

# THE FATHER'S ACT OF GRACE

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Matthew 11:27.<sup>1</sup>

A Scottish girl left the home of her shepherd father and lost herself in the sinful big city. Like some young women in today's big cities, she became a prostitute. Her anguished father waited long for her return. Finally he went to the city and walked up and down its dark streets, sounding his familiar shepherd's call so that his lost daughter would hear. One night while she was in a house of sin, she heard the call of her dear old father outside. With tears in her eyes, she rushed outside to meet him. She could not resist that call of love.

If we do not resist the love of Christ revealed at His cross, we will be drawn to Him. The Holy Spirit will give us the precious gift of repentance, a true heart sorrow for sin itself. God has exalted Christ with "His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31).

It is only "the goodness of God [that] leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4).

This is illustrated in a man who committed crime after crime in an effort to cover up his first mistake. Worst of all, he did nothing to prevent an innocent man from being sent to prison when he himself should have been the one jailed. As so often happens to a criminal, he lost his sense of fairness

and kindness, and his wife and children left him. His home was ruined. Yet that hard-hearted man would not repent. He insisted: "I cannot, I will not, I dare not, I must not!"

Finally the innocent man who was wrongfully in prison did an unusual thing. He wrote the hard-hearted man a letter, forgiving him for all the wrong he had done to him. Can you imagine? That letter broke the heart of that evil man and brought him to repentance and confession of his crimes. He said, "All the troubles that came to me failed to bring me to repentance; but when I was forgiven, I repented." Fear can never drive you to be a better person, but realizing that you are forgiven—that does it.

Romans 5 describes what happened: "God's act of grace is out of all proportion to Adam's wrongdoing. For if the wrongdoing of that one man brought death upon so many, its effect is vastly exceeded by the grace of God and the GIFT that came to so many by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ" (vs. 15, NEB).

This marvelous gift of grace does not belittle the seriousness of the sin that we have committed; the true dimension of the guilt of our sin is the murder of the Son of God.

What kind of sacrifice can balance that account of our guilt? Someone holy and innocent must take our place and "pay the price of guilt."

This is a legal or judicial "verdict of acquittal" that Christ accomplished for us and gave us as a GIFT. The Father so loved us that He gave us His only Son to die our second death. All He asks from us is to "believe" what He has done. And that word

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<sup>1</sup> 71 "Hiding in Thee" 525

“believe” means to express a heart-felt appreciation for what it cost Him to save us. And that heart-appreciation melts the stony heart, and changes us—that is, converts us. The Bible invites us to “think of God.”

And when we do, it is not to think of Him as some merely infinite electronic-like intelligence that pervades the universe, but we are to think of Him as Someone infinitely close and personal—“Our Father which art in heaven. . .” (Matt. 6:9).

A clever, intelligent enemy has arisen within the universe who has challenged Him. The following are among the charges and insinuations of accusation implicit in Lucifer’s rebellion; the charges are echoed from the sinful heart of man.

1. God is basically selfish. “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set them in order before thine eyes” (Ps. 50:21). “So you thought that I am like you. But now I reprimand you and make the matter plain to you” (GNB).

[Satan] “had accused God of seeking merely the exaltation of Himself in requiring submission and obedience from his creatures, and had declared that while the Creator exacted self-denial from all others, He Himself practiced no self-denial and made no sacrifice.” GC 502; RH, Feb. 18, 1890.

2. God’s law is unjust because it requires an obedience impossible to yield. “The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Rom. 8:7). “The old sinful nature within us is against God. It never did obey God’s laws and it never will” (LB). 5BC 1129,

1131.

3. The divine government is responsible for the rebellion. “Who are you to criticize God? Should the thing made say to the one who made it, ‘Why have you made me like this?’” (Rom. 9:20, LB). GC 670, 499.

4. Self-denial is impossible and therefore not essential for the human family. “When I want to do good, I don’t; and when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway” (Rom. 7:19, LB). MS 50, 1900.

5. Angels (and man) need only do what they think is right, without the restraint of law.

“He [the rebel] reiterated his claim that angels needed no control, but should be left to follow their own will, which would ever guide them right. He denounced the divine statutes as a restriction of their liberty, and declared that it was his purpose to secure the abolition of law; that, freed from this restraint, the hosts of heaven might enter upon a more exalted, more glorious state of existence. . .”

Satan has continued with men the same policy which he pursued with the angels. GC 499, 500.

6. God’s unjust restrictions led to man’s fall in Eden. Said the serpent to Eve, “God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen. 3:5).

“By the same misrepresentation of the character of God as he had practiced in heaven, Satan induced man to sin. And having succeeded thus far, he declared that God’s unjust restrictions had led to man’s fall, as they had led to his own rebellion.” GC 500.

7. The Father and the Son were the enemies of the angels, and of man, and Lucifer was their friend. “. . . Angels became disaffected. The insinuations of Satan took effect, and they really came to believe that the Father and the Son were their enemies and that Satan was their benefactor. Satan has the same power and the same control over minds now, only it has increased a hundredfold by exercise and experience” (3T 328).

8. The Father is angry with sinners. His wrath would wipe them out. Jesus offered Himself up for the target of God’s wrath on the cross in order to appease Him. The atonement is viewed as an intramural legal matter between Jesus and the Father whereby He turns away God’s wrath from sinners.

The sacrifices of the heathen were always to placate the wrath of the angered gods. Quite common among the pagans in the Middle East as well as North, Central and South America were human sacrifices to appease the gods. Note their pyramids and altars.

“Christ died to reconcile the Father unto us?” . . . It is the pagan idea of sacrifice applied to Christianity. God, they think, was angry; he must pour forth His wrath upon someone. If upon man, it would eternally damn him, as he deserved; but this would interfere with God’s plan and purpose in creating the worlds, so this must not be. And yet God must not be cheated out of His vengeance; for this reason He pours it forth upon Christ, that man may go free. So when Christ died, He was slain really by the wrath and anger of the Father. This is

paganism. The true idea of the atonement makes God and Christ equal in their love, and one in their purpose of saving humanity . . . The life of Christ was not the price paid *to the Father* for our pardon; but that life was the price which the Father paid to so manifest His loving power as to bring us to that repentant attitude of mind where he could *pardon us freely* (George Fifiield, *The Love of God*, pp. 33, 34.)

“Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the *propitiation* for our sins” (1 John 4:10). “He loved us and sent His Son as a sacrifice to atone for our sins” (REB). The text does not say that *provisionally*, possibly, maybe, perhaps, Christ will be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world if and when and not until the sinner “accepts.” Christ already *is that propitiation*.

God Himself has taken the initiative—“Whom God hath set forth to be a *propitiation* through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God” (Romans 3:25). “Whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by His blood” (NRSV). And note that it is the “blood” which accomplishes the propitiation.

A propitiation is an offering that changes someone’s enmity or alienation to friendship. It doesn’t make sense to say that the sacrifice of Christ *propitiates the Father*, because He already loved us so much that He gave Christ for us. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten

72 *Powerful Good News!*

Son.” It was He who “set forth” Christ on His cross, so that when He is “lifted up . . . [He] will draw all men” unto Himself by the sight of that blood.<sup>2</sup>

Nor does it make sense to say that the blood propitiates the devil, or buys him off. He is still our enemy. Who then is propitiated by that blood? Some say that there is a cold, legalistic maneuver accomplished—the law was satisfied or that justice was propitiated. But however true this legalistic concept is, the Good News tells of something warm and heart-moving. Law or justice are abstract entities that don’t have hearts that can feel. We are the ones who have hearts that can feel and need to be reconciled. We are propitiated, moved by the sight of that “blood.”

When the sinner stops resisting and lets his proud human heart be melted by that cross, he is reconciled to God and that means he is changed. Now *justification by faith takes place*. This is the process that makes him fully obedient to the law of God. In the past, he was disobedient, and he was selfish. He still has a sinful nature, but now faith works, and he does not fulfill those selfish impulses. He crucifies them. He is no longer selfish. There is no thought of reward for himself. Formerly a slave to selfish fear and sin, now he is a slave to Christ’s love, and he joins Paul in saying, “The love of Christ constrains us.” *This is what it means to be “under grace.”* He overcomes “even as” Christ overcame.

“But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much

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<sup>2</sup> John 3:16; 12:32.

more than, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Rom. 5:8-10).

The death of Christ made effective a *forensic* justification applicable to all men. Legally, “all men” were justified, because He died for “all” (2 Cor. 5:14, 15). And He died for them “while we were yet sinners.” “When” we were still “enemies, we were reconciled . . .”

That sounds like a blatant contradiction, doesn’t it? How can you be “reconciled” while you are still in enmity? The answer is: we were *justified legally* by a sacrifice made for “all men,” and the reconciliation is included.

But let’s be careful here: legal justification and “receiving the atonement” are two different things. We *receive* the atonement [reconciliation] only when we *believe*. “We have *now received* the atonement [reconciliation],” Paul says in Romans 5:11, when we are “justified *by faith*” (verse 1). To confuse legal justification with justification by faith will not help us finish the work in this generation; it will set our clock back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and lead to antinomianism. Instead of completing the Reformation begun by Luther and Calvin, such confusion will only retard its progress.

(c) “Therefore as by the offence of one [Adam] judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of One *the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*” Romans 5:12.

Again we have what appears to be a contradiction! How can Paul contrast the “judgment” which came by Adam upon “all men to condemnation” with the “free gift . . . unto justification” coming *likewise* “upon all men”? The vast majority of “all men” certainly do not exhibit any of the fruits of “justification by faith”! The answer to this apparent contradiction is simply to say that that is true—“all men” do *not* exhibit the fruits of justification by faith because they have not been justified by faith. They have only been justified *legally*; and the simple fact that they live is evidence of that legal justification. “All men” would not be able to draw even one breath if that forensic justification were not effective for them. The very fact they live is proof that Christ died for them, and is the “propitiation” for their sins. Only by virtue of this sacrifice can God “wink at the times of this ignorance.” (Acts 17:30).

Here is where the “gospel” comes in. We are commissioned by the Lord to “go into all the world” and tell “all men” that they have been justified. We are to bear “good news.” God has no chip on His shoulder against them. He is not imputing their trespasses unto them. The propitiation is already a fact, not a mere provision. And when some *believe*, that moment they are “justified by faith.”

(d) “If One died for all, then were all dead: and that He died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves . . .” 2 Cor. 5:14, 15.

All *would* be dead if He had not “died for all.” The grave is what we deserve. The very fact “all” live is evidence that a forensic justification has been

effective for them in that “our Saviour Jesus Christ . . . hath brought *life* to light through the gospel” (2 Tim. 1:10). “Life” has thus been provided for “all men” who deserve only death. More than this, those who *appreciate* the “Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”, those who “*believe*,” for *them* Christ Jesus also “hath brought *immortality* to light through the gospel.”

(e) “God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them” Verse 19.

Clearly, God does not “impute” any man’s trespasses unto him until he rejects Christ. Therefore, the only sin for which anyone will be condemned in the Judgment is the sin of unbelief, that is, the sin of not appreciating the sacrifice which effected a legal justification for all (cf. DA 58). When Christ died, He did something for every man, woman, and child in the world. He was “the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world”. John 1:9. This “Light” is not a mere provision—it is effective. “In Him was life; and the life was the light of men.” Verse 4. No one, saint or sinner, ever knows a moment of joy, ever smiles, but by virtue of the sacrifice of Christ. This is “news” the world needs to hear; and for those who believe it, it is “*good news*”.

Mrs. White supported the view that man was reconciled to God by the death of Christ, not God reconciled to man. The Father loved us:

“But this great sacrifice was not made in order to create in the Father’s heart a love for man, not to make Him willing to save. No, no! . . . The Father

loves us, not because of the great propitiation, but He provided the propitiation because He loves us.” (SC 15.)

Here’s what John 3:16 means to say to us—“God so loved the world [that is, every individual, personal sinner in it] that He gave His only [“begotten”] Son for us [which means that He loved us more than He loved Him], who chooses to believe in Him should not go on perishing within himself, but should have eternal life [not an extension of our present worldly and often painful existence], but the kind of life that Jesus has in His resurrection life.”

We’ve all heard how sly, cunning, and evil Satan is. Have you known how he has tried to suck the life out of the greatest verse in the Bible? John 3:16 has enough dynamite truth in it to save any sinner, but if its meaning is devalued, its effect on the human heart is weakened.

What kind of a sacrifice did the Father make when He “so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son”? There is a time-honored doctrine often labeled as “orthodox” that denies that God ever had a Son before Jesus was born in Bethlehem, that He became a “Father” only at that time. The idea is that God simply agreed for a Twin, or a fellow Committee Member, to come to earth and be sacrificed. Gracious, yes, generous even; but . . . a sacrifice?

When it comes to thinking about the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, the “Godhead” is so great that my brain is like a little pea in trying to understand it. But God is trying to say something to

me. According to John 3:16, Christ was always the Son of God, even from all eternity: “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. . . . And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (John 1:1, 2, 14).

There was never a “time” in eternity when the Son of God was not! The Muslims say we teach that God had a “wife” of some sorts; No. God has tried to tell us something beyond words: Christ was not “begotten” as we beget children—the word in the Bible does not mean that. It means only beloved One. The Father’s love for His Son was the infinite Antitype of our human love for a child, and God has permitted us unworthy humans to have the experience of parenthood in order that we might understand just a trifle the heart-rending agony in the infinite Father’s heart when it came time to “give His only begotten Son.” The sacrifice was made in eternity, and it was and is infinite. John 3:16 does make sense; and a pea-size brain and heart like mine can at least begin to appreciate it.

Literal meaning seems to be “only one,” “solitary one.” Psalm 25:16 presents a use of it that has no reference to an only child: “Turn Thee unto me. . . for I am *yachid* and afflicted.” Here the meaning must be “solitary”, “lonely”.

Its use in Gen 22:2 and 16 is most interesting. “And he said, Take now thy son, thine *only* son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering

upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.” “I sworn, saith the LORD, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine *only* son.” The Father’s love for the world is illustrated in Abraham’s love for his *yachid*, who represents the “only begotten Son”, given for the world. Here is a moving prophecy of Jn. 3:16.

John doubtless saw in Gen. 22 the term he needed to apply to Christ. However, *yachid* has no connotation of being “begotten.” By implication its use in Gen. 22 could mean “only begotten” (not counting Ishmael as lawful “seed”); and this may be the reason why the LXX translators used *monogenes* in this passage (the term is so used in Heb 11:17). John used *monogenes* of Christ because of the figure of Isaac in Gen. 22; but certainly not with any idea of Christ being brought into existence at any time as a child is begotten of its father. As Isaac was an “only darling” in the eyes of his father, so was Christ to His Father. Thus John seeks to emphasize the Father’s love for a sinful world. John 1:14 presents *monogenes* without an article: “we beheld His glory, the glory of an only begotten from a father,” i.e., the “image” of a father, the “glory” being His character of perfect love.

A child cannot “create” his father; but the way the Bible is speaking, the child [that is, you and I] can formulate a vision of what “father” should mean; that is included in the command to “believe.” The Holy Spirit is personally present with every individual to make this a thrilling experience that you share with the Father in private.

Your personal memories of your earthly father may

be deficient, but the heavenly Father is not limited by your personal, individual deficiencies; He has a road or route direct to your individual human heart and He invites you to “believe” in Him in His fullness of love (*agape*).

You may say, “Impossible! I’ve gone too far.” You cannot have gone too far because the Lord Jesus Christ is your Savior waiting to be recognized up until you draw your last breath; and if illness has caused weaknesses in your thinking ability, it is not too late for you to “cry unto [Him] out of the depths,” for there “is forgiveness with Him that He might be [reverenced]” (see Psa. 130:1-4).

So, here is the Lord Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, opening the gates of the New Jerusalem so that “all who would might enter, and no one is denied.” Thank Him! Humble your heart [you can’t respond with a proud heart!], and say “Amen!” and enter in, leaving all your pride behind.

The Lord Jesus says to each one of us personally, “I have loved you with an everlasting love: therefore with loving kindness I have drawn you” (Jer. 31:3). That is personal, individual, intimate love; not a cold electronic thing. It’s the love of a Father—our heavenly Father. As intimate, close, personal as any earthly father’s love can be. Only far more so.

Some dear people feel that they have never known an earthly father’s love; what can the dear Lord do for them? (I knew a boy in college like that—he was having a bitter time.) But truthfully, none of us have ever had a human father who could perfectly portray the love of our heavenly Father, for us.

So, let no one be the least discouraged if you have never known an earthly father's love: kneel on your knees and make a choice to BELIEVE what you cannot SEE. He will respond to that prayer!

The dear heavenly Father will not forsake you or neglect your prayer; He has already loved you with "an everlasting love," now ask Him to grant you the spiritual eyesight, the discernment, to recognize the gift He has already given you. If His love is "everlasting," that means that He loved you while you were still in your mother's womb. He was working on you even then, with that love. If you can't sleep tonight (or any night), pray The Lord's Prayer:

(1) "My Father, which art in heaven . . ." No angel in heaven is permitted to address the great King of the universe, Master of the Milky Way, as "Father." Every angel must stand aside and let you pass on your way to the throne of the Father. That is astounding, but solemnly true.

(2) It's because of the Father's love for this one "little lost sheep," this one planet in rebellion; the Father has given His only Son, Jesus, to be the new Head of this human race; in so doing He has adopted as members of His own family every one whose heart cries out, "Father!"

(3) In a legal, judicial sense, the Father has already adopted every one of the human family; but some either have refused to be adopted or have not known they have been adopted; these await the coming of the "news," which of course is "good news," which the Bible calls "the gospel."

(4) "Ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, "Abba, Father. The Spirit . . . beareth witness with our [personal] spirit, that we are the children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:15-17). When you can't sleep, think about that.

(5) The Father has the Milky Way and all the universe around His neck (as it were), but He is infinite; that means He can care for you and about you just the same as if you were the only "child" He has in this vast universe.

(6) That is taught by Hebrews 11:6 where we are told that anyone who is sincere in wanting to come to God must believe two things: (a) that God IS—this infinite King of the universe; and (b) that He listens to, and rewards anyone who is sincere in coming to Him (including sinners!).

(7) So, when you can't sleep, pray to this infinite Father who sees and cares when a little sparrow falls to the forest floor (Matt. 10:29). Pray to Him . . . don't stop, pray . . . If you don't know what to say, pray, "Abba, Father . . ." until the realization comes over through the Holy Spirit that you are somebody important whom "the Father of spirits" cares about personally (Heb. 12:9).

(8) This will be the "reconciliation" that the Father is working to do: "God was [is] in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself" (2 Cor. 5:19).

(9) When you are reconciled to the Father, then you are also reconciled to His Holy Law. That will include all the works of righteousness including keeping holy the Sabbath, the seventh day of the week, "the Lord's [true] day" (cf. Rev. 1:10).

This is a true story, dates back to the British rule in India. The Pamban Bridge is situated in Tamil Nadu, India. At the entrance of the bridge you can see a picture of a weeping man holding some human body parts close to his chest.

This bridge was built during the British rule in India and it was constructed in such a way that the center portion of the bridge could be lifted with the help of huge wheels, so that ships could easily pass under the bridge. On the bridge, roads and rail tracks are laid for trains and other vehicles to pass. A middle aged man was appointed to roll the wheels up and down when ships arrive. Once he saw a train slowly approaching, while he was pulling back the bridge after a ship quietly passed beneath. He had to pull back quickly or else there would be a fatal accident and thousands would have died.

At that time his 9 year old son came with lunch. When he saw his father struggling with the wheels, he kept the lunch box down and started helping him to roll the wheels to put the bridge back. Suddenly his son's finger got caught inside the wheel and he started crying out. At this time if the father tries to save his son, the bridge could not be put back on time. He had no other option but to ignore his son's cry. With all his strength he kept on rolling the wheels to down the bridge. As the wheels rolled on, his son slowly started slipping away into the huge machine.

Tears rolled down his father's cheeks, but he ignored his son's cry. If he tried to save him, the train will surely fall into the sea with the people in it. Slowly the boy's whole body fell into the machine

and his father could hear his bones breaking one by one, until with a loud sound, his head cracked.

The train with thousands of passengers slowly rolled on the rails, without knowing what had happened there.

Though this man performed his duty honestly he lost his only loving son. With extreme lamentation, he pulled out his son's body parts from the machine and held it close to his chest and cried bitterly.

British Government honored him greatly and in memory of this incident they placed the picture at the entrance of the bridge.