



Writings of W. Burney Overton

As I See It to Be

Unconditional Love in Human Relationships

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W. Burney Overton

Unconditional Love in Human Relationships

I believe
That God created human beings in His own Image;
That He sees us to be good;
And that He loves us unconditionally.

I believe further,
That He created human beings to be
In an unconditionally loving relationship with Him—and with each other.
Our highest capacity
Is to love unconditionally
And to enter into relationship
Without setting any conditions
As to how the person is to participate in it.

I have believed for a long time
That God relates to human beings
With this kind of unconditionality.
He loves,
And does not require anything in return.
Nor does He abandon the relationship
When desires or expectations of His are not met.
To do so would be to put conditions on the relationship
And to deny His own unconditional love.

God does want human beings
to be in the relationship
in particular ways,
And knows there are
terms and conditions that, when met,
enrich the relationship,
and make it complete.

Indeed,
God continually reveals to human beings
what those terms and conditions are
so that choices can be made
both about being in the relationship
and how to be in it.
He instructs.
He discloses Himself and His will.
He remains true to His own being
and to His part of the relationship,
while He invites each of us

to choose to be in the relationship
with the same unconditional love
that He has for human beings.

For a very long time
I believed the concept of Unconditional Love,
but modified it insofar as human relationships were concerned.
I saw
all human relationships as conditional.

Then I raised a question with myself,
“If love is unconditional,
in what sense can relationships be conditional?
Or are those between us
Also to be unconditional?”

It seemed clear to me that any relationship
was marked by conditions—
even the relationship with God.
I wondered, and I wanted some answers.
How are the conditions set?
Whose responsibility are they?

I studied.
I searched my heart and mind.
I prayed.
I tried to talk out the concepts with people.
I came to some understandings
that I want to share with you.

You are I are in a relationship
at some level of caring and sharing.
There is something in it for each of us.
If my love for you is unconditional,
then it seems to me that
my whole purpose is to give to the relationship.
I want to be sensitive to your needs and desires.
I want to be attuned to what is going on with you.
I want to be responsive to you,
and to give to you
without attaching any conditions
as to how you are to respond
or as to what you are to return to me.
If I attach conditions to my giving,
then I am not giving,
nor am I being unconditional in my love for you.

And I, too, have needs and desires.
in the degree that I have learned about
unconditional love,
I love myself, and value myself,
and treat myself with respect and regard.
In loving you,
I do not negate myself,
nor cancel myself out as if I had no value.

Rather, it is in direct proportion to
my true loving of myself
with the same kind of unconditionality,
That I am able to love you
and give to you
and be to you something of what you let me know
you want and need.
And do so without attaching any strings
requiring you to respond in kind to me.
I don't stay in the relationship very well
if a high proportion
of my needs and desires are not met.
If I choose to move out of the relationship,
does that mean that I no longer love,
or that the love was – is –conditional?
Not necessarily.

What I do is put conditions upon myself.
I determine the terms and conditions
for me
that are involved in my being in the relationship.
if I love unconditionally
and place no conditions on you
as to how you are in the relationship,
then I accept you where you disclose to me that you are.
I do not make demands.
I do not hold you accountable.
I make my commitments,
and I hold myself accountable.
I tell you what they are
so that you can know
what to expect from me,
but I do not want you to hold me accountable.

“But you said..... You promised.....”
seems not to work very well.

Nor does it work out very well for me to be angry
and upset with you when you do not
meet requirements that I have set.

If the relationship is to be truly unconditional,
each of us decides upon
and makes
his/her own commitments to the relationship
and then lives them out in the relationship.

When you choose not to be responsive to me—
to the needs and desires that I have let you know I have—
I have choices to make about the relationship
and whether or not—and how—I remain in it.
What I do not do is place ultimatums upon you.
I accept the responsibility for letting you know
how it is with me—
and what does and does not meet my needs and desires—
and how I am feeling.
And I leave you free to do whatever you choose to do
with the information I have given you.
Even if I decide that I must move out of the relationship,
I continue to love unconditionally.
You have the right
and the freedom
to be involved in the relationship as you choose
and to let me know what you have chosen.
Then I must decide whether or not I can be in the relationship
on those terms—and I let you know.

The converse is also true, of course.

It seems odd to me,
but nonetheless true,
that being unconditional in relationships
is easier
when there is not so much at stake for me.
The more interdependent
and the deeper the relationship,
the harder it seems to be to remain unconditional.

When I have entrusted myself
wholly to a relationship
I feel very vulnerable.
I have allowed myself to look to the relationship

for the meeting of my deepest needs and desires.
I have exposed myself
in letting it be known what those needs and desires are.
I have sought for them to be met in the relationship.
If I do not find—or provide—
some safeguards
I am at your mercy,
I can be hurt and hungry.
That is how it is if I really am unconditional
in the relationship.

Perhaps it isn't so strange that
relationships of less depth
are easier to maintain unconditionally.

I think about friends.
I want to be faithful
to my commitment to them—at whatever level it may be.
I am pleased, and grateful
for what comes back to me,
and I am not aware of having any requirements
as to how they are to respond to me.

I think about my children.
I love them very much.
I value the relationship we enjoy and have.
They know that they are totally free
to be in or out of the relationship with me as they choose.
No matter what, my love for them is constant.
They can count on it.
They can count on the security of our relationship.
They know that they are loved—unconditionally.
Sometimes they choose to function in ways
that do not take me into account as I might like.
That is their freedom—and their responsibility.
The relationship between us is intact.
They are loved unconditionally—and they know it.

There is a rather extreme example in the Bible
of unconditional love and
unconditional relationship—
that of Hosea and his wife, Gomer,
in the Old Testament.

As I understand it, the book of Hosea
is intended to portray the unconditional nature

of God's love for His people,
and of the relationship on God's part.
At the same time, it is a picture
of the kind of relationship that can be
when one person loves another—unconditionally.

Gomer was a prostitute.
Hosea loved her and wanted her to be his wife.
She decided to be, and, for a time,
gave up being a prostitute.
Then she went back to it.
Hosea did not condemn her.
He did not reject her.
He did not cease to love her.
He stayed in the relationship.
In time, she came back to him,
having chosen to give up her profession.

Maybe it is not possible to be that unconditional.
Even so, I believe it to be
a goal toward which to strive.
To the degree that the goal is reached
the relationship is enriched
and grows in significance.

I do not believe that God intended
for you to be obligated to me,
or me to be obligated to you.
Nor for us to be bound in a relationship
by obligations that either or both of us feel.

I believe that He intended for our relationship
to be obligation free—
for us to love so totally and so completely
that we choose to be in the relationship
within the limits that each of us has chosen
according to each other
the freedom to be in—or out—of the relationship
as each chooses.

You are not obligated by me.
And I am not obligated by you.
I do decide how to be in the relationship with you
to respond to your needs and desires as I know them
because I love you unconditionally.
I do make these decisions

in the understanding of my own needs and desires.

I do not make demands.

I do set some limits.

I give expression to the relationship
at the level of the meeting of needs and desires.

When I love unconditionally,
one of the greatest desires in my life
is to know about you—and your needs and desires—
and to be able to respond to you and them
in ways that are satisfying to you.
In that, also,
I am fulfilled,
and our relationship is as God intends.