Getting a Grip on Unconditional (Part 1 of 4)

It is the most profound insight ever discovered by conscious humanity. It is the most liberating idea ever conceived of by human minds. And it is the very core nature of the Ultimate Reality that creates and sustains all other dependent reality. It answers the most profound questions ever asked by human persons- Why something? Why conscious persons? What is the point of life? All this and more elevates this truth to the status of ultimate truth and reality. There is nothing in the universe more important to know than this. Its importance outweighs all other conceivable knowledge and insight. Am I just engaging in excessive exaggeration? No. I am not even close. It is not possible to overstate the value of this insight or discovery.

The Jesus Insight

The Palestinian sage, Jesus, argued similarly for its supreme value and importance. He told stories of people who sold everything they had just to purchase this treasure. I refer to that element in his teaching of unconditional forgiveness, unconditional acceptance, and unconditional generosity, or to use a summarizing term- unconditional love.

Humanity has not yet begun to explore the infinity of potential in this feature of unconditional love. It holds the potential to liberate human minds and spirits from all the darkness and mythically-based fear that has accumulated in consciousness over the millennia. It holds the potential to liberate humanity to enter an unlimited future, an infinitely better future free of all conflict and violence, most notably the conflict and violence that stems from our animal inheritance with its impulses to retaliation, domination, exclusion, vengeance, and destruction. It holds the potential to unleash a quantum leap forward in consciousness.

Among all the research coming out on the Historical Jesus I would argue that this one element in his message deserves special highlighted attention due to its strikingly unique character and potential. Don’t let over-familiarity with the term breed disinterest or a sense of having already fully understood it. It is widely used in religious circles as if self-evident in religious belief systems. But the religious context has seriously distorted the meaning of unconditional and diminished its profundity with traditional categories of payback justice, thereby rendering nonsense the basic meaning of unconditional. Nothing is more powerful or liberating than this concept. And this liberating potential is a prime reason for repeatedly revisiting and exploring unconditional, simply because too much payback darkness still remains embedded in human consciousness with its clouding restraint holding back humanity from the full freedom that is our rightful heritage.

Jesus, with his unique emphasis on this feature or element of unconditional, introduced something shockingly new and startling into the long history of human insight and perception. In fact, his particular teaching on unconditional love was so opposite to all previous conventional understanding (of deity, human ethics, etc.) that it appeared not just outrageously scandalous to many people, but entirely insane. Even his own family concluded this much about him and his message, and said so. It simply did not fit any conventional paradigm of normality, justice, sanity, or common sense.

Most previous human perception had been developed around ideas of payback justice with its elements of wrong behaviour, offended parties, deserved revenge, and just punishment. This form of justice had long been based on myths of displeased and retaliatory gods; demands for sacrifice or payment as the prerequisite for forgiveness; exclusion- in that only the so-called good or righteous were accepted (those obeying the laws and fulfilling the rituals of a society), while all others- the unrighteous or bad people- were excluded and punished; and ultimate divine retribution. This was known as strict payback justice. Good was rewarded and bad was punished. It all seemed so common sense, so right, and just. It was a cause/effect or action/consequence approach that was assumed to be the natural and universal order of all reality.

But payback justice is nothing more than primitive retaliation and revenge dressed up in the robes of divinity and high-sounding legal terminology. It is not what we are to be as human. We are something much better.

The ideas and practices of payback have brought a debilitating darkness to human consciousness and human societies, and have created endless unnecessary fear and misery- whether fear of an angry deity, fear of rejection and loss (if you think parental rejection is devastating to children, imagine eternal rejection by your Creator Father), and fear of temporal and ultimate punishment. People have projected their worst concepts of retaliation and punishment onto divinity and in so doing have made those concepts more intense and more threatening and almost impossible to re-evaluate and reject. When you protect something under the canopy of the sacred (its from God) that thing then takes on an unchallengeable authority.

The Palestinian sage Jesus, a common Jewish peasant, blew all this fear, anxiety and darkness away. He declared that no sacrifice or payment was necessary to obtain forgiveness. Forgiveness was free and not mediated by the religion of the day or by any religious elites. By his words and actions, Jesus showed that all people were fully forgiven, all were accepted equally, and all were recipients of all good things (rain and sun sent on all alike, both ‘good’ and ‘evil’). He liberated human spirits from the darkness of payback and cleansed consciousness with a uniquely new light and love. And he made a special effort to emphasize that forgiveness was offered to the lawbreakers, and to those who refused to kowtow to the rules and rituals of the dominant groups of a society. The free spirits, atheists, tax collectors, bandits, prostitutes, poor, social outcasts, and any others on the lists of shame- these people were fully and equally the recipients of unconditional forgiveness, acceptance, generosity, and love. This made religion with all its mediating hocus pocus entirely unnecessary.

Through sayings and stories, Jesus set forth an amazing new type of love without condition of any kind. It was expressed in such things as his telling people to lend to others and not expect repayment. And in his urging people to forgive endlessly and not keep a record of other’s wrongs, to not judge others faults or condemn them in any way. And in his urging them to not retaliate against wrong done or respond to violence with violence. All such teaching was summarized in his hardest saying that urged people to not hate their enemies but to love them. If people did this then they would be like God (an expression of the image of God). This was what God was like. God did not discriminate between good and bad people but welcomed all and treated all the same, with an open embrace of unconditional generosity. God did not look for payback or payment for wrongs done. God just forgave endlessly. God, as love, did not keep a record of wrongs (e.g. 1Cor.13- love does not keep a record of wrongs). God loved all- the best and the worst- just the same. Unconditional love defines what it really means to be human and therefore to be like God.

 (End of part 1)

Offending Good People (Part 2 of 4)

This message of unconditional love as taught by Jesus offended good, moral people who were oriented to payback justice. It outraged their sense of justice as reward for good and punishment for bad. Payback has always discriminated between good and bad people and responded accordingly. Now Jesus was saying, “No- all people will receive the same generosity”. And if any of us are not offended by this unconditional love then we have not yet fully grasped the scandalous nature of this love. We have missed the offensive point that Jesus made. It is a direct frontal attack on any and all payback thinking. It is a dangerous challenge to the conventional order of all things.

People who have worked hard, lived according to the rules, lived rightly as their group tells them to, these people have always expected that in the end justice will prevail and they will be honoured and others who have not done as they have done will be punished and even rejected. And they believe this is what a righteous God is all about. Making all things right in the end as they have dreamed and longed for. In fact, good moral people have always dreamed of the ultimate payback scenario to make right all the unresolved good and evil that has been done on earth. That ultimate payback scenario is expressed in the religious vision of heaven and hell. This is a projection of barrier, separation, and revenge to infinite degree.

But Jesus’ message frustrates such expectations and angers such people. He even evokes a murderous reaction from some otherwise good, moral people. They become incensed at this scandalous generosity. Much like Jonah who became angry and depressed when God would not punish his enemies but instead showed compassion and mercy to them. Many people respond just as Jonah does, with anger at this offensive generosity shown to so-called evil or bad people (I only use these terms evil or bad in acknowledgement of conventional categorization of those who break rules, and refuse to follow the customs and conventions of reigning cultural authorities or religious groups).

In Jesus’ stories the response of the audience to these expressions of unconditional forgiveness and generosity is central to grasping the real offensiveness of such unconditional love. Jesus offered repeated examples of good people becoming notably offended or outraged and this makes clearly the point of just how scandalous unconditional love is to most good people.

Jesus’ own followers also took offense at his teaching on unconditional and following his death they reverted to explaining him in terms of conventional payback justice. They effectively buried his message in the traditional mythology of an offended deity that would forgive only after a proper payment or sacrifice had been made for sin. His followers could not grasp what he was teaching and so they reverted back to conventional payback mythology to explain him. In doing this, they completely distorted his message with Christian conditionality. This is evident all over the New Testament, in the dense payback theology of Paul, Peter, John, and others (and in saying this I do not discount the other valuable insights also made by these people).

How do we know that the theology of Paul and others is a direct contradiction and distortion of the message of Jesus? Let me respond with the good logic of the Jesus Seminar. They note, for instance, the statements attributed to Jesus in Matthew 11, where he apparently curses Capernaum. These statements, say the Seminar scholars, are not from the historical Jesus but are later additions put in his mouth by others advocating payback and trying to present him in such terms. To quote the Seminar scholars, “Jesus would not have condemned the towns that did not accept him. He would not have told Capernaum to go to Hell after instructing his disciples to love their enemies...the reference to the destruction of Sodom is inimical to someone who taught his disciples to love their enemies” (The Five Gospels, p.320). If anything contradicts the message of Jesus to show unconditional love to all, then it is simply wrong and should be rejected as not authentic to his core message. That’s a great little rule of thumb when sorting out what is authentic to the historical Jesus and what is not.

So also with anything else that tries to lessen or redefine the plain meaning of unconditional or to remove the offense from this powerful concept. Unconditional simply means no conditions at all. Nothing. No prerequisites; no post-requisites. No demands at all are to be met. No payments at all are to be made. Absolutely nothing is required to receive the fullest forgiveness, acceptance, generosity, and love from God. Every person is fully accepted and loved simply for being a human person. Everyone is an imperfect human being, but each is a loved favourite of God no matter how failed a life has been lived by any person.

The outrage and offense at this teaching on unconditional love continues today, including among Christians who claim to be the legitimate followers and rightful guardians of Jesus’ heritage. But in taking offense at the core message of his on a radical unconditional treatment of others, Christians should beware of standing shoulder to shoulder with such shamed characters as the older brother to the Prodigal son, who took offense at the generosity of the father to his wayward son. They should be careful of standing against Jesus and with the hardworking labourers in the vineyard who were incensed at the generosity of the owner toward the latecomers, giving them the same reward as the regular labourers, despite their minimal output. Offended people stand with the men rebuked for seeking harsh payback justice for a woman caught in adultery. Believers in payback response stand with those men who were offended by Jesus’ acceptance of a ‘sinful woman’ that washed his feet with her hair. They were all offended and scandalized by the unconditional forgiveness, acceptance, generosity, and love shown to ‘unworthy’ and ‘evil’ people. It violated their sense of conventional justice. They believed that human failure should be punished as this was only right and just.

For millennia now we have had payback justice beaten into our consciousness as the natural and right order of things. This makes it very difficult for us to even begin to grasp this new unconditional response of Jesus toward all people, so-called good or bad.

 (End of part 2)

God Is Love (Part 3 of 4)

Let me take this element of unconditional to where it is really pointing and see how many good people I can offend in the process. It points to something entirely new to human consciousness- a radical new view of Ultimate Reality or Deity. It declares that the great and long-feared Source of all, is not threatening, avenging, or punishing. There is nothing to fear in God, but rather, God represents safety to infinity and beyond. God is indeed love. And now it has been revealed that God is not just love, but is of the nature of a scandalously unconditional love that overturns all previous associations of deity with any form of retaliation, vengeance, or punishment. This is indeed an entirely new God. An offensive and scandalous God. But an entirely humane God. A safe God.

Note these comments from a lady named Peggy, presented in Kenneth Ring’s Lessons From The Light (capitals her’s): She was shown, “The all-pervading and primary nature of love in the universe...’The Light told me everything was love, and I mean everything. I had always felt love was just a human emotion people felt from time to time, never in my wildest dreams thinking it was literally EVERYTHING!...I was shown how much all people are loved. It was overwhelmingly evident that the light loved everyone equally without any conditions! I really want to stress this, because it made me so happy to know we didn’t have to believe or do certain things to be loved. WE ALREADY WERE AND ARE NO MATTER WHAT! The light was extremely concerned and loving toward all people...if only people could know how much they’re loved, maybe they wouldn’t feel so scared or lonely anymore”.

“Then as if to drive home the incomprehensible immensity of this love so that she would never forget it, Peggy received an infusion of the light’s energy: I vividly recall the part where the light did what I felt like switch on a current of pure, undiluted, concentrated unconditional LOVE. The love I experience in the light was so powerful it can’t be compared to earthly love, even though earthly love is a much milder version. Its like knowing that the very best love you feel on earth is diluted to about one part per million of the real thing. As this stream of pure love went through me, I felt as if the light was saying simultaneously, ‘ I love you COMPLETELY and ENTIRELY as you are, BECAUSE YOU ARE...It was like being bathed in energy particles of pure love....I knew there was nothing wrong with me in any way. NOTHING! ...I WAS PERFECTION”.

Ring adds, “Peggy...took home an important lesson about the healing power of unconditional love” (p.45-46).

This view of God as unconditional love is presented in the Bible itself in various places, despite the often clouding context of surrounding payback mythology. Even in the Old Testament we are told of a God that does not want sacrifice, but mercy. We should have long ago known better that God was not interested in payment for sin but rather desired mercy and unconditional forgiveness. Note also all those New Testament writings that urge people to forgive and love enemies and to not keep any record of the wrongs of others. They are told to treat others generously without expecting payment. Now if people are expected to behave like this, why should we think that God is held to a lesser standard and allowed to demand payment before forgiving, or to keep a record of wrongs and demand payment for those wrongs? Surely God holds Godself to an even higher standard than what is demanded of us. We only work at trying to love. God is Love in its purest form. A God who demands any conditions at all would be meeting a lower standard of behaviour and response than we imperfect humans are held to. Such a God is not a God of love. That God is permitted to exercise a conditional forgiveness and love by demanding full payment for wrong before he forgives. This is a direct denial of the nature of unconditional love.

Think of it- any high and humane response urged upon us imperfect people, well, we can be sure that it is a response that God also holds to, only in infinitely higher fashion. If God tells us to not retaliate against enemies but forgive and love them, then we can be certain that God does not retaliate against his enemies but forgives, no matter what they have done. Look at the most graphic example of forgiveness ever recorded when Jesus was crucified. He said to his tormentors, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do”. This is perhaps the supreme example of how God treats enemies who have done the worst things possible, such as murdering innocents. He does not threaten them with retaliation or punishment but offers forgiveness. So how can we still believe that God would punish or destroy anyone, no matter how horrible the things they have done?

This insight of Jesus points to something so incomprehensibly wonderful that it is even today hard to fully grasp. That all people, none excluded, are fully forgiven. All are fully accepted; all are loved equally. There is no special insider status for some, for the so-called obedient and righteous; the good people. There is no special treatment or reward for the faithfully religious. The failed addict on the street, or the criminal, is as valued and loved as any so-called lifelong moral or good person. In fact, according to Jesus, those who view themselves as the good people may actually be farthest from this kingdom of God- this kingdom of unconditional- and may be the last to grasp this amazing generosity and love. Such people show their inability to understand unconditional love by taking offense and even rejecting it as too shameful and scandalous, just as many did in the time of Jesus. Some were so angered by it that they fought it outright and planned to kill its leading advocate. It was that offensive and enraging.

Even today we find the ongoing endeavour to explain this scandalous love away. While many religious people will acknowledge the term unconditional love as part of their belief system, they subsequently set about explaining it in terms of their traditional theological positions which demand all sorts of conditions and prerequisites. Yes, unconditional love they affirm, but first it depends on Jesus making a blood sacrifice or payment to satisfy the offended holiness of God. Only then God can show unconditional forgiveness to those who repent and ask for it, and then change their ways by joining a good church and doing God’s will as taught by that church, and....and on and on it goes. You see what happens. Unconditional as taught by Jesus suddenly becomes something entirely different that is highly conditioned on full payment made before forgiveness can be offered, and many other conditions. We are then right back to the old payback justice of moral and religious systems. Unconditional has once again become conditional and the scandal is removed and the conventional sense of justice is once again satisfied. The brilliance of this new insight is then dimmed and its liberating power rendered impotent. And people are once again enslaved to fear and anxiety over their standing.

And the core message of Jesus is eviscerated and made nonsensical. Conditions of any kind have nothing to do with authentic unconditional love. If you cannot embrace unconditional with its basic meaning of no conditions, then use another term that denotes the conditions you are advocating. Call it conditional love, if such can even be called love.

What’s The Outcome?

And what about the common complaint from concerned people that such a teaching on unconditional love will produce carelessness about one’s behaviour? Not true. When people grasp something of the wonder of unconditional love, they then feel the impulse to be and do the same. You see this in the accounts of people having Near-Death Experiences. They taste something of a wondrous unconditional love and come then back with a stronger desire than ever to live the same love in their lives. They want to be better persons, more loving, and to treat others better. They have come to realize how important love is, and especially unconditional love. Many of them do not see this same message taught in their religions and so become less religious, though more spiritual. They also often adopt a universal approach to belief systems and religions. They realize that God does not care at all about religion and belief systems but accepts all people regardless of the beliefs they hold. They are beginning to grasp something of the real meaning of unconditional. It does not require adhering to some particular belief system or joining any religion. I would also add that you don’t need an NDE to understand this message of Jesus, and even some NDErs seem to miss the full wonder and scandal of such love.

What could this truth do if fully unleashed in human consciousness and societies? Well, think of the social costs of operating relationships and societies on the principles of payback justice. Payback is really just primitive retaliation and revenge dressed up in the robes of divinity and human justice. This payback thinking is at the root of so much interpersonal misery (getting even) and wider social misery and violence (again, getting even, punishing offenders, re-enforcing cycles of violent reprisal). The cost of payback justice has resulted in entire sections of humanity shut down for years at a time in the chaos of war and cyclical violence. Genuine unconditional love sets offenders free. It chooses to bear the pain of any offence and so squashes the impulse to get even. This reverses potential slides down into tit for tat. It chooses to start new cycles of positive response that rise toward something better in relationships. And this gets to the smallest details of interpersonal relationships as well as the consequences of wider societal relationships.

Nothing is more practical than unconditional forgiveness and unconditional acceptance for resolving conflict in human relationships and wider relationships between societies. Nothing is more practical for bringing peace on earth and ending violence and war. Nothing is more effective for solving human pathologies that are re-enforced by payback. And nothing is more effective for meeting the deepest of human needs for acceptance and love. This unconditional insight is the key to the beginning of the infinity of progress toward something better. But yes, it will turn the current order or things upside down and this will undoubtedly anger many people. It will undermine power and status and spell the end of religion. It is a dangerously upsetting idea.

 (End of part 3)

Summarizing Unconditional (Part 4 of 4)

So how to express the real nature of this scandalous unconditional element in Jesus’ teaching and life? Let me summarize it as plainly and bluntly and offensively as possible and do so by responding to the conventional myths and beliefs of payback systems: There is no threat behind reality. There is no angry god, seeking retaliation against bad behaviour and threatening punishment or demanding a payment before forgiving. As Bob Brinsmead has said, if any payment has to be made then forgiveness is not required. A God who demands payment in full, knows nothing of real forgiveness.

I continue: There is no hell for bad people or exclusive heaven for only good people. Illness, misfortune, suffering, and death are not punishment for sin. No one will be rejected by God. God is not angry with anyone. Lets rid our consciousness once and for all of such dark and depressing ideas as payback and conditions. There is nothing surrounding you but incomprehensible love focused on you despite whatever you have believed, thought, or done.

Every person- both so-called good and bad- is equally located in the very center of unconditional love, unconditional acceptance, and unconditional forgiveness at all times. Every person is the recipient of a scandalous generosity. Everyone has received the gift of consciousness or conscious existence as a unique person, a person created out of love, held in existence every moment by love, and who will be received back into that love in the end. Everyone is equally gifted with all the beauty of the world and the universe, and with all the resources of our physical reality as well as all the fullness and opportunity of any future existence. No one is of lesser or greater status in this kingdom of unconditional love. No one is on the periphery. All exist in the very center, fully accepted and loved by God.

Let me repeat for emphasis- every person, with all the differing degrees of imperfection and failure that are inherent to being human, is fully forgiven, and fully accepted, and a recipient of the scandalous unconditional love of God. None are excluded, not even the worst. Does that make you feel uncomfortable? Well, if we start to set boundaries and exclude others then where do we draw the line? We should remember that we have long tended to evaluate people and their behaviour according to the dark and vengeful impulses of our old animal brain and the inhumane desire to wish enemies harm. Do we really think God is like us in the expression of our worst impulses? Then that would be a frightening God and none of us would be safe. No; God is unconditional love.

Try to grasp it in a personal manner- how would each one of us like to be treated? We would all prefer unconditional forgiveness, unconditional acceptance, and unconditional generosity. Well, then we ought to extend the same preference to all others, without limits or boundaries. We ought to treat others just as we would like to be treated.

And no matter how we try to get a hold of it and express it, this unconditional love is still something incomprehensibly better than the best that we can probe or imagine. Language superlatives cannot express it. It is something that liberates utterly from fear, worry, and anxiety and allows us to fully embrace ourselves and all life. It liberates people at the very core of their being- in their subconscious minds and the depths of their spirits- from anything that would cause distress, despair, or doubt. No wonder people ushered into the presence of Light and Love during an NDE later speak of experiencing a peace, calm, and bliss that pass all understanding. Such is the impact of unconditional acceptance and love.

This love inspires us to make life something better for everyone, for all life. Tasting something of unconditional love sparks a desire to bring this wonder to all life. It inspires all of us to new commitment to creating a better future, and to explore the infinity of human progress.

Unconditional love provides us finally with the reason why the universe exists. It answers the question of why we exist- and that is to learn something of love. We exist to give and receive such love. As the lady named Peggy, in Ring’s Lessons From The Light, said, “We are all here to do an assignment of love” (p.47). You cannot go wrong in trying to love. In fact, every effort to love is fulfilling the very purpose of the Creator for bringing this universe and world into being.

The historical Jesus points to something so amazing that it is worth more than anything else in the world. As noted before, he spoke of people discovering a pearl or treasure and selling everything to possess this treasure. He was referring to the kingdom of God that is unconditional love. This was the kingdom that he valued and taught others to seek. It ought to be valued above everything else in life. It was something so infinitely better than the best that could be imagined or expressed that it redefined the concept of transcendent. Whatever you can imagine about how good divine forgiveness, acceptance, generosity, or love might be, be certain that it is infinitely better than that imagination that tries to stretch into the infinite. This is what “God is love” really means. It makes everyone feel safe in the most ultimate manner.

But because of its potent overturning of conventional worldviews and its power to disturb the peace of payback societies, such love has also became the ultimate offense and scandal to good moral people who have lived their lives oriented to a strict code of payback justice. And if we do not offend one another with our descriptions of unconditional love then we have not explained it properly or fully. Unconditional love is an offense to the common sense of justice as rewarding good and punishing bad. Look how such love offends good, righteous, hard-working people in the stories of Jesus. The point of including those people in the stories is to show the actual nature of unconditional response, that it offends and outrages good people. If it does not offend, then we are likely not getting close to what it really means.

This core teaching of Jesus has been long distorted and buried by the context of the Christian belief system and by the Christian theology of payment and justice. This is a great tragedy. It is time to liberate human consciousness fully and take it to new levels of advance. It is time to cleanse consciousness of the darkening beliefs of vengeful payback justice.

We need to be very careful of any qualifying explanation that weakens the scandal and offensiveness of the element of unconditional in Jesus’ message. It is something that should make everyone feel uncomfortable and dangerously in the realm of the outlaw. Don’t try to lessen the offensiveness. Don’t diminish the scandal by attaching any sort of condition. Don’t dim the brilliance; and don’t hinder the power of this unconditional to liberate the human mind and spirit by qualifying it in terms of conventional justice. Don’t try to save this generous God from himself, feeling that he has gone too far and will bring ridicule and charges of extremism and impracticality or loss of common sense.

Let unconditional bite fully. Then watch it transform human consciousness and unleash human creativity toward the infinity of progress into a better future.

Wendell Krossa

Postscript: I have been hesitant to add the usual qualifiers to counter the complaint of some that advocating unconditional treatment of others appears to be advocating foolish things like letting dangerous criminals go free (e.g. psychopaths). Let me just say that unconditional love does not override obvious common sense which means responsibility to protect people from harm. These situations that require coercive restraint of violent people (people unable or unwilling to restrain their worst impulses) do not void the basic thrust of unconditional treatment of others, including the need to challenge the barbaric prison systems that we continue to support that imprison many nonviolent people.

We need to watch the endless excuse-making that people employ to avoid the responsibility to engage unconditional love in all its offensiveness and scandal.