I

The Father as Covenant not Contract God

Filial over Federal

The purpose of part 1 of this book is to present the significance of the Torrances' filial, ontological, and objective soteriology, particularly in the face of current criticism by contemporary Federal theologians. The Torrances boldly challenged the Federal theology of their day when they believed that the preaching and teaching made salvation dependent upon our own efforts. This first chapter will explore the Torrances' belief that God the Father is revealed in his Son as a covenantal God, not a contractual God, with primarily filial rather than judicial purposes for humanity. Prior to any contribution that we could make, God chooses the whole of humanity for salvation in Christ. This liberates us to offer ourselves back to God wholeheartedly in freedom.

In order to understand where the Torrances stand within their Reformed tradition and the conflict that arises, it is helpful to consider Charles Partee's distinction between three kinds of Calvinism:

> (I) Conservative Calvinists, represented by Charles Hodge and his sympathizers, advance Scripture alone emphasizing its divinity before its humanity; (II) Liberal Calvinists, represented by Friedrich Schleiermacher and his sympathizers, advance faith alone emphasizing its subjectivity before its object; and (III) Evangelical Calvinists, represented by Karl Barth and his sympathizers, advance Christ alone emphasizing his person before his work.[1]

Conservative Calvinism, represented by Charles Hodge, Louis Berkhof, Richard Muller, the Canons of Dort (1618–1619), and the Westminster

1. Partee, "The Phylogeny of Calvin's Progeny," 26.

Confession (1648), seeks to be a faithful follower of Calvin.[2] Liberal Calvinism, driven by the challenge of contemporary issues, does not wish to be so restricted.[3] Evangelical Calvinism wishes to follow Calvin but is not so concerned with getting "back to" Calvin, on the grounds of *ecclesia reformata, semper reformanda*.[4] The Torrances have been grouped into this third way, along with figures such as Thomas Erskine, Edward Irving, John McLeod Campbell, and Karl Barth. "Evangelical Calvinism" has the vicarious humanity of Christ, and union with Christ, at its center. It claims to be in continuity with John Knox and the Scots Confession of 1560, and in contention with the Synod of Dort, the Westminster Assembly, and the Federal theology of Conservative Calvinism.[5]

Federal theology was the prevailing preaching and teaching of the Torrances' Scottish Reformed tradition in their time. Federal theology has had a history of dominance in the perspective of those wishing to adhere to Calvinism and it continues to have an abiding authority today.[6] It currently governs the North American Reformed perspective and "is considered, by many, to be the only orthodox Reformed theology acceptable."[7] According to Federal Calvinism, God made a covenant with Adam as the "federal" head of the human race. God created Adam to discern the laws of nature by reason and, if Adam was obedient, God would give him eternal life. If he was disobedient, it would lead to death. Adam disobeyed the law and, as federal head of the human race, his curse affected all of humanity. Out of his love, God made a new covenant, electing some to be saved by Christ. In order to forgive humanity, God had to satisfy his righteousness and justice and Christ therefore became a penal substitutionary sacrifice to atone for the sins of the elect.[8] This Federal scheme is expressed confessionally in the Irish Articles and in the Westminster Confession of Faith.[9]

2. Ibid., 28.

3. Ibid., 40 It is outwith the scope of this book to engage with the debate with liberalism.

4. Habets and Grow, "Introduction," 6–7.

5. Heron, "Foreword," xiv–xv. T. F. also uses the term "Evangelical Calvinism" himself. See T. F. T., *Scottish Theology,* 59–60.

6. McGowan, "Federal Theology as a Theology of Grace," 44.

7. Habets and Grow, "Introduction," 3.

8. McGowan, "Federal theology," 43. For a recent introduction to Federal theology, see Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*.

9. Ibid., 44. Purves writes of the Westminster Confession of Faith, "This confession has, since 1647, been the doctrinal standard of the Church of Scotland, shaping the Presbyterian mind ever since." Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology,* 64.

The Torrances believe that Federal theology is a distortion of Calvin's theology.[10] J. B. contends that the Federal doctrine of election presents God's relationship with humanity in contractual terms, which is foreign to Calvin's teaching of one eternal covenant of grace. J. B. argues that "old" and "new" do not denote two different covenants; they are two forms of the one eternal covenant.[11] Federal Calvinism presents a covenant of works for all and a covenant of grace only for the elect.[12] J. B. argues that this means that God is related to all of humanity in terms of law, but only to some in terms of grace.[13] Primacy is given to law over grace.[14] J. B. considers, "In the federal scheme, the focus of attention moves away from *what Christ has done for us* and for all humanity to *what we have to do* IF we would be (or know that we are) in covenant with God."[15] He observes that this leads to a lack of assurance regarding salvation and people turning inward upon themselves to examine whether they are bearing enough "fruit" as evidence of their salvation.[16]

There is much debate as to whether Federal Calvinism is faithful to Calvin.[17] More importantly, however, A. T. B. McGowan, who disagrees

10. J. B. T., "Introduction," 5.

11. Ibid.

12. J. B. T., "The Concept of Federal Theology," 24.

13. J. B. T., "The Incarnation and 'Limited Atonement," 92.

14. J. B. T., "The Concept of Federal Theology," 23. McGowan has sought to defend Federal theology from J. B.'s criticism, arguing that Federal theology is a theology of grace. McGowan, "Federal Theology as a Theology of Grace," 41–50. The same argument can be found in McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*. Yet McGowan's highlighting of elements of grace within Federal theology does not adequately defend Federal theology from J. B.'s criticism that there is "an impoverishment and restriction of the concept of grace." J. B. T., "Introduction," 8. Whilst elements of grace can be found in Federal theology, grace is subordinated to an overarching legal framework which does not adequately reflect God's primarily filial purposes for humanity.

15. J. B. T., "Introduction," 7.

16. Ibid., 4.

17. Among those who argue that later Calvinists distorted Calvin's teaching are: Hall, "Calvin against the Calvinists," 19–37; Armstrong, *Calvinism and the Amyraut Heresy*; Rolston, "Responsible Man in Reformed Theology"; Kendall, *Calvin and English Calvinism to 1649*; Bell (a student of J. B.), *Calvin and Scottish Theology*. Among those who dispute this are: Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists*; McWilliams, "The Covenant Theology of the Westminster Confession of Faith and Recent Criticism," 109–24; Muller, *Calvin and the Reformed Tradition*; Muller, *After Calvin*. McGowan considers, "How can scholars come to such diametrically opposite positions and yet express them with such absolute assurance? The answer must surely be that the evidence is not compulsive in either direction." McGowan, *The Federal Theology of Thomas Boston*, 52.

with J. B.'s criticism of Federal theology, considers that the "crux" of J. B.'s argument does not concern a perceived lack of faithfulness to Calvin but rather "a misunderstanding of the nature of a Biblical covenant."[18] For the Torrances, the essential difficulty with Federal Calvinism is that it distorts the nature of *how* God relates to humanity in salvation because it does not subordinate human logical constructs to God's revelation of *who* he is in Christ. Lack of assurance in salvation and weariness from trying to obtain it can be remedied by a true understanding of God.

Who over How

"Who" over "how"

In order to understand *how* God acts in salvation, it is necessary to first ask *who* God is. This is the priority of the "who" question over the "how" question, which Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote of in *Christology*.[19] He argues that Christology cannot be equated with soteriology. Christ cannot be known from his works. Rather, we understand God's works from knowing the person of Christ, who is the revelation of God the Father. We must therefore look to *who* God is in order to understand *how* he acts.[20]

This is the starting point for the Torrances.[21] J. B. perceives that if we do not begin with the "who" question, and allow our understanding to be shaped by God's self-revelation through his Son, we project anthropological notions onto God which have damaging consequences for how we understand salvation.[22] J. B. asserts, "Our dogmatic starting point in theology should be: Who is God?"[23] Correspondingly, T. F. argues that we cannot seek to understand God according to prior anthropological systems of logic. The method of knowing in theology must be appropriate to the subject of enquiry. God determines our knowledge of him and we are dependent upon his self-giving revelation.[24]

> Knowledge of this God cannot be moulded according to our plastic ideas or controlling archetypes; that would be idolatry.

18. McGowan, "Federal Theology as a Theology of Grace," 41.
19. Bonhoeffer, *Christology*, 37–39.
20. Ibid.
21. J. B. T, *Worship,* 58.
22. J. B. T., "Introduction," 1.
23. J. B. T., *Worship,* 58.
24. T. F. T., *Theological Science*, 26–27.

> Rather must our knowing of God be brought into conformity with what He reveals of Himself, and under the control of what He gives us of Himself.[25]

Revelation through the Son

For the Torrances, we know *who* God the Father is according to his self-giving revelation through the incarnation of his Son. T. F. describes this revelation as God "objectifying" himself in Christ.[26] Jesus is able to show us who God is because he is *homoousios tō Patri* (of one being with the Father).[27] As Jesus said, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30); "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9); "No one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him" (Matt 11:27). Of one being with the Father, Jesus is the very expression of the Father's heart. There is no difference in their mercy or love; Jesus is not the kinder side of a God who is also a wrathful Father.[28] As T. F. would often assert, "There is no God behind the back of Jesus."[29]

> God and Christ, the Father and the Son, are one in their being and nature—there is no God behind the back of Jesus Christ. As the one Mediator between God and Man who is himself both God and Man, Christ cannot be thought of in some intermediate way, as coming in between us and the wrath of God, or as changing God or making him merciful. Jesus Christ is God incarnate; what God is in Christ he ever was and is in himself. Christ's coming among us in the likeness of sinful flesh, in the likeness of flesh as it is in us sinners, in order to condemn sin in the flesh and reconcile us to God, is the very movement and expression of the Love of God.[30]

25. Ibid., 37.

26. Ibid., 29, 37, 43, 45; See also T. F. T., *The Ground and Grammar of Theology*, 165.

27. T. F. T., "Introduction," *The Incarnation*, xviii.

28. This misunderstanding is exemplified in such infamous preaching as Jonathan Edwards's. See Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."

29. T. F. T., "Introduction," *The Incarnation,* xvii; T. F. T., *Scottish Theology,* 294.

30. T. F. T., *Scottish Theology*, 294.

"Filial" over "judicial"

Seeking to be faithful to God's self-revelation in Christ, the nineteenth–century minister, John McLeod Campbell, sought to promote a filial understanding of the atonement over a judicial understanding. He perceived that the judicial categories of the Federal Calvinism of his time had led to a lack of joy, peace, and assurance in salvation among his congregation.[31] Looking to God's self-revelation in Christ, McLeod Campbell saw grounds for their assurance, joy, and peace: Jesus's activity in salvation is one with the Father; the Son was not placating the wrath of the Father in order to receive forgiveness for humanity. The reconciliation that Jesus brings about is the very expression of the love of the Father. For McLeod Campbell, this does not deny a judicial element to atonement, but it means that it must be subsumed and only understood within God's overarching filial purposes for humanity.[32]

The Torrances admire and advance McLeod Campbell's concern to promote the "filial" over the "judicial."[33] They believe that, when we look to who God is through Christ, we see that the Father's dealings with humanity in salvation are primarily filial rather than judicial. The Torrances were therefore critical of their own tradition's Westminster Confession of Faith for having an overarching judicial framework. In contention with the Torrances, R. Michael Allen seeks to defend Federal theology by arguing that it does not distort the filial emphasis found in Scripture and Calvin.[34] He points to the significant place of adoption in the Westminster Confession, asserting, "Justification is for adoption. Thus, the kind of Calvin-against-the-Calvinists thesis propounded by Torrance . . . cannot be maintained, as if the relational focus of Calvin was lost amid the contractual and legal apparatus of his scholastic successors."[35] Allen contends, " . . . the Westminster Assembly manifests a serious commitment to putting the legal in its place—that is, as a parameter for relational union with the triune God."[36] However, the Torrances' contention with Federal theology is not that Federal theology

31. J. B. T., "Introduction," 3.

32. McLeod Campbell, *The Nature of the Atonement*. Commenting on McLeod Campbell's perspective, Purves writes, "The issue atonement must deal with is not broken law as much as a broken relationship with God, which leads to sin." Purves, *Reconstructing Pastoral Theology,* 63.

33. T. F. T., *Scottish Theology*, 293–312. T. F. commends McLeod Campbell as "one of the profoundest theologians in the history of Scottish theology since the Reformation of the Church of Scotland." T. F. T., *Scottish Theology,* 287.

34. Allen, *Justification and the Gospel*, 40.

35. Ibid., 44.

36. Ibid., 45.

denies God's filial purposes, but that they are restricted within an overarching legal "parameter."[37] Allen only reinforces the Torrances' concern.

T. F. believes that an overarching legal framework distorts the nature of the Father, presenting him primarily as a Judge and Lawgiver and only a Father to those who satisfy the requirements of the Law.[38] If you begin with a concept of God as Lawgiver, J. B. considers, there is the tendency to understand salvation in terms of God being conditioned into being gracious by human works or by Christ satisfying the conditions of the law. However, if you begin with the God revealed by Jesus as the triune God of grace, you will see his unconditional filial purposes whereby he draws us as his sons into communion with him.[39] Scripture speaks of God's intention "to bring many sons to glory" (Heb 2:10; cf. Eph 1:5). J. B. asserts, ". . . God's primary purpose for humanity is 'filial,' not just 'judicial,' where we have been created in the image of God to find our true being-in-communion, in 'sonship,' in the mutual personal relations of love."[40]

J. B. also perceives that a legal framework leads to a distortion of our understanding of humanity. He writes, "The federal scheme has substituted a *legal* understanding of man for a *filial*. That is, God's prime purpose for man is legal, not filial, but this yields an impersonal view of man as the object of justice, rather than as primarily the object of love."[41] J. B. considers that the Federal scheme can lead to the perception of humanity more as workers than as sons: "What our doctrine of God is, that is our anthropology. The counterpart of the contract God of the covenant of works is the individual with his / her legal rights—and a work ethic! The counterpart of the triune God of grace is the human person created for communion."[42] This resonates with the parable of the prodigal son, in which the father forgives his son before he has even had a chance to repent, and does not wish for his son to relate to him in terms of work and servanthood, but welcomes him back as family (Luke 15:11–31). The difficulty with an overarching legal framework is that it demands works from humanity for salvation. An overarching filial

37. Michael Horton argues that Federal theology holds together both the "legal and relational, judicial and familial." Horton, *Covenant and Salvation*, 130. However, for Horton, justification is "the forensic basis of union with Christ" (129). He writes, "Justification is exclusively juridical, yet it is the forensic origin of our union with Christ, from which all of our covenantal blessings flow" (139).

38. T. F. T., *Scottish Theology*, 128–33.

39. J. B. T., "Introduction," 1.

40. J. B. T., "The Doctrine of the Trinity in our Contemporary Situation," 15.

41. J. B. T., "Concept of Federal Theology," 35.

42. Ibid.

context declares that God has created humanity for communion.[43] The Torrances believe that the Father's dealings with us are not primarily in terms of law but rather in terms of Fatherhood and sonship.

Conclusion

The Torrances are convinced that, in considering *how* God acts in salvation, it is necessary to first ask *who* God is. We know *who* the Father is according to his self-giving revelation in the incarnation of his Son. Of one being with the Father, the Son is able to reveal the nature of the Father. The Torrances argue that this means that the Father and the Son are unified in their mission and that the Father's wrath is not pitted against the Son, conceived of as a kinder side of God. Rather, Jesus is the very expression of the Father's love for humanity. The Father's purposes are primarily filial rather than judicial. His love sought our salvation so that we might be adopted as sons and daughters in order to live in loving communion with him. This is of the utmost importance for people who lack joy, peace, and assurance in salvation.

Covenant versus Contract

Contract

Having considered *who* God is, it can be better understood *how* God acts in salvation. For the Torrances, the Father, who is one in his mission with the Son and has primarily filial purposes, does not relate to humanity in contractual terms. J. B. defines a contract as "a legal relationship in which two people or two parties bind themselves together on mutual conditions to effect some future result."[44] He suggests that contractual thinking arose in theology as a reflection of the structure of seventeenth century society in Britain, France, and New England.[45] The Torrances identify contractual thinking in Federal theology when salvation is made dependent upon our personal response.[46] Although God's grace may be upheld, contractual

43. Ibid., 35.
44. Ibid., 228.
45. Ibid., 227–28, 231.
46. T. F. T., *Scottish Theology,* 144.

thinking can unintentionally steal in when forgiveness is made conditional upon repentance, with devastating consequences for assurance of salvation.[47]

Contractual thinking is perpetuated today by forms of evangelical outreach such as the "Four Spiritual Laws" of Campus Crusade for Christ and "The 4 Points": "If you want to have that separation between you and God removed and have the punishment and guilt of all the wrong things you've ever done wiped away, then you can, right now! Just say this prayer and if you are sincere, God will see your heart and save you."[48] Michael Horton has observed that in evangelicalism "some Christians struggle to the point of despair over whether the quality and degree of their repentance is adequate for them to be forgiven, as if repentance were the ground of forgiveness and the former could be measured by the intensity of emotion, resolve, and victory over specific sins."[49] Martin Luther calls this "legal repentance."[50] J. B. perceives that the evangelical order of grace is reversed so that repentance is prior to forgiveness.[51] He observes, "It makes the imperatives of obedience prior to the indicatives of grace, and regards God's love and acceptance and forgiveness as conditional upon what we do—upon our meritorious acts of repentance."[52]

Covenant

The Torrances contend that God does not engage with humanity in contractual terms, but in covenantal terms. A covenant, in Biblical terms, is "a promise binding two people or two parties to love one another unconditionally."[53] Two kinds of covenant are seen in the Bible: *suntheke* (bilateral) and *diatheke* (unilateral). A bilateral covenant is made between two equals, for example, when a man and woman promise to take each other in marriage. A unilateral covenant, however, is made by one party for another. An example of this can be seen in Israel when a king made a covenant for his people, defining

47. J. B. T., "Covenant or Contract?," 58.

48. See the "Four Spiritual Laws" of Campus Crusade for Christ: http://www.campuscrusade.com/fourlawseng.htm; and "The 4 Points": http://www.the4points.com/INT/about_the4points.php?page=EVA; http://www.the4points.com/INT/about_the4points.php?page=PT4&osCsid=e892fe3bcf239459b4e39fffa6bf7026. See also "Simply Share Jesus" and the "EvangeCube": http://www.simplysharejesus.com/.

49. Michael Horton, *Pilgrim Theology*, Kindle ed., Loc 5263.

50. John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.2.iii.

51. J. B. T., "Covenant or Contract?," 57.

52. J. B. T., "Christ in our Place," 48.

53. J. B. T., "Covenant Concept," 228.

what kind of king he would be and what kind of people they would be.[54] As T. F. considers, God knew that Israel was incapable of fulfilling a bilateral covenant; therefore, he provided a way for Israel to respond to him. God made a unilateral covenant with Israel, asserting, "I will be your God and you shall be my people." Israel did not have to fulfill certain conditions to gain God's favor. This was a distinguishing factor from the activity of those who were not the people of Israel.[55] It is this kind of unilateral covenant which the Torrances argue that God has made with humanity.[56] God fulfills both sides of the covenant for our salvation in Christ. J. B. writes, "The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God who has made a covenant *for us* in Christ, binding himself to man and man to himself in Christ."[57] T. F. declares the covenant in this way:

> God loves you so utterly and completely that he has given himself for you in Jesus Christ his beloved Son, and has thereby pledged his very Being as God for your salvation. In Jesus Christ God has actualised his unconditional love for you in your human nature in such a once for all way, that he cannot go back upon it without undoing the Incarnation and the Cross and thereby denying himself. Jesus Christ died for you precisely because you are sinful and utterly unworthy of him, and has thereby already made you his own before and apart from your ever believing in him. He has bound you to himself by his love in a way that he will never let you go, for even if you refuse him and damn yourself in hell his love will never cease. Therefore, repent and believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Saviour.[58]

We are not forgiven *if* we repent; we are forgiven, *therefore* we repent.[59] This is what Martin Luther calls "evangelical repentance."[60] J. B. draws upon McLeod Campbell's conviction that Christ vicariously confessed our sin for us.[61] He also points to the parable of the prodigal son who wanted to work his way into his father's favor, as in legal repentance, but the father accepted his son before he even had the opportunity (Luke 15:11–32).[62] J. B. argues

54. Ibid., 229.
55. T. F. T., *The Mediation of Christ*, 84.
56. J. B. T., "Covenant Concept," 229.
57. Ibid., 230.
58. T. F. T., *Mediation,* 94.
59. J. B. T., "Covenant or Contract?," 57.
60. Calvin, *Institutes*, III.2.iii.
61. J. B. T., "Christ in our Place," 49.
62. J. B. T., *Worship*, 57.

that, in the New Testament, forgiveness precedes repentance.[63] There are no conditions upon humanity to receive salvation. J. B. therefore repeatedly insists, "The God of the Bible, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is a covenant-God, and not a contract-God."[64]

Obligations of grace

The Torrances' claim that God places no conditions upon humanity for salvation has not been received without criticism. As J. B.'s son, Alan J. Torrance, considers, "JBT's exposition of this invariably gave rise to [the] concern, namely, that such a theology of grace risked weakening or diluting the force of the law thereby opening the door to a liberal if not licentious attitude towards our God-given obligations."[65] Yet this concern is a fundamental misunderstanding of grace. The desire to uphold godly behavior is certainly commendable; Paul is clear that we do not have a license to sin: "What then are we to say? Should we continue in sin so that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin go on living in it?" (Rom 6:1–2; cf. 6:15). However, Paul also emphasizes that grace leads to the end of sin. To introduce conditions for salvation is to keep us under the law. Paul asserts that sin abounds under the law (Rom 5:20). The very thing that people employ to seek to discourage disobedience perversely fuels it.

It is God's unconditional grace that leads to living a holy life that upholds the law. Paul writes that it is under grace that sin has no dominion (Rom 6:14). Grace teaches us to reject ungodliness:

> For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and wordly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds. (Titus 2:11–14)

Paul asserts that we are free from the law and that godly living is a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5). Godly living fulfills the law but this is the fruit of the Spirit rather than our own efforts; we cannot boast of anything but the cross

63. J. B. T., "Covenant or Contract?," 57.
64. J. B. T., "Introduction," 6.
65. A. J. T., "The Bible as Testimony to Our Belonging," 107.

of Christ (Galatians 6). It is not law but grace that is the only way leading to authentic Christian behavior.

For the Torrances, there are no conditions placed upon humanity *for* grace, but there are obligations *of* grace. The "logic of grace," T. F. believes, is that "all of grace" does not mean nothing of man but rather "all of man."[66] Likewise, J. B. argues that although God makes the covenant for us, it demands a response from us.[67] God's claim *of* humanity places a radical claim *upon* humanity. However, it is essential to distinguish that the *obligations* of grace are not *conditions* of grace.[68] J. B. writes,

> God's grace, which certainly lays costly unconditional claims upon us, is not conditioned by considerations of worth and merit. Repentance, faith and love, are not conditions of grace, but our *response* to grace, and the way to evoke that response is to hold out to people the love of the Father, the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the promises of the Spirit—and that is the road to *assurance*.[69]

God is a covenant God, not a contract God; his purposes are primarily filial over legal.[70] J. B. often asserts, "the Indicatives of grace are always prior to the obligations of law and human obedience."[71] T. F. also situates our response in relation to the fact that God has already provided the perfect human response in our place through Jesus.[72] This means that our response is a participation in a response already made, which liberates humanity from any demands to earn God's grace and allows us to offer ourselves back to God in freedom.[73]

Despite the liberating nature of unconditional grace, the fear of antinomianism, or lawlessness, can lead to people introducing conditions for salvation and also legalism. John Coffey proposes that this is the reason why seventeenth–century Federal theologian Samuel Rutherford, of whom the Torrances were so critical, taught about the conditionality of the covenant and the importance of preparations. Coffey considers that Federal

66. T. F. T., "The Atonement, the Singularity of Christ and the Finality of the Cross," 230; see also T. F. T., *Mediation,* 105.

67. J. B. T., "Covenant or Contract?," 55.

68. J. B. T., "Introduction," 6.

69. Ibid., 3–4.

70. Ibid., 1.

71. J. B. T., "Covenant Concept," 230.

72. T. F. T., *Theology in Reconstruction*, 131.

73. T. F. T., *Mediation,* 104.

theologians such as Rutherford held to Calvin's doctrine of *sola gratia* but, in practice, preaching focused on the necessity of human activity because of the concern that grace leads to a license to sin.[74] This serves as an example of what J. B. perceives to be the human propensity to contradict God's covenant by introducing conditions:

> The fallacy of *legalism* in all ages—perhaps this is the tendency of the human heart in all ages—is to *turn God's covenant of grace into a contract,* with the most serious consequences for preaching, worship and pastoral counselling. In the Bible, the form of the covenant is such that the Indicatives of grace are always prior to the obligations of law and human obedience. 'I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, I have loved you and redeemed you and brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, *therefore* keep my commandments.' But legalism puts it the other way round. 'If you keep the law, God will love you! If you keep the Sabbath day and carry the yoke of the Torah, the Kingdom of God will come!' The imperatives are made prior to the indicatives. The covenant has been turned into a contract, and God's grace made conditional on men's obedience.[75]

Such a contractual understanding can lead to a lack of assurance in salvation and weariness in trying to obtain it. In contrast, the affirmation of God's unconditional grace grants assurance and a freedom to respond because God has already chosen the whole of humanity for salvation and provided a response for us in Christ. Therefore, it is precisely because a response is not demanded *for* our salvation that this creates a response *to* our salvation. When a person is coerced into a contract, he does not have a true understanding of God's grace, and cannot respond with such authentic love for God. Alan J. Torrance explains this with an analogy of two husbands who must travel abroad for business. Their wives become concerned at the temptations that may arise on their trip. Margaret says, "John, never forget that if I ever find out that you have so much as nodded in the direction of another woman in the course of your travels, I shall sue you for divorce and ensure that you lose the kids, the house and a substantial portion of your salary, not to mention your reputation . . . !" On the other hand, Jane says, "David, I would just like you to know that no matter what circumstances you find yourself in and no matter what happens, I shall always be there for you and will always love you. If you make mistakes, never forget that I shall

74. Coffey, *Politics, Religion and the British Revolutions*, 133–34.

75. J. B. T., "Covenant Concept," 230.

always forgive you!"[76] Torrance argues that it is Jane's unconditional love that inspires a faithful response:

> Which of the two husbands is more likely to engage in the aforementioned 'untheological activities' during his trip? One suspects that it would be John for the simple reason that, as he left, his wife Margaret made it clear that she did not love him unconditionally. Contrary to the commitment inherent in their wedding vows, their relationship was a contractual one. She was, in effect, informing him that she did not really love him at all. The withdrawal of unconditional love could only serve to weaken the obligations that stem from it. The obligations on David were, by contrast, profoundly strengthened—and in a way that was both affirming of him and surely freeing. It would not only intensify the obligatory response but inspire and facilitate it.[77]

God's unconditional covenant of grace does not diminish our legal obligations but actually deeply strengthens them.[78]

Conclusion

In light of God's filial purposes for humanity as revealed through the Son, the Torrances assert that God has made a unilateral covenant with us in Christ, who has offered the perfect response to the Father in our place. For the Torrances, the proper declaration of the gospel is: "God *has* saved you. *Therefore* respond." Some argue that this message of unconditional grace leads to lawlessness and there can be a propensity to introduce conditions in order to promote lawfulness: "*If* you fulfil [a certain condition], *then* God will save you." However, as well-intentioned as this may be, it can only serve to increase lawlessness. God's gracious covenant does not diminish our legal obligations but actually strengthens them because we are able to offer ourselves back to God in freedom, knowing that the response has already been made for us in Christ.

76. A. J. T., "Bible as Testimony," 107.

77. Ibid.

78. The argument that grace leads to godly living raises the question of why Christians still sin. This will be explored in chapter 6 but, for now, we might affirm that although grace may not always lead to godly living, it is the *only way* to authentic godly living.