



GLOBAL GRACE NEWS

GGN is a teaching resource for ministers and churches all over the world. We advocate the gospel of the grace of Jesus Christ - Jesus alone, grace alone, faith alone. Our purpose is twofold: to help the Church rediscover Jesus and to take this message to the world.

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## Global Grace News

It is a joy to welcome you to this issue of Global Grace News teaching letter. The two articles both look at the amazing New Covenant.

It almost seems to be a too good deal: the New Covenant Jesus has made for us where He Himself stands as the guarantor on our behalf. Study the articles carefully, and allow the Holy Spirit to bring revelation and establish a deep and strong security in your personal life and ministry.

Your covenant with God is not based on yourself and your own efforts but is entirely based on Jesus and what He did on the cross. Our faith is in the Grace of God and the finished work of Jesus Christ.

I will also take this opportunity to welcome leaders from D.R. Congo and Rwanda, and all the rest of you who are with us for the first time. It is our great privilege to stay connected with you, and our desire is that this GGN teaching resource will be used by God to strengthen and continue to equip you for the important work you are doing.

We would love to hear from you, via [info@globalgraceneeds.org](mailto:info@globalgraceneeds.org). Both praise reports related to the teaching articles and questions concerning the teachings are welcome. Also be aware that there are some questions and answers available on the [www.globalgraceneeds.org](http://www.globalgraceneeds.org) website.



Mary Felde  
*Editor*

# Love Declares War on Religion

by Peter Youngren

Part 1 of a series from Luke 15

The Pharisees' relationship with God was based on a religious contract of "dos" and "don'ts". And the Pharisees were proud because of their seeming ability to keep the religious contract. In Luke 15 Jesus shows that the Pharisees had totally misunderstood who God really is.

Luke 15 is love's declaration of war against self-righteous religion. The well-known parables of the good shepherd, the woman who lost her coin, and the father and his two sons constitute Jesus' response to the attacks from indignant Pharisees. We read, "Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes complained, saying, "This Man receives sinners and eats with them..." (Luke 15:1-2)

Verse 2 summarizes the entire gospel: God receives sinners and has fellowship with them. This is our fantastic message that regrettably is heard all too seldom.

"Sinners" were those who did not live up to the standard taught in the synagogue. Tax collectors were worse than regular sinners, rejected by the Pharisees and despised by the general population. They were Jews employed by the Romans for the purpose of collecting taxes from

Jews - wealthy citizens who stole money without being held accountable for their criminal activities. These were the "scum" of society, hated to the degree that there is maybe no parallel today. The zealots were a religious group who saw it as an act of worship toward God to murder a tax collector.

Here we see Jesus having a celebratory meal with the most despised people you can imagine. To eat with somebody was not as we may see it - just a quick lunch or a cup of coffee. No, according to the Middle Eastern custom it was a way to have fellowship, to show acceptance and solidarity, to embrace another person. The Amplified Bible's translation of the first two verses of Luke 15 reads, "Now the tax collectors and [notorious and [a]especially wicked] sinners were all coming near to [Jesus] to listen to Him. And the Pharisees and the scribes kept muttering and indignantly complaining, saying, This man accepts and receives

and welcomes [preeminently wicked] sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:1-2 Amp)

Why did Jesus have fellowship with sinners and tax collectors? We could conclude that Jesus didn't have sufficient wisdom to understand that

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such an association would negatively influence His ministry. On the contrary, since Jesus was full of wisdom we realize that Jesus was fellowshiping with sinners and tax collectors to show what was His actual ministry: “to seek and to save that which was lost.”

## War against religiosity

The parable about the good shepherd who sought the lost sheep, the woman who found the lost silver coin and the father who welcomed his lost son home was more than an answer to the questions of the Pharisees: it was a declaration of war against everything that was known as religiosity. Jesus and the Pharisees were on a collision course concerning who God really is.

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Through Jesus we see God's heart fully revealed. Jesus said, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.” (John 1:18) The contrast is razor sharp: Jesus versus the Pharisees, the heart of God contra the mindset of religion.

To better understand Jesus' message we must first know something

about the Pharisees. They were a spiritual movement based on the Holy Scriptures: the Torah, Psalms and the Prophets. They looked upon themselves as representatives of God's will on earth. Jesus could have been born some seventy-five years earlier, but then the Pharisees would have just been in the beginning of their movement. God saw to it that Jesus came at a time when the Pharisees were at the top of their influence. It seems to have been God's intent that the gospel of grace would confront the pharisaical attitudes. The Pharisees only knew a God of demands and Jesus had come to show them God who is love, even until death.

Jesus' reference to the bosom of the Father refers to the time before time began when Jesus shared the joy and love in the Holy Trinity. Church fathers used to call this “perichoresis,” loosely translated a circle, a dance of love where God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit lived in an eternal, mutual love. God is love and has always been found in this love.

God did not create people because He was lonely but so that this full fellowship of love would be shared by people. In Adam humans walked away from this love but in Christ we are restored to it.

Jesus' behavior in Luke 15 shows us the Father's love towards sinners, but it was also offensive to everything the Pharisees saw as holy. How could the Messiah have fellowship with sinners? God is, after all, holy and cannot have anything to do with sinners, so they thought, and so many still think.

## Contract or Covenant?

For the Pharisees, their relationship with God was based on a religious contract of “dos” and “don'ts”; and that too seems to be true for many today.

A contract is about two or several parties who make an agreement where they commit themselves to live up to certain obligations. A contract has nothing to do with love or trust, but rather it points to the opposite: to demands and possibilities of taking one

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another to court. The Pharisees were proud because of their seeming ability to keep the religious contract better than the world around them. Their life was about performing spiritual merits and their joy was in the fact that they were better at it than others. They were on a higher level than “sinners and tax collectors.” That's the way it is in all religions.

The religious contract becomes a mirror where we view both self and others. In the story about the Pharisee who prayed at the front of the temple, we read that he prayed “within himself.” Even his prayer life had become a sort of theatre; a mirror where he showed his own ability compared with those who were “less” holy.

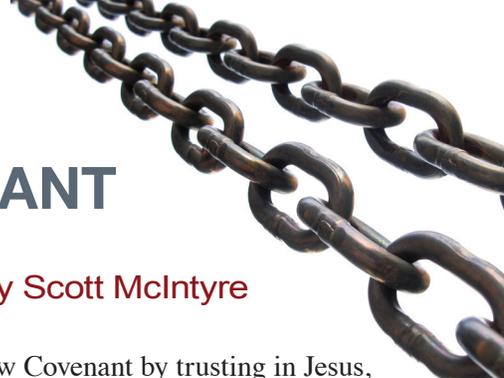
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Luke 15 reveals the covenant of love: God's love given to us freely and without pay. God is the God of the covenant and His covenant is always connected to people like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – frail and faulty individuals invited into God's covenant of love, in spite of themselves. In Christ we become Abraham's children, graciously embraced into the dance of love.



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# THE UNBREAKABLE COVENANT



By Scott McIntyre

**God made a covenant with Abram and promised great blessing to Abram and his descendants. The New Covenant is the fulfillment of the covenant with Abram. How can we benefit from the New Covenant? And what is our part?**

You are a beneficiary of the New Covenant. What does that mean? Well, to begin, consider something that may be a little more familiar to us at this point in time: a will (testament) of a parent (let's say a father for this example).

When a father makes out his will, he declares his desire for what should be done with his possessions after he passes away. Perhaps a son is given the house, a daughter is given the vehicle... any combination is possible according to what the father possesses. Also, the will cannot be modified without the consent of the father.

Even in the natural world, a covenant (testament) cannot be added to or taken away from.

I have just used what to our minds today is a very natural example. But did you know that the Apostle Paul used the same example to illustrate the New Covenant? Consider Galatians 3 where Paul is calling the Galatians' attention back to the perfection of the New Covenant that has been established between God and people in Jesus:

*"Brethren, I speak in the manner of men: Though it is only a man's covenant, yet if it is confirmed, no one annuls or adds to it"* (Galatians 3:15).

What is Paul saying? Even in the natural world, a covenant (testament)

cannot be added to or taken away from. How much more then the New Covenant? It is God's idea; God's initiative; God's doing. It cannot be added to or taken away from. My friend, this is important for us to know.

## God's Covenant Partner

Paul was writing to the Galatians who were attempting to improve their standing before God by their own performance. Somehow they had been deceived into thinking they needed to perform certain religious deeds in order to maintain the covenant, or to receive more value from the covenant. Paul's emphatic response to this thinking is, "No, No, No!!!"

Be encouraged today, my friend. God has not removed any of the benefits that have come to you in Jesus, nor is there any room for improvement in the New Covenant. What is there room for? More recognition of Jesus. He is faithful in the covenant (even though we are not always so); His faithfulness counts for us; and because He is faithful, the New Covenant is unbreakable.

Perhaps there have been times in your life as a believer when you were convinced that God was displeased with you. Like many people who have been trapped by religion that is based solely on the Old Testament, maybe you had even come to a place in your thinking where you believed your failures had given God a suitable reason for leaving you, excluding you from His family, or removing His blessing from your life and ministry.

Please read these words carefully: Your failures and unfaithfulness do not change God's opinion of you, nor do they violate the New Covenant, causing you to be disqualified from God's goodness. If you desire to partake of the benefits of the

New Covenant by trusting in Jesus, you are always welcome to do so.

You are not God's covenant partner. The Man Christ Jesus is God's covenant partner.

Now, is it true that a covenant requires faithfulness? Certainly. And is it true that in the biblical accounts of covenant there were serious consequences for people who violated a covenant? Yes, that is true. So then, how is it possible that your unfaithfulness to God does not result in Him rejecting you as a covenant partner? Answer: You are not God's covenant partner. The Man Christ Jesus is God's covenant partner. He is never unfaithful to the covenant. His perfection is ever-present before God (Hebrews 9:24). And because you are in Him (Romans 6:11; Ephesians 1 & 2; Colossians 2:9-13), your failures do not appear before God. Instead, Christ's perfection and faithfulness appear before God on your behalf. Praise the Lord!

## God's Covenant with Abram

Let's continue this study of covenant for a minute or two. The New Covenant is the fulfillment of the covenant God made with Abram long ago. Yes, there was the time of the Mosaic (Old) Covenant. But we are told in Galatians 3:17-26 that the Mosaic Covenant, referred to as "the law," ended when Jesus came and it did not annul the covenant that was previously made by God with Abram and his seed. God did not replace His covenant with Abram. Rather, the law was given to show Israel, and all people, that it is not possible for us to benefit from God's goodness by human effort or merit. From the very beginning of our lives, we are "confined... under sin" (Galatians 3:22), and only by God's mercy and grace can we receive the

benefits of His promises. God, of course, knew that from the beginning. So in establishing His covenant with Abram and his seed, God's grace for all generations was already at work.

Do you remember the story of God confirming the covenant with Abram and his seed? God had promised great blessing to Abram and his descendants (Genesis 12:2-3; 15:1-6). I like to say it this way: God promised to empower Abram and his descendants to be well and do well for their own good and for the good of all people. My friend, that is God's provision for you today too: He has made provision for you to be empowered to be well and do well for your own good and for the good of other people through you. Praise the Lord again!

Jesus, the Seed, was present when God confirmed the covenant of which Abram and his descendants would be the beneficiaries.

So how will this occur in our lives? We have already seen that a covenant demands faithfulness. And we have seen that, in things pertaining to God, human effort is futile and clearly shows that all of us are nothing but unfaithful. How then can anyone benefit from God's covenant? I alluded to the answer earlier: In establishing His covenant with Abram and his seed, God's grace for all generations was already at work.

In Genesis 15:8-21, we read the account of God confirming His covenant with Abram, who clearly was familiar with the formalities of ancient covenant. Abram prepared animal carcasses for the covenant ceremony, thus creating a path of blood between the carcasses. Such a path of blood was the place through which the participants in an ancient covenant would pass as they made promises to each other and pronounced curses that would arise if someone broke the covenant.

But after Abram had everything prepared, God caused a change that was essential for the security of the covenant.

Before we continue with the story, be reminded of a few things: A covenant is made between two or more parties; a covenant demands faithfulness; Abram was a sinner from birth, just like every other person born in Adam's lineage. Clearly, God could not depend on Abram. Now, back to the story in Genesis 15.

Everything was ready for the covenant to be confirmed. But at the last minute, God made the crucial change: He put Abram to sleep (v.12). What does this mean? Abram would be a beneficiary of the covenant without bearing the responsibility for the security of the covenant.

Who then would be responsible? A covenant must have more than one party. God is present. Abram is asleep. Is there only one participant? No. According to Galatians 3, everything is fine even while Abram is asleep because:

*"to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." And this I say, that the law, which was four hundred and thirty years later, cannot annul the covenant that was confirmed before by God in Christ, that it should make the promise of no effect" (Galatians 3:16-17).*

### Jesus is the Seed

Did you see that? Jesus is the Seed to whom the promises were made, and the covenant was confirmed by God in Christ. Jesus, the Seed, was present when God confirmed the covenant of which Abram and his descendants would be the beneficiaries. We can now see this even in Genesis 15. While Abram was asleep "*there appeared a smoking oven and a burning torch that passed between those pieces*" (v.17). Not one, but two things appeared and passed through the blood of the covenant. God was present. The

Seed of Abraham, whom we now know as Jesus Christ, was present. The covenant was confirmed, and it is forever secure for Abram, for you and for me, because the continuation of the covenant does not depend on you or me, it depends only on Jesus. He is faithful, He is unchanging. He is God, and He is human. In Him there is faithfulness on God's part, and in Him there is faithfulness on humanity's part. The New Covenant in the Lord Jesus Christ is THE

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### UNBREAKABLE COVENANT!

What then do we do? Consider Jesus in every aspect of life, and respond accordingly to Him. He leads us in godly living. He inspires us in faith. His healing power, His strength and His abilities are manifested in our bodies. His love and kindness are heard in our words and seen in our actions.

Jesus is faithful. Jesus is unchanging. Jesus is the One in whom the New Covenant is forever perfect and secure. You are in Him. What does that make you? The recipient of every good thing found in God's will, and a vessel of His love and power through whom He is made known to the people around you.

You are empowered to be well and do well for your own good and to the glory of God. And as a minister of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus, you are empowered to help other people be well and do well.



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