

God's Unconditional Commitment to Us

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"I will never leave you nor forsake you" ([Hebrews 13:5](#)).

When I wrote a brief article on our need for an indestructible faith in God, in 2010, I felt that it would be my last writing. But I now feel called to write one more article in which I deal with what I regard as the most neglected truth in the entire Bible, namely that of God's **unconditional commitment of himself to ALL** of his children whether they be of **"the older brother type" or the "younger brother type,"** described in the parable of the prodigal son (or elsewhere metaphorically as **"Jew"** and **"Gentile"**).

During the years before I knew the gospel, I could understand how God could love the obedient older brother but I wasn't able to comprehend how he could love the irresponsible younger brother. Later I began to understand that God loved both of his sons even though they were disobedient in their particular kind of sin. Thus, the apostle Paul could correctly say that all of us have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God ([Romans 3:23](#)).

In my 2010 article, I touched on this truth but now I want to expand on it by examining some of the many scriptures which not only proclaim this truth, but also fully support it. I am praying therefore, that God will enable me to write so clearly that no one will fail to see the magnitude of this truth but instead, will be **irrevocably grasped by its magnetic attractiveness** and be enabled to unconditionally commit themselves to God.

Churches are full of teachers who say that what their churches need is members who will commit themselves to God and to each other, but they fail to produce many such members. So we ask, how can such members be produced? Our answer might be that not until we are taught that God loves us and has committed himself to us unconditionally can we commit the same way to him and others (such as the person to whom we are married).

Most of the people I know believe that God doesn't save anyone unless we **"do our part."** But the truth is that **God does save us all by himself alone even though we fail to do our part** in the usual sense of what **"do"** means to most people. So I feel that before we go any further, the special sense in which we **"do"** anything for God must be made clear. I believe that the best place for us to begin an answer is [John 6:28-29](#) where

the Jews asked Jesus, *"What shall we do so we may work the works of God?"* His answer to them was, *"This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*

A good example of this is what happened when God promised Abraham what He (God) was going to do through him and one of his descendants (Jesus) for the whole world ([Genesis 12:1-3](#), [15:5-6](#)). To all of which, Paul says that **Abraham believed God, and this kind of faith was reckoned to him as righteousness**. In verse 20, Paul goes on to say that no distrust caused Abraham to waver in his conviction that God would do what God had promised that He would do. Paul further tells us that the promise made to Abraham was **not through the Law**, but *"through the righteousness of faith."* Preceding this in verses 13 through 16, Paul says that for this reason, it is by faith in order that it may be in accordance with Grace so that **the promise will be GUARANTEED to all of Abraham's descendants**.

Right here, we need to pause long enough to take seriously the word **"guarantee"** in the connection in which Paul used it. Ordinarily, sellers of products make **conditional** guarantees. Very few of them are unconditional. But since **the guarantee under consideration is based on grace**, we can conclude that it is unconditional, and be in awe of it!

So back in [Romans 4:5](#), Paul says that Abraham trusted God who justifies the **UNGODLY!** Again in 5:6, he says that while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. To top it all off, Paul, in [Ephesians 2:1,5](#), says that *"even when we were dead in our transgressions, Christ made us alive."* I have said all of this to show us why we can't **"do"** anything toward our justification in the usual sense of the word **"do,"** but we can do it in the sense that Jesus affirms in [John 6:20-23](#), namely to believe in him to do for us what must be done in order for us to be saved.

An illustration of this is the response given to the **"gospel sermon"** Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, found in Acts, chapter 2. In that sermon he told his hearers that the man they had recently crucified was their long awaited **Messiah** who didn't retaliate against them. His hearers cried out, *"Men and brethren, what shall we do?"* To this plea, he replied, *"Repent every one of you in the name of Christ and be baptized for the remission of your sins and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit"* ([Acts 2:38](#)).

Here is where a distinction between the two different kinds of **"do"** must be made. The very fact that this question was asked showed that those who asked it had only the conventional kind of **"do"** in mind, namely a human effort to obtain something, in this case what they needed to do to be saved. In this mode of thinking **they naturally regarded repentance and baptism as works they must do**. But if we look at them in the context of Peter's Gospel we see them as **gifts to be received**, or as the Japanese translation of baptism says, we must *"Receive baptism."* [Acts 11:18](#), confirms that

repentance is something granted by God. Thus, **faith, repentance, and baptism are works of God** in and for us. "**Our part**" is to receive them as **gifts from God**. When we hear Christ's Gospel, we find that our way of thinking about God is radically changed as is the meaning of repentance (change of mind).

To further clarify what we are talking about I will draw two circles: one of which is inside the other and this will show us why **any agreement between two parties which requires each to do his part cannot be regarded as a gift**. The large outer circle is the sphere of the **unconditional**, while the inner circle is the sphere of the **conditional**. Law is the inner circle (and I believe it is necessary to make clear that Paul's use of the word law refers to all law, not just the Law of Moses per [Galatians 3:22](#): "*... If a law had been given which was able to impart life, then righteousness would indeed have been based on law*"). The reason this needs to be understood so clearly is because otherwise we will not be able to understand why Paul and all other writers warn us that all of us are going to be judged regarding our deeds.

How are we to fit judgment into the gospel of God's unconditional love and mercy? Surprisingly, one of the best answers is found in [James 2:13](#), where it is said that "*Mercy triumphs over justice*." In other words, The outer circle of God's mercy trumps the inner circle which demands justice, i.e., obedience to all of God's commandments, which must not be taken lightly per [Galatians 6:7](#), "*God is not mocked; whatsoever a man sows shall he also reap*." A better answer is [Romans 11:32](#), where Paul declared that, "*God consigned all men to disobedience in order that he may have mercy on all*." The only kind of people who need mercy are disobedient people! But before we can be shown how **really** sinful and undeserving we are, God must judge us. Thus, one of the main purposes of **judgment is to open our eyes to how sinful we are and how much we really need mercy**. This will also help us to appreciate Paul's words in [Romans 4:5; 5:6,10](#), where he uses the words "*ungodly enemies of God*" to characterize those for whom Christ died.

I am now going to take a closer look at Galatians 3 and [Ephesians 2:2-10](#). In the first of these two texts the apostle Paul articulates the gospel more clearly than he does anywhere else by showing the radical difference between the **unilateral** (one-party) **promise** God made to Abraham and the **bilateral** (two party) **covenant** He made with Israel 430 years later. In regard to which, Paul warned us never to allow the 430 year older bilateral covenant to annul the promise He made to Abraham. In the promise recorded in [Genesis 12:1-3](#), and [15:5-6](#), God tells Abraham that He (God), is going to lead him to a land which will be given to him, in which his descendants will number more than the stars of the heavens and the grains of sand on the seashore, and through one of which God will bless all of the nations on earth.

This was an **unconditional promise** which was fulfilled in **the one descendent of Abraham that God had in mind when the promise was made, namely Jesus Christ**,

who sacrificed himself on the cross to save the whole world. His forerunner, John the Baptist, recognized him as *"the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world."* Jesus fulfilled this prophecy when he forgave everyone who put him on the cross! That includes all of us. Our part in response to this is to **receive it** as the **GIFT** it is.

To accept God's **gift** to us on the cross does not eliminate our doing of good works. In order to see how Grace, Faith, and Works relate to each other, I want to turn to the best three verses in the Bible which explain this, namely, [Ephesians 2:8-10](#), which says, *"For by grace you have been saved through faith and this not of yourselves it is a gift of God; not as a result of works so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them"* (New American Standard Bible). In order to make these verses as clear as possible, I would like to condense and paraphrase them as follows: *"You have been saved by grace ONLY through the only kind of faith created by grace which results in the only kind of works created by faith feeding on Grace."*

Everything needed to be done for our salvation was done by God on the cross. Our only part in this is to **RECEIVE** this work of God on our behalf. Thus, it is incorrect to say we are saved by grace **PLUS** faith **PLUS** works. As Paul says so well in [Romans 10:17](#), our faith comes by hearing the word of Christ about which he said in verse 15: *"How beautiful are the feet of those who bring glad tidings."* Those glad tidings are the Gospel good news that eternal life is a **FREE GIFT** from God ([Romans 6:23](#)). In this light we can see that faith and repentance are things that **HAPPEN** to us when we hear and accept the gospel of God's unconditional love for us and His commitment to us.

Now I would like to consider a few other scriptures followed by a look at some of my experiences when being counseled by Christian Counselors, who reinforced of the Gospel of grace for me.

(1). [I John 4:8,16,18-19](#). Here we are told that *"God is love"* (verses 8 and 16), and that there is no fear in such love because in it is no fear of judgment (verse 18). Furthermore we are enabled to love fearlessly when we have been loved by God (vs. 19). Although I was able to understand this intellectually, it was not until I was introduced to Christian counseling in 1959, that I experienced it emotionally. About that same time there were some churches which began to provide small group meetings where members were able to get well enough acquainted with each other that we could love each other for who we actually were. When some of these groups were modeled after [James 5:16](#), we were able to **confess our sins to one another** instead of trying to expose the sins of others. This way of relating to others demonstrated what Jesus was talking about when he told his hearers to stop judging each other and become aware of the **"log"** in our own eye before trying to remove the speck in our brother's eye ([Matthew 7:1-6](#)). Our **"log"** represents our unconscious in which we have buried who we really are and pretend to be who we are not. Jesus regarded the Pharisees as that kind of persons. I once heard a

speaker say that God is the only one who can honestly introduce himself as "*I am who I am.*" The rest of us must introduce ourselves as "*I am not who I am.*"

I believe that one of the best ways for us to be delivered from hypocrisy is found in [Hebrews 4:12-13](#), where we are told that the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two edged sword which divides between soul and spirit...and which lays us open and bare before him with whom we have to do. If we might agree that the sword is the good news of the Gospel of Christ, we can easily see why it opens us up. It is because the Gospel confronts us non-threateningly, and puts us at ease, opening us to ourselves, showing us who we really are. In most of the groups I participated in, we were provided an environment in which it was safe to open up.

In His sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7), Jesus provides a good example of this. Before confronting his hearers with how short they had fallen from what God commanded them to be, He devotes the first 16 verses of His sermon to telling them how blessed they were. Instead of scolding them for their failures, He blessed them with his gracious unconditional love. Upon experiencing such love, tears came to their eyes and melted them into meekness and a willingness to admit they felt hungry and thirsty for more of what He was giving them, which, in turn, enabled them to be merciful to others who needed it, and it purified their hearts to see that God is the source of the love they were receiving from Jesus. It brought them peace within themselves and enabled them to be peacemakers and bear up under persecution. At the end of this beatitude transformational experience, their faces were all "**lit up**" with joy. So He said to them, "*You are the light of the world,*" not that they **should** be such light, but that they **were** that light.

Thus, we see that the first 16 verses of the sermon on the mount were spoken in the **indicative mood** (what is), before the rest of the sermon which is spoken in the **imperative mood** (what should be). We learn from this that the Gospel must be proclaimed before the commands are issued, which has caused some to say that **all of God's imperatives are based on his indicatives**. In other words, the horse needs to be placed in front of the cart, not the other way round.

Finally, I want to look at two Old Testament Scriptures that portrayed the radically different kind of covenant God would be making, not only with Israel, but with all of us. The first is [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#), where God is going to make a different kind of covenant from the one He made with Israel through Moses which "**they broke.**" In the new kind of covenant, God will not need to issue external commandments because he will have written them on their minds and hearts and all will know him as the forgiving God that he is. Not a word is said about his forgiveness being based on their prior faith, repentance, and obedience. So we ask for an explanation and we can only guess that the new covenant is similar to God's unilateral **PROMISE** He made to Abraham wherein, **God does it all** and **Abraham believes** what God told him.

One of the most significant episodes in the God-Abraham relationship was when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac. On that occasion, Abraham showed that he had learned a very important truth that he and Sarah had failed to learn when God had announced to them that he was going to give them a son. At first, they were unable to believe that God would do anything by himself without their help. But by the time Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his son, he had learned to trust God to somehow spare Isaac by either resurrecting him after he was sacrificed or by providing a substitute for him. Thus, he was able to assure Isaac that God would provide, which is what God actually did.

All of this provides us with a picture of when God would provide all of us with the perfect sacrifice of His only begotten son on the cross, which is tantamount to saying that He offered himself as the perfect sacrifice ([II Cor. 5:19](#), "*God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself.*")

(2) The second text is [Ezekiel 36:16-38](#). In both texts, God admits that He had failed to obtain obedience from Israel using external Commandments. Both texts show that a heart transplant was needed in response to which God said he was going to **replace Israel's heart of stone with a heart of flesh** into which He would put His spirit. So the question arises, how did God melt Israel's heart of stone? The answer is, of course, the gospel of God's unconditional love, mercy and grace in which He commits himself to Israel and to us, which in turn, draws from us a corresponding unconditional commitment of ourselves to him! His Gospel melts our defensiveness and enables us to increasingly obey His commandments, the first of which is to confess our need for his **FREE GIFT** of salvation. It must be emphasized here that just because we are saved as a gift "**apart from works,**" it does not mean that works play no part in our lives. Quite the contrary, **the more we are fed grace the more works we will do.** These works will not be done **in order to be saved,** but **will be done as the result of our salvation.** Furthermore, they will be of a finer quality than we could do on our own, and we will not claim credit. Someone has well said that **the reason we give God all the credit is because he accepts all the debit.**

In conclusion, I want to give my personal testimony of how the theme of this paper has played out in my life. I was born to missionary parents in Japan, and by the time I became a teenager after moving back to America, everyone who knew me assumed that I would follow in my parents' steps and be a missionary to Japan when I became an adult. But after tasting life in America I did not want to go back to Japan, so I refused to go.

However, this brought so much guilt into my life that I felt like the apostle Paul felt, described in [Romans 7:24](#), "*Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?*" His answer is in the next verse, "*Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ*

our Lord." This answer was not enough for me at that time in my life since I didn't sufficiently know Christ even though I had been a baptized Christian for 10 years.

Thankfully, the answers for me happened when my father took me to hear E. Stanley Jones, a world renowned missionary from India. He was so radiant with love for Christ that his sermon filled me with that same love and my eyes were opened to the reality of Christ who came alive for me in His **glorious attractiveness!!** This, of course, changed my mind about returning to Japan. I was ready to go as soon as General MacArthur permitted new missionaries to enter post war Japan in 1947.

What happened to me that night was an encounter with the living Christ, similar to what Saul of Tarsus experienced on his way to Damascus. He became the **Apostle Paul who testified to King Agrippa that he had not been disobedient to "the heavenly vision"** (Acts 26;19). This is a powerful example of the connection between a "*vision*" of Christ and our obedience to Him. Once we have been encountered by Christ and have felt the sheer quality of His unconditional love, we become enabled to love and commit to Him unconditionally. With these words we come full circle to where we began this paper. But since my focus was almost entirely on the importance of God's unilateral promise to Abraham compared with the bilateral covenant with Israel through Moses, I feel it to be very important for me to now show **the importance of the bilateral covenant.**

The Apostle Paul was certainly aware of this need when he warned his readers in [Galatians 6:7](#), not to forget the law of sowing and reaping: "***Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever a man sows shall he reap.***" Another indication of this awareness is found in [Romans 5:21-6:2](#), where Paul says that "***where sin abounded, grace did all the more abound.***" But he immediately followed this by warning his readers against thinking that they should sin all the more. So we ask, what is the purpose of law? Although Paul gives us three partial reasons in [Romans 3:19-20](#); [7:7](#) and [Galatians 3:19-24](#), the over arching reason for the law is to provide us with a clear picture of the kind of persons we are meant to be. The very man who opened my eyes to Grace also opened my eyes to the fact that we live in a moral universe and he helped me to appreciate the importance of our own compliance with it. The law provides us with an absolute in the midst of the many ambiguities of life.

As Professor Richard Niebuhr has written, "**The Ten Commandments are not ten suggestions.**" They are seriously meant to be obeyed! But since no one has ever lived up to them we must have something more if we are ever to be saved. As Paul says so well in [Romans 6:14](#), "***Sin shall not have dominion over you for you are no longer under law but under grace.***" Those who truly understand Grace are the most likely to do good works, not for credit but in appreciation for grace.

Now for another look at the parable of the prodigal son with which we began this paper and how it illuminates what we are talking about. The **older brother** represents the **bilateral** way of thinking in relation to God and the **younger brother** represents the **unilateral** way of thinking about how God relates to both of his sons. The elder brother is outraged by the gracious way the father treats his undeserving son. He is saying, in effect, *"I am your deserving Son who stayed home and obeyed all of your commands, but you never gave me the royal treatment you lavished on your undeserving younger son. You should have made him pay for his shameful misconduct before letting him into our home."* His father replied, *"All that was mine was yours and you could have had all the celebrations you wanted."* What an irony this is! The older son was not only unaware of what had already been his but was unable to avail himself of it.

When we apply all of this to ourselves, we see that most members of most churches are unaware of **God's unconditional commitment of himself to them**. So they are needlessly deprived of the abundant life mentioned by Jesus in [John 10:10](#). Everywhere Jesus went multitudes followed and surrounded him and **felt his LOVE**. They couldn't get enough of him and his delicious words of grace. He was powerfully **ATTRACTIVE!!** He knew this truth about himself and said on one occasion that if He were lifted up from the earth, He would draw all men unto himself ([John 12:32](#)).

On another occasion he said, *"Whoever drinks of my water will never run dry."* Why? Because his *"water"* becomes an **artesian well that overflows**. That's the kind of overflow we all need in order to cope with the complexities of interpersonal relationships, such as between husbands and wives and parents and children. That's why in answer to Jesus' question about whether Peter would leave Him like so many had, Peter declared he would not ever leave Jesus because Jesus had the words of eternal life ([John 6:66-68](#)).

Once we have been drawn into the circle of God's unilateral, unconditional love embodied in Jesus, we will never want to leave. Someone has poetically said that heaven is a place *"where the gates swing outward never."* In other words, heaven has no exits because **no one will ever want to leave!** In [John 10:27-29](#), Jesus said that no one will be taken out of His hand, the hand of **the Good Shepherd who loves His sheep**.

This reminds me of the judgment scene described by Jesus in the 25th chapter of Matthew when the king separates the sheep from the goats. Those he declares to be his sheep are surprised and say they were unaware of having done the good deeds He said they did. But those He calls goats say to the judge, *"When didn't we do the good deeds?"* This shows that those who live by grace take no credit for what they do while those who live under the bilateral type of covenant expect credit for every good deed they do.

So what does all of this indicate? It indicates that the deepest longing in the core of our being is to love and to be loved. C. S. Lewis called this truth our **"inconsolable secret."** When Jesus offered his all embracing love to the citizens of Jerusalem, they refused it and killed him the next day! I never cease to be amazed at **the massive resistance to grace** which I have encountered during my 94 years! Why would anyone refuse to accept what everyone wants more than anything else? I believe that one of the best answers may be the third and fourth chapter of Hebrews where we are told that the reason Israel failed to enter the rest offered to them by God was because of their **"unbelief"** ([Hebrews 3:19](#)). In verse 4:6, disbelief is called **"disobedience."** Thus the disobedience against which the entire book of Hebrews was written is **not our failure to perform good works but rather against our failure to receive God's grace and thereby produce the good works which are pleasing to God!**

It is generally agreed that the process through which healthy human beings are developed is through the use of both **"carrots"** and **"sticks."** In the context of this paper, **"carrot"** is a metaphor for **grace** and **"stick"** for **law**, and the consequences which follow from failure to obey. Paul shows his awareness of this in [Romans 11:22](#), where he reminds us of the **"kindness"** and **"severity"** of God. For those who rely on God's kindness, God will continue to be kind and merciful. But even to them He will administer his discipline when needed. (See The first 14 verses of Hebrews chapter 12). To those who choose to rely on their good performance, rather than his mercy, God will be especially severe. (See all of Matthew, chapter 23).

One question remains for me, namely why are there so few who are asking for the kind of commitment described in this paper? The answer would seem to be that there are very few who have **EXPERIENCED the kind of LOVE** which leads to such commitment. It is my hope that this paper may contribute toward creating a desire for such love.

In telling my life story covering the first 60 years, I said I had learned two very important lessons, namely, **(1)** the importance of learning to **RECEIVE** and **(2)** to **GIVE**. This paper has been mainly about receiving and has therefore been mainly addressed to the **"older brother"** type of persons. Ironically, the **"younger brother"** type has learned only too well the art of **"receiving,"** without the good works which normally flow from the acceptance of grace.

I cannot think of a more appropriate way to conclude this discussion than by using the verse with which the apostle Paul ended his discussion of God's mercy in the first 11 chapters of his letter to the Romans: **"For God consigned all men to disobedience in order that he may show mercy to all"** (Vs. 32). I regard this verse not only as climactic in Romans but also in the whole Bible. It confirms **God's last word to all of us**, namely **mercy**. James agrees with this in [James 2:13](#), where he says that **"Mercy triumphs over justice."** In other words, when mercy swallows justice, **the highest form of justice is**

mercy. Those who are fed this supreme truth will be able to do what Paul says in [Romans 12:1](#), namely to present their total selves as a living sacrifice to God.

In summary, in spite of our failure to live up to God's standards for us, He will remain unconditionally committed to us and our ultimate salvation (called **grace**). When we have heard and assimilated this super delicious good news, it will draw

from us a like unconditional commitment to Him (**faith**), which will manifest itself in loving lives of service to Him and to our fellow human beings (**good works**), for which we will claim no credit. And, let us continually keep in mind the Apostle Paul's question, **what do we have that we did not receive?** ([I Cor. 4:7](#)).

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