is saying is that if he owes you anything and as I mentioned earlier this is the indication that he no doubt stole money from Philemon. So he owed

him money. But he was a slave. He had no way to repay. So Paul says put that to my account. But notice especially verse 19. I Paul am writing to you with my own hand. One commentator suggested that this is the formula for a legal document that Paul is now using a style of a legal document to say I'm making a formal statement here. I will repay.

It's like giving him an I owe you. It's a signed deed. The point I wish to make is this: Love is costly. Love pays. Love participates. It gets involved. Love pardons. And love pays. Again the classic, the ultimate illustration is that God loved us and then God turned around and paid for our sin. Love pays. The good Samaritan Christ illustration of love paid the inn-keeper.

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