

Examples of Conditional and Unconditional

Written by K B Napier

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Is salvation conditional or unconditional? Is God's love conditional or unconditional? The same question can be asked of any number of different biblical teachings. What is the answer? In this article we will examine what is conditional and what is not. Invariably, those of either a Calvinistic or an Arminian stance will take opposite stances. This, however, is irrelevant, because what matters is what God says.

'Conditional' in Language

Look at 'Conditional sentences' or 'Conditional clauses'. These tell us that certain actions can only take place *if* (the word 'if' is relevant) certain conditions are met. In language, there are three kinds of conditional sentences, where: the fulfilment of the condition is highly likely (because the steps to fulfilment are deliberate and positive), or, the condition is very unlikely to be fulfilled (because of an element of doubt), or, the condition cannot be fulfilled at all (because it refers only to the past: what is already done is done and cannot be changed). (These apply when used with three usual tenses; there are other possible tenses).

I am not going to explain how these structures operate in English, but wish to show that there are a variety of possible actions compared to the necessary conditions imposed by a situation or person. This is useful, because otherwise the opposite conclusions drawn by Calvinists and Arminians are inexplicable. To put it another way, both cannot be right (though Calvinism is more likely to be right than Arminianism, which is heretical)!

So, when we look at what is conditional in scripture, we must look to see if the condition is highly likely to be met, or, if it is very unlikely to be met, or if it is not likely at all to be met. In each case, there is a very important factor that cannot be ignored – that God is not like men, and if He declares something to be conditional, then it is; if He declares it to be unconditional; then it is. What men think is irrelevant.

What do you think God declares in scripture? It depends on the situation given by God Himself. Sometimes God imposes conditions, and sometimes He does not. Recognising which one applies is vital, or we tend to rush down a road that is the antithesis of what God's word teaches.

Apart from these possible conclusions above, there are other factors to consider. For example, '*causal conditional*'

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. This can be expressed: If X then Y, where X is the cause of Y. There is also, in linguistics, the *'indicative conditional'*

sentence in which "If A, then B" (what I often refer to as the "If – Then" form of argument... IF this is true, THEN so is B [and C,D, etc.]). The problem here is that few people ever bother to test 'A' to be true (or false), and they accept many godless theories as true, though they are not.

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'counterfactual conditional'

expresses what would happen if the opposite were to occur. We see these operating in scripture, yet they are usually ignored by those with a presumptuous mind not settled on scriptural teaching.

One thing to look out for is the presence of an "If" element, as opposed to a "when" element. The first is often less definite than the second. If is usually a conditional requirement, while 'when' is not (but not always). A Christian can mix what is conditional with what is unconditional. This may, or may not, be intentional, but it can, used wrongly, present a disastrous theology and biblical interpretation. Indeed, this kind of sloppiness is present in many arguments by Christians, who riddle the churches with nonsense, or even blasphemy.

For example, "If I had trained as a violinist, I would be a famous musician today". Many muses of Christians are like this, and they are completely useless. The sentence actually says: "I am not a violinist, and so I am not a famous musician." Can you see what makes it useless? Many Christians live this kind of useless life, based on impossible dreams, actions, or beliefs. Note how the example mixes past and present and even future possibilities.

These factors are not limited to English. In French, for example, the conditional mood is similar to the English form. They both describe events that are not guaranteed to occur (the 'if' element).

Now, take a 'conditional offer' of a job. To get the job you must firstly finish a training course you are undertaking, or pass relevant academic exams, or fulfil some other necessary prerequisite. If you do not gain them, you lose the job.

Rob De Decker describes these factors (grammar.ccc.commnet.edu). He gives the following example: "I will go to Japan, if I have enough money". In this example, the *'main clause'* is the phrase given before the comma. The last part or phrase is a *'conditional clause'*

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. As you can see, the fulfilment of the main clause depends entirely on fulfilling the conditional clause.

Perhaps your mind is reeling by now! But, these are very important matters, because God often gives us 'main clauses' to accomplish, but to accomplish or fulfil them, we must do this or that. If we do not fulfil the conditional clause set by God, there is no way we will ever attain to the main clause. That is, we either do what God says we must do, or we miss the benefit or prize. Now, let us go on to look at examples of main clauses in scripture, and see if they all require fulfilment by conditional clauses.

Biblical Main Clauses

Read Genesis 2:16, 17

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: *for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*

”

The first part, emphasised in bold, is the 'main clause', beginning with a suitable causal conjunction. It is what God promises to Adam. But, it is conditional, as the phrase in italics clearly indicates. That is, *if* Adam eats of this tree *then* he will suffer the consequences. He can eat of any other tree, but not of this one. His life depends on his obedience!

Abram received a great promise. Initially it appears not to have conditions attached... but it does! See Genesis 12:1, 2

“Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

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And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:”

In this text the conjunction ‘and’ (start of verse 2) implies a condition. It is this: IF you get out of your home country and go where I send you, I will make your family great. Thus, if Abram wished to see this promise fulfilled he firstly had to move from his home and go wherever God sent him. The promise is maintained throughout his life, but God issued several conditions along the way. He also ‘filled out’ the promise. For example, in Genesis 13:14-17

“And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.”

Here we see God giving Abram extra benefits and promises, without this time imposing conditions. The conditions came afterwards and included them, in much the same way that a codicil amends an original executed will. Only in this case the amendment does not get rid of or amend the original promise; it expands upon it. It is a rule that if we are given these amendments, unless God says they alter the original promise, they are to be taken as included in the whole promise.

The promise is further referenced, again without the addition of a condition, in 15:4 and 5. This is when Abram and Sarai were promised a child of their own. After God gave Abram the promise He then added a condition. This was in response to Abram’s question concerning the land, *“And he said, Lord GOD, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?”*

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God answered with a relatively 'small' condition – Abram was to sacrifice three animals and two birds. It is to be understood that even if we consider a condition to be minor or relatively small, if God demands it, then it is vital: just as no sin is 'small' in God's eyes, neither is a condition that guarantees the fulfilment of God's promises.

In Genesis 17:1, 2 we have this:

“And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, *I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.*

And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.”

Here, the main clause is in bold and the conditional clause is in italics. Woe betide any Christian who cannot differentiate what is a promise and what is a condition! Even worse is when he deliberately does not fulfil the conditional clause. Abram was given the main clause: his family *w*
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multiply greatly, IF he fulfilled God's commands – to walk in holiness and to be perfect. The same promise is further expanded in the chapter. Very often the original promise remains the same, while the conditions applied to it expand or are further clarified.

In verse 9 we find that the demand made of Abram, to obey and live an holy life, was also expected of his seed (including the nation of Israel). If they refused to obey, there would be consequences, the first being excommunication from the family (and hence the coming nation) *i*
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any male was not circumcised. This condition continued all through the history of Israel.

Does God Love Everybody?

This question can also be put as “*Does God hate anybody?*” The answer to both is rejected by many, for God does NOT love everybody, and He DOES hate many. This is based on the conditionality of His love. This is why Jesus warned the Pharisees not to rely on their nationhood alone. See Luke 11:42. The Pharisees were warned of dire consequences for passing over or ignoring good judgment and the love of God. Thus, though they lived under the general promise of God, as members of His chosen people, their sin caused them to suffer God's wrath.

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Yet, the love of God is evidenced in the hearts of everyone who is genuinely saved (Romans 5:5). Therefore, if we act as if love did not exist, then we are unsaved. It has to be the case, for NOTHING can separate us from divine love (Romans 8:39). It stands to reason that only being unsaved can prevent God's love in us.

We see this love manifested in us if we "*keep(eth) his word*" (1 John 2:5). So, the having and keeping of God's love is conditional. Indeed, every promise of God is conditional. In this matter of love the condition is that "*we keep his commandments*" (1 John 5:3). In Deuteronomy 10:12 we have a more defined statement, showing that God imposes a conditional clause on all who claim His love:

"And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul."

Then, in chapter 30, verse 20, we are again shown both the main clause and the conditional clause:

*"That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: **for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them*** ."

The main clause or promise is in bold, and the requirement or conditional clause is shown in italics. That is, if the people wanted a long life and possession of the land, they needed to fulfil God's demands, by listening to Him, by loving Him, and by adhering closely to Him. Conditions are not always given in close proximity, and may appear in different biblical texts to the promises, but conditions exist!

Is Salvation Conditional or Unconditional?

Salvation is unconditional. The unconditional nature of salvation is clear evidence that

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Arminianism is very wrong, an heresy, and a grave blasphemy. It is unconditional because God imposes no conditions at all on man when he is saved. The only 'conditions' are those imposed by other men, in their doctrinal error.

What makes salvation unconditional? God's word! God says that no man seeks after Him, but prefers sin. No unsaved man can approach God, because God cannot tolerate sin. Sin is an unbridgeable divide. It takes God's own choice to elect a man to salvation. He does this in eternity, where all promises and conditions exist always. God's decisions made in eternity have no time attached – what God decides is in a timeless Heaven, where, in terms of eternal choices, yesterday, today and tomorrow are all the same to God; they simply 'are'.

Thus, God elects a man to be saved, and did so before anything was made (A-403). Then, at an earthly time determined by God in eternity, the man is visited by the Holy Spirit, Who makes the man's spirit alive, where once it was dead. Once it is made alive (born again/regenerated), the man's spirit can listen to the Holy Spirit as He brings the man to repentance. This repentance is given by God, and is a sign that the man believes the Gospel call. Once he repents, he is saved. (See O-110). Nothing or no-one can prevent salvation taking place (A-127), nor can a man lose his salvation (A-391). He can do nothing to obtain it.

Salvation is a gift given freely by God, and it is not earned nor acquired by anything at all, including faith, decisions made for Christ, or anything else. The election in eternity is made by God, with no reference to the person's state. Regeneration is a gift of God, given to allow the Holy Spirit access to the soul. The man cannot help this process in any way. Repentance is made only after the spirit is made alive by God. And salvation itself is a gift, free of all human involvement. All of this unconditionality is dependent on a vital condition et by God!

Conditions on God, by God

That is, God places conditions upon His own deity. For example, God cannot change. Nor can He sin. He cannot act against His own declared nature. Being God He can do whatever He wishes, but He chooses not to act in a way that contradicts His declarations about Himself. That is, He imposes His own conditions upon His own self. This is important for us, because if He changed (as the ancient Greeks believed about their mythical gods), we could never be certain we are saved.

But, God tells us how we are saved (freely, of grace and mercy, and not through any works we may do. A-151). He never alters the process He has Himself prescribed for us, and never

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retracts His love and salvation because we sin.

Therefore, if we introduced a 'time-line' into this argument, we can say that God imposes conditions upon Himself in eternity. He does NOT impose conditions on mankind for them to be saved, so we can do absolutely nothing to be saved. Salvation, then, is unconditional. However, conditions DO exist on us AFTER salvation from our lost estate (see O-108). Once we are saved freely, unconditionally, God applies certain conditions. For example, we must live holy pure lives, we must love the brethren, and so on. (And even if we sin this will not alter the original promise of salvation).

After that, when we leave this life, we again return to an unconditional state, for once we die we cannot sin again, and so enter Heaven free of this burden and guilt. In Heaven there is no sin, so we do not need conditions. The only condition in Heaven is that God remains as He is, and does not change His mind about us.

So, our unconditional salvation depends entirely on God's conditional self. If it did not, then salvation would be a lottery, with grave uncertainty about our future state. This conditionality in God's character applies throughout life in many areas. It is foolish to think that God loves unconditionally (except in the matter of salvation from death to life).

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