

# Conditional and Unconditional Promises

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## Corner's Position

In a section entitled *God's Promises are Conditional*, Corner states that "God's favorable promises or solemn threats are conditional upon our continued obedience or disobedience to him."<sup>1</sup> Corner's argument uses verses such as 1Sam 2:30 and Ez 33:13 to demonstrate that even God's promises which appear to be unconditional are, in fact, conditioned upon our subsequent faithfulness: "Seemly unconditional promises do have a condition attached."<sup>2</sup> Strings are attached, in Corner's perspective, to all God's promises. One really has to look at the fine print, so to speak, even regarding God's promised gifts of eternal life and salvation. After all, Ps 31:23 stipulates: "The Lord preserves the faithful." Preservation is thus conditioned on perseverance. For this reason, even though an **eternal** benefit was initially promised in 1Sam 2:30, this benefit could be forfeited through subsequent lack of faithfulness. Faithfulness was the string which was attached. Similarly, when God promised life to the righteous in Ez 33:13, God could renege on that promise in the case of subsequent unrighteousness on the part of man (cp. Ez 18:24-26). Consequently, Corner's thesis is that just because God has promised eternal life to the believer, this does not mean that God cannot revoke that benefit if the believer ceases to be a believer. This gift was not given to the believer with no strings attached. There are unspoken conditions, such as remaining a believer, which are more clearly articulated in other clarifying texts.

Even though we fully affirm unconditional security, we will not dismiss Corner's assertion too quickly. Granted, some within our own camp may think that Corner's argument does not deserve a detailed response and will be satisfied to remark that Corner overstates his case when using the text from Ezekiel to assert: "**Sin can always be the righteous man's downfall leading to his death** (*spiritual and/or physical*)" (bold his; italics mine).<sup>3</sup> As is widely admitted, sin kills—*physically*. And many of our fellow securitists may be content to leave it at that and reply that Corner has simply moved beyond Ezekiel's text when Corner uses it to postulate that sin kills the righteous *spiritually*. Admittedly, we too perceive Corner to be in error in deriving the inclusion of spiritual death from this text. Notwithstanding that assessment, however, in Corner's defense we would point out that there is more to Corner's argument than meets the eye.

Disproving Corner's conjecture is like fighting an invisible foe. One cannot be content to prove that the reception of the gift of life is punctiliarly conditioned on faith alone. There may be invisible conditions still lurking elsewhere in the text in which linear conditions are brought into play to kill the believer and take away his free gift of eternal life if he does not comply with the additional requirements—of which he may not have been initially aware but which God has clarified elsewhere. We will not disagree with the premise of Corner's position: Invisible conditions do in fact exist. The conditions may not be visible to surface examination. There may be strings attached to God's promises.

Hence, despite what we securitists perceive to be illegitimate use of the Ezekiel text, we find it prudent to recognize that Corner does have a valid point in that there are promises, both positive and negative, that God has made where the fulfillment would seem to be certain yet upon further investigation is seen to be contingent. This text, and others like it, do confirm that there are indeed strings attached to some of God's promises. We can understand, therefore to some degree, how Corner could use such texts to advance his theory that the seemly unconditional promise of eternal life is really conditioned on ongoing obedience. This hypothesis is confirmed, at least theoretically in principle, by the texts from which the phenomena of unspoken, linear contingency is found subsequently to exist. Just ask Jonah.

## Jonah

Jonah was given a message by God: “Yet forty days and Nineveh will be overthrown” (Jonah 3:4). The outcome would appear to be certain. So why did Jonah jump on a ship rather than jump at the chance to proclaim a message of destruction to a people he wanted to see overthrown? As one reads this historical account, it becomes apparent that Jonah’s knowledge of God’s character allowed him to accurately anticipate that the seemingly unconditional promise God made to destroy Nineveh was actually contingent on the response of the wicked living in Nineveh. Jonah fled because he feared that instead of Nineveh being overthrown, it might turn out that the destruction God promised would be overthrown instead. Those receiving this proclamation suspected that the forebode of their obliteration might be reversible and consequently responded with an attitude which questioned the actual fulfillment: “**Who knows**, God may turn and relent, and withdraw His burning anger so that we shall not perish?” (Jonah 3:9). “Who knows?” Jonah knew. In fact, he explains that this is the reason he jumped on the boat rather than jumped at the chance to preach this message: “**I knew** that Thou art a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, and **one who relents** concerning calamity” (Jonah 4:2). So did God tell Jonah a whale of a lie?

Given the bluntness with which Jonah replies to God, we suspect that if Jonah had thought that he could morally accuse God of lying, then Jonah would not have hesitated to do so. Instead, the only charge Jonah brings against God is with being gracious. Jonah complains because God changed His mind regarding the calamity God had promised. Similarly, when God promises a positive outcome, He *may* relent concerning the positive outcome. This is Corner’s point. And we are forced to concede this to be the case. But Corner goes beyond the biblical text by implying that *all* (rather than *some*) of God’s promises *are* (rather than merely *may be*) contingent in their fulfillment on our ongoing faithfulness. It is to this excess that we must object.

But not all objections to Corner’s argument are valid. Many (even of those who affirm unconditional security) would, with the children of Israel, respond to Corner, if not to God Himself, that “the way of the Lord is not right” (Ez 18:25)—if it involves the Lord not keeping His positive promises when the Lord does not mention any explicit subsequent conditions when initially giving the promise. Thus we can understand, to a degree, Corner’s frustration with those who affirm unconditional security since, in certain cases at least, God’s promises which appear to be unconditional may upon closer examination prove to be conditional despite our initial impression. And to a certain extent, we might even feel Jonah’s resentment of God’s relentment. It is not right for God to renege on His promises. Did God not in as much as promise Jonah that He would destroy Nineveh? So why did Jonah not accuse God of not doing the right thing and pout: “Shall not the Righteous One do right?” Abraham asked as much, “Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?” (Gen 18:25) Here, we find the first Jew, Abraham, jewing God down from making an unconditional promise to destroy Sodom (regardless of how many righteous people may have lived there) into making a conditional promise that was contingent on finding fifty, then forty-five, then forty, then thirty, then twenty, then only ten righteous people within the city. From the nature of the Deity with whom they dealt, Abraham and Jonah perceived that they could not accuse God of lying even when He changed His mind. Abraham was counting on the fact that he could change God’s mind.

## Amoral Mutability

How then are we to follow the example of Abraham and Jonah in reconciling the fact that God can change His mind concerning promises He has made and yet not be considered a liar? How can we harmonize the fact that God does indeed change His mind when elsewhere we are told, “God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he **promise** and not fulfill?” (Num 23:19; NIV) Corner believes God’s promises are conditional. This text seems to say otherwise. Yet, we cannot stop here and claim victory over Corner’s argument because there is more to this story than meets the eye. As is well known, we can elsewhere find the affirmation that God does not lie or change His

mind (1Sam 15:29). But at the same time we find multiple affirmations that God does in fact change His mind (Ex 32:14; Jonah 3:10).

Men not only change their mind amorally but also immorally. God never changes His mind immorally. Thus, we might respond analogously that even among men it is recognized that there are matters about which a man may change his mind without being considered a liar. And the same is true of God. God does not change His mind regarding matters that would make Him a liar (Heb 6:18). But analogies can only be pressed so far. The analogy of comparing God to men breaks down since the text explicitly says: “God is not a man...that he should change his mind.” We take this to mean that God is not a man that He could change His mind in such a manner that would make Him a liar. He never changes His mind in a manner that would be inconsistent with the justice and grace of His own nature. Since man can lie, man is incapable of making an immutable promise. Conversely, it must be acknowledged that God is capable of making immutable promises. As a matter of fact, that is the only kind of promise He can make (1Kings 8:56; 2Cor 1:20). Eternal life, in fact, is a **promise** (2Tim 1:1). Paul clearly regards this **promise** of eternal life as immutable since it was promised by “God who cannot lie” (Tit 1:2). It is at this juncture that we spot weaknesses, major ones, in Corner’s argument.

First, Corner cites examples of texts which show that God can change His mind. But he fails to consider the texts on the other side of the discussion which indicate that God cannot change His mind. Second, this failure in Corner’s treatment leads to a failure in his logic in that he misses the logical corollary of a balanced deliberation which considers text on both sides of the equation. Logically, just because there are *some* promises about which God can change His mind because they may be dependent on unspoken contingencies, does not mean necessarily that God can change His mind regarding *every* promise. Not every promise is dependent upon such subsequent contingencies. Just ask Abraham.

### **Unilateral Promise**

When God appeared as a flaming torch that passed between the pieces of the sacrifice which were cut in two, the Lord made an unilateral covenant with Abraham which could not be contingent upon Abraham’s subsequent faithfulness, and the Lord clearly signified that fact to Abraham by passing between the pieces without Abraham (Gen 15:17-18). This was the object lesson that God provided Abraham by which Abraham could rest assured that God could not violate the promise without violating His own integrity. God can and does make promises which are not conditioned on the recipient’s subsequent faithfulness. No invisible strings could be attached. But by failing to note (or at least admit) this verity, Corner calls the integrity of his own argument into question.<sup>4</sup> Just ask Haley.

### **Alleged Discrepancies of Conditionality**

The backbone of Corner’s defense for viewing all of God’s promises as implicitly conditional is found in his citing classic texts which reveal God changing His mind. The text that Corner uses to introduce his section entitled *God’s Promises are Conditional* is Jer 18:7-10. In Haley’s book *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, after supplying a two-column grouping of texts which appear to be at odds with one another in asserting that God is changeable versus unchangeable, Haley likewise uses Jer 18:7-10 to commence the premise of his solution:

Here is brought clearly to view the *underlying condition*, which, if not expressed, is implied, in God’s promises and threats. **Whenever** God, in consequence of a change in character in certain persons, does not execute the threats or fulfill the promises he made to them, the explanation is obvious. In every such case, the change is in man, rather than in God” (italics his; bold mine).<sup>5</sup>

Very well, we are all in agreement that this passage, and ones like it, brings out the implicit underlying contingency that *may* exist in God’s promises. *Whenever* we see God change His mind regarding a positive or negative condition, we can be certain that there was an

underlying condition (at least for the individual realization). The problem is that Corner has sought to press this limited concurrence to mean that there is underlying contingency in *all* of God's promises. But again, we will not dismiss Corner's argument just because of this mistake. In Corner's defense, we will acknowledge that by our best estimation it seems that Haley is of the same opinion as Corner in perceiving universal conditionality underlying all of God's promises. But unlike Corner, Haley supplies two columns pertaining to the discussion of such texts: one side dealing with God's immutability, the other with His mutability. Haley explains that precisely because God is immutable (changeable) in His character, He must be mutable (changeable) in His dealings with men and His emotions toward them. Splendid, we fully agree. Further, Haley makes a most important observation that is not mentioned by Corner: "**Some** of his [God's] declarations **are** absolute and **unconditional**; the greater part, however, including promises and threatenings, turn upon conditions either expressed or implied."<sup>6</sup>

Apparently, Haley makes a distinction between God's declarations and promises and thinks that God's promises are always conditional, at least by implication. If we could but affirm from Haley's discussion that he believes that God's immutable character causes some of His promises to be unconditional and some to be conditional, then we would be in full accord with Haley's discussion of immutability. Internal consistency within Haley's discussion would seem to require that he agree with us that this is indeed the case. And we have seen passages above which link God's promises with His immutability. Unfortunately, we must hesitate from citing Haley as being in full agreement with our position in that some of Haley's subsequent comments lead us to suspect that he believes God is mutable in all His dealings with men. Even his internal discussion within the section of immutability gives the impression that Haley believes that a change in man requires a corresponding change in how God deals with man. Correspondingly, in Haley's estimation, if a believer actually ceased to be a believer, he would lose eternal life.<sup>7</sup> So as it is, we must cite Haley as being in agreement with Corner's thesis, even though to Haley's credit he digs deeper than Corner in that Haley acknowledges that the conditionality is rooted in God's mutability and even deeper still in recognizing that God's mutability is founded upon God's immutability. Surprisingly, Haley evidently fails to deduce that since some of God's declarations are unconditional, some of God's promises (such as the promised gift of life) are unconditional as well. From his own analysis, Haley should have deduced that *some* of God's promises are unconditional while *most* are conditional. But his failure to do so causes us to regard him as a Calvinistic advocate of conditional security.

We, therefore, call Haley to the witness stand as a hostile witness to our affirmation of unconditional security. In doing so, we find in our cross-examination of Haley's Calvinistic concurrence with Corner's conditional security that Haley has gathered evidence regarding God's immutability which may serve as a foundation from which to offer our objection to the Corner-Haley opinion that 1Sam 2:30 proves that any time there is a subsequent change in the man who has received the promise, then there may no longer be an applicability of the promise.<sup>8</sup> They seek to turn a limited truth into a universal truth and in doing so have overstepped the boundaries of the text.

It comes as no surprise when Calvinists join their fellow conditional securitists in the Arminian camp in affirming conditional security from a text such as 1Sam 2:30: "Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the Lord declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.'" In commenting on this verse, Smith asks, "Can then a promise of God be withdrawn?" His answer is an unqualified, "Yes, assuredly." Honoring God is "one of these conditions essential on man's part to secure the fulfillment of God's promises."<sup>9</sup> In short, if you want security, you will have to secure it by honoring God. One would deduce from such unqualified statements that to secure the fulfillment of God's promises regarding eternal life one must honor God throughout one's life. This conditional security is the joint premise of both Arminianism and Calvinism.

## Our Position

Our thesis, in contrast, is that *some* of God's immutable declarations are tied irreversibly to His character so as to rule out the possibility of linear contingency. To be sure, God, who is faithful and just (Dt 15:4), may nevertheless spurn Israel whom He has begotten as a son (Dt 32:18-19). Also, God may divorce Israel whom He has married as a wife (Jer 3:8). We will further concede that these texts typologically reveal how God may deal with present day believers. And granted, from the joint conditional perspective of both Arminianism and Calvinianism, a text like 2Tim 2:13, which is addressed to NT believers, is taken to mean that "if we are faithless, then God remains faithful" to His promises to punish us with soteriological severity (cf. Hendriksen, NTC). In complete contrast, we believe that 2Tim 2:13 affirms unconditional soteriological security: Even if we are not faithful in keeping His word, God is faithful to keep His word by keeping us.

Even if we were to agree with soteriological conditionalists and conclude that 2Tim 2:13 means that God is faithful to judge us, we would respond that this judgment is only misthological in scope. God will judge unfaithful believers at the JSC. God's despising us as His sons, divorcing us as His wife, or being faithful to His promises to punish us when we deny Him are all, at the most, pictures of conditional security exclusively at the misthological level. Not all sons will inherit the kingdom. Not all those betrothed to the Lord will be found worthy to become His bride. At the individual and misthological level, those who bed with the devil will be given a certificate of divorce so that they do not become the Bride of Christ. At the soteriological level, however, the Lord still loves us and we remain His own. One reason we believe that we remain His own is because of the Lord's promise and prayer to unconditionally keep us (Jn 10:28-29; 17:11). But such matters aside, for the purpose of the present discussion, we will focus on the classic problem posed by Haley between God's immutability and mutability and the impact this has on Corner's premise of universal changeability regarding promises.

## Errors by Conditionalists

To illustrate a columnar comparison of conditional versus unconditional promises, we will just consider a contrast within 1Samuel and Ezekiel themselves, since they are home to Corner's primary texts: 1Sam 2:30 and Ez 33:13.

### *Conditional Versus Unconditional Promises*

<i>Conditional Promise</i>	<i>Unconditional Promise</i>
"Therefore the Lord God of Israel declares, 'I did indeed say that your house and the house of your father should walk before Me forever'; but now the Lord declares, 'Far be it from Me—for those who honor Me I will honor, and those who despise Me will be lightly esteemed.'" (1Sam 2:30)	"And also the Glory of Israel <b>will not lie or change His mind</b> ; for He is not a man that He should change His mind." (1Sam 15:29)
"When I say to the righteous he will surely live, and he so trusts in his righteousness that he commits iniquity, none of his righteous deeds will be remembered; but in that same iniquity of his which he has committed he will die." (Ez 33:13)	"I, the LORD, have spoken; it is coming and I shall act. <b>I shall not relent</b> , and I shall not pity, and I shall not be sorry; according to your ways and according to your deeds I shall judge you," declares the Lord God" (Ez 24:14).

As we have seen, Haley was less than perceptive in not acknowledging that the immutability of God's character extends directly to God's promises. And Corner has been less than forthcoming about the fact that there are two sides to the contingency expressed in God's promises. In the very biblical books to which Corner makes his strongest appeals to demonstrate that God's promises are conditional, there are additional passages which indicate that God's promises are also unconditional. Therefore, Corner's section would have been better entitled

*Some of God's Promises are Conditional.* The omission of his admission that only *some of* God's promises are conditional raises severe questions regarding the integrity of his argument since Corner's premise seems to be that all of God's promises are conditional. Naturally, it is much easier for Corner to argue that God's promise of eternal life is conditional if there is no such thing as an unconditional promise! But once it is acknowledged that some of God's promises are unconditional, the premise of Corner's argument is falsified and his conclusion that the believer's security **must** be conditional is nullified.<sup>10</sup>

Since a balanced discussion of the relevant facts will take into account the fact that God can and does make unconditional promises, the resulting question that must be asked is, When God promises a believer eternal life as a free gift, is God conditioning the possession of eternal life on the believer's continued faith and/or faithfulness? In failing to acknowledge the possibility of unconditional promises, Corner has seriously impaired his ability to deal adequately with the possibility that unconditional securitists may be categorically correct in assigning soteriology to the realm of unconditionality for those who have become believers—regardless as to whether or not they remain believers.

### Errors by Unconditionalists

In defending eternal security, Geisler devotes a paragraph to defending the premise that "salvation is an unconditional promise" and a joint paragraph to affirming that "salvation is an irrevocable gift." To his credit, unlike the conditional securitists in the Calvinistic and Arminian camps, Geisler cites 2Tim 2:13 in defense: "God can never take back the gift of salvation. He is bound by his own unconditional promise to be faithful, even if we are faithless, for he cannot deny himself (2Tim. 2:13)."<sup>11</sup> We also sincerely appreciate the fact that in an expanded discussion Geisler affirms that God's promise of the gift of eternal life is an irrevocable, unconditional promise and clearly grounds this affirmation in God's immutability: "When he makes an unconditional promise he never fails to keep it (cf. Gen 12:1-3; Heb 6:16-18)...The only thing that makes God morally bound to keep his word is his unchangeable nature."<sup>12</sup> We likewise believe that God's immutability makes His gifts unconditionally irrevocable. Unfortunately, however, just as Corner overstates the case for unconditional security by assuming that *all* God's promises are conditional since *some* of His promises are conditional, Geisler mistakenly seems to believe that just because God makes an *immutable* promise that it must be *unconditional*.

For example, Geisler wrongly cites Heb 6:17-18 as an example of an unconditional promise of eternal security. But this text is only an irrevocable promise to believers who meet the condition of ongoing faith and faithfulness. Rather than being a soteriological promise as Geisler mistakenly assumes, this text is a misthological promise. And lest it be thought that we are being too hard on our fellow securitists, we will point out that even some of our fellow misthologists, such as Dillow, have fallen into the trap of taking the same short cut in defending eternal security by soteriologically appealing to this text from Hebrews.<sup>13</sup> But this misthological promise does not apply unconditionally to believers until they have completed the course of their lives and have been found worthy of the reward. This text, like Heb 10:36, is saying that believers must endure in order to "receive *what* was promised." The question is, "*What* was promised—a gift or a reward?" A study of the word *promise* in the book of Hebrews readily confirms that the promise of reward is in view. This is not to say, as we will see below, that a text like Heb 6:17-18 has no value in affirming unconditional security, only we cannot take a short cut in exegesis and make a jump in logic to use this verse directly to support our position. We will not allow missing links in our argument.

Similarly, Peter's affirmation that a believer's inheritance is "imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1Pet 1:4) is yet another text which some of our well-meaning fellow securitists, such as Baker, have erroneously appealed to as teaching unconditional security: "It is God who has reserved it for us. Did He make a mistake in reserving it for us?"<sup>14</sup> No. Of course not. God has not made a mistake in making the reservation. But Baker has made a mistake in thinking that just because a potential reward is eternal that it must be

unconditional in its final realization. The reward is eternal, the reservation is not.<sup>15</sup> Both this text as well as Heb 6:17-18 are talking about a misthological hope which only becomes an unconditional certainty when one has met the linear contingency whose terminus is to be found at the end of one's life. In other words, a believer has to endure to the end of his life in order to come into realized possession of this misthological hope. As careful misthologists, we cannot accept the well-intentioned attempts of our fellow securitists or even misthologists, such as Geisler, Baker, and (to a limited extent) Dillow, in erroneously using such texts to affirm eternal security. We will not accept faulty evidence in support of our thesis. Nor do we need to.

### **Rewards are Conditional**

The problem, then, is that certain securitists and misthologists have failed to perceive that some of the texts which they are citing in defense of unconditional security are actually dealing with the conditional nature of eternal rewards. By pointing out the **conditional** nature of rewards in such texts, conditional securitists are easily able to offset these mistaken appeals by unconditional securitists. But in failing to recognize that such passages are talking about the conditional nature of **rewards**, unconditional securitists are making an even more grievous error in that they condition one's salvation from hell on one's works.

Corner has failed to note that the texts he poses in defense of underlying conditionality only confirm the conditional nature of **rewards**. It was God's intention that the realization of the perpetual priesthood should be an eternal reward for their conduct (Num 25:13; cp. Ex 29:9). God clarifies in 1Sam 2:30, however, that the realization of this reward is contingent on ongoing faithfulness in that He would honor those who honor Him and despise those who despise Him. Undoubtedly, this is the language of rewards rather than of a gift. Being honored by God is conditioned on serving God and successfully enduring trials (Jn 12:26; 1Pet 1:7). This is obviously a reward motif based on service since rewards are conditioned on works. In conditioning the gift of eternal life on the same thing as a reward, Corner is attempting to condition the gift on works and thereby turn the gift into a reward.

### **Missing Links**

The fact that a reward may be contingent on linear contingency is not exactly ground breaking news. It does not take a rocket scientist to figure out that rewards are earned. Lay people can figure that out, even if some scholars cannot. On the other hand, it would take a long chain of evolution in one's theological thought to successfully turn the imperishable gift of eternal life (which a believer already possess) into a reward (which the believer must struggle to keep and endure to obtain). There are too many missing links and categorical gaps in Corner's soteriological phylogeny to think that he has successfully turned a gift into a reward. We do not earn a gift. Just because a gift and a reward share the similar characteristic of being a promise does not mean that they can be dug out of the text and arranged in a theological, evolutionary tree so as to link one inseparably to the other with a line of linear contingency. A gift is a different kind of theological animal than is a reward. They cannot be mated to produce the hybrid that Corner has imaged: a linear contingent gift. We may, therefore, liken Corner's futile exegetical attempts to turn a gift into a reward with a biased collection of certain texts to the failed efforts of evolutionists to make monkey out of man by appealing to the fossil record. But just as *The Fossils Still Say NO!*, to quote the subtitle of Gish's classic rebuttal, we find that a systematic examination of the biblical texts still responds unyieldingly to Corner's endeavor to classify all of God's promises as being conditioned on ongoing performance. By picturing God as giving man the promise of eternal life as a gift and then taking it back because of man's performance, Corner's placing the conditional label upon such promises turns out to be labile and libel, making God out to be a liar.

## Surely Live

But what about the fact that God promises the righteous that they will *surely live* and the unrighteous that they will *surely die* and then clarifies that this promise is to be understood conditionally (Ez 18:13-14)? Do such texts (which Corner digs up from only one side of the theological column to put on display as examples of *seemingly unconditional promises which are really conditional*) provide the missing links Corner needs in order to prove that all of God's promises are in reality conditional? Not at all. These seemly-unconditional-but-really-conditional promises are not unconditional promises of a **gift** that were subsequently turned into a conditional promise of **reward** through a process of theological macroevolution over a period of prophetic time. These texts, like 1Sam 2:30, were promises of reward all along, which when traced through their development in scripture and examined under the lens of progressive revelation are seen to be but examples of misthological microevolution in which their underlying contingency becomes more pronounced in some passages than others. Evolutionists are not the only ones to confuse microevolution with macroevolution. Conditional securitists do so also. Corner has seen the microevolution in which the misthological nature of some linear conditional promises were more clearly brought out subsequently, and he has consequently concluded that one may assume macroevolution in which all promises are regarded as evolving from the same misthological nature.

As to passages such as Ez 33:13, the fact that God promises the *righteous* that they will *surely live* is not to be misconstrued to mean that they will *unconditionally* live, as God Himself clarifies in the passage itself. Second, the passage is not talking about either imputational righteousness or soteriological life. Rather, practical righteousness and the reward of temporal righteousness are in view. The passage begins with repeated warnings of the sword taking their lives if they are wicked. Yet those who warn the wicked of their impending deaths will *save their own lives* (literally, *save their souls*, Ez 33:9). But this terminology is always used temporally or misthologically in the Bible, never soteriologically. Those who do not warn the wicked will, like the wicked, die. The people complain that they are rotting away (obviously rotting on earth not in hell) and are fearful that they will not *live* (Ez 33:10). Again, they are concerned about being killed, about staying alive, on planet Earth in a dog-eat-dog world where it often seems that only the fittest survive. Theological speculation about ontological extinction is the last thing on their minds. They are not trying to stay alive on the branch of some imaginary evolutionary tree which is trying to turn their gift of life into a reward. They are simply trying to survive, not only individually but corporately, as the *house of Israel* (Ez 33:11). The survival of the *house of Israel* is also a concern in the background passage (Ez 18:31), where the issue of life and death is clarified as the wicked person being *put to death* as a form of capital punishment rather than soteriological demise.

Third, God has several reasons to be keenly interested in the survival of Israel as a nation. The Lord has too many unfulfilled, unconditional promises invested in the nation of Israel to allow it to slip away quietly into the night never to be heard from again within the pages of history. At that time in which Ezekiel was writing, the promised Messiah was yet to come from them and for them. And the restoration of the Davidic kingdom still awaits our time. The miraculous restoration of the nation of Israel in our time is an event unparalleled in history. This modern miracle stands as a testimony to the fact that God knows how to keep a promise, even to a people who are faithless. The unconditional nature of God's promise to the nation of Israel is further seen in that the nation of Israel was no longer in tact in order to meet any linear contingency before being restored as a nation. As to OT typology, we find pictures of unconditional security in how God treats Israel. Amidst the misthological insecurity, we find pictures of unconditional security linked to God's immutability (Mal 3:6).

## Typological Syllogisms

Still, someone will respond in Corner's defense that since the promise of life was made to the righteous who stays righteous that the precedence is established, at least in principle, that the



believer must remain a believer in order to continue to have life as a believer. After all, Israel is an OT picture of a born-again believer. In other words, the Arminian will agree that God promises eternal life to a believer. But he will then stipulate that in order to keep eternal life one must remain a believer. Supposedly, the promises no longer apply if one ceases to be a believer. The above passages from Ezekiel might be sought for typological support:

1. The promise is that the righteous will surely live.
2. If the righteous becomes unrighteous, he will surely die.
3. Therefore, the promised living is conditioned on remaining righteous.

So typologically, from an Arminian point of view, this might be thought to justify the following parallelism:

1. The believer is promised eternal life.
2. If the believer becomes an unbeliever, the promise of life no longer applies to him.
3. Therefore, retaining regeneration is conditioned on remaining a believer.

From this Arminian perspective, just as the righteous could lose his life in the OT if he did not remain righteous, so the believer in the NT can lose his eternal life if he does not remain a believer. The survival of the fittest becomes the survival of the faithful in this theological migration (cp. Ps 31:23). Having already examined and refuted this type of argument from multiple vantage points in the *Outer Darkness*, it will suffice to briefly mention a few objections here to augment our present defense of unconditional security which regards it as inconsistent to think that one must remain a believer in order to retain the free gift of eternal life.

### **Believer ≠ Ongoing Believer**

First, linear contingency necessarily implies, if not outright demands, that the benefit bestowed be regarded as a reward rather than a gift. Thus, to base the possession of the gift of eternal life on linear contingency is to turn this gift into a reward. To indiscriminately apply a misthological syllogism to a gift can be like trying to put your right foot into your left shoe. It is not a natural selection. Second, the context in Ezekiel is undoubtedly talking about the reward of life. The NT is clear that the gift of life is not conditioned on works and thus not a reward. The typology is in disparity. Third, just because a believer no longer believes does not mean that he is no longer a believer. He may remain a believer substantively and trichotomously even though he is no longer a believer functionally. Fourth, there are promises in which the biblical writer has made it clear that there are not underlying (moral) contingencies. Fifth, there are conditional promises of misthological life in the NT which would make much better typological parallels to these linear conditional texts than trying to cross match misthological life with soteriological life. This cross-match turns out to be nothing but a mismatch. For example, if one desires a typological parallel between conditional promises regarding life, let it be found in the natural misthological correspondence between the OT and NT regarding the *salvation of the soul*, particularly since this is what Ezekiel is talking about. Sixth, misthology fully acknowledges that perseverance results in salvation. But this lends no support to Corner's position because his argument is that perseverance results in believer's soteriological salvation. Misthology insists that the believer's soteriological salvation is unconditional; it is the believer's misthological salvation that is conditional.

### **Immutability and Conditionality**

Having briefly outlined some of our exegetical and theological objections to the implementation of such passages picturing God's mutability to defend unconditional security (and its attendant premise that all of God's promises are conditional), we will now further address the underlying philosophical assumptions by asking the question, "Does the immutability of God's character make His mutability in dealing with man \_\_\_\_\_ (necessary,

possible, or impossible)?" We interject this blank to allow the reader a moment to pause and mentally fill in the blank. The answer is not as easy as one might initially think and certainly not as easy as Corner's arguments would imply.

When Adam sinned, it changed how God dealt with him because Adam became something that he was not before—a sinner. A change in God's dealings with Adam was necessary. God expelled him from the garden. Obviously, we should fill in the blank with the word *necessary*, even if doing so supports Corner's contention that when a believer becomes an unbeliever it is necessary to conclude that God withdraws eternal life from him. If this were the end of the story, then it might indeed be possible to speculate that God necessarily withdraws eternal life from a believer who ceases to believe and that there is an underlying conditionality to all God's promises. As long as man has the ability to change, then man must have the ability to nullify God's promises—if God's promises must correspondingly change in response to any and every response by man. If God does not have the ability to make an immutable promise to a mutable man, then immutability becomes an impossibility for our immutable God. We smell a rat somewhere in this limited perspective of the Corner-Haley reconstruction.

First of all, it does not make sense to think that everything man does requires that God changes how He deals with man. Your ordering mustard on your hamburger does not mean that God must treat you differently. Thus, we would anticipate that an amoral human action would not necessarily invoke a divine reaction. For that matter, we need not jump to the conclusion that each and every immoral action by man results in a negative reaction by God. For one thing, when man sinned, God atoned. This was a very positive reaction by God to a very negative action by man. Rather than merely responding as man condemner, God responded as man's redeemer. Secondly, in God's positive reaction, God has taken counteraction to make it possible for Him not to respond negatively to man as a sinner just because man sins. By a declaration of justification, the Lord has found a permanent solution to sin by which He has, as expressed in the song *Glorious Day*, "justified freely forever" those who ever believe (cf. Heb 10:10,14). Need we be reminded that this justification is a gift (Rom 3:24)? This type of permanency rules out linear contingency since the benefit has already been bestowed freely and eternally. God has "perfected for all time" those who have at any time been *justified freely forever*.

In order to convey the permanency of regeneration, Peter stresses that it is sourced in the immutability (imperishability) of God's word (1Pet 1:23). In doing so, Peter ontologically links the immutability of God with the new nature of man in such a way as to require that we believe that man's new nature is ontologically immutable so that regeneration is irrevocable. It is not necessary that God withdraw eternal life from us each and every time we sin. One bite killed Adam. One bite does not kill us because God has given us a tree of life, in the form of the old rugged cross, that allows us to live forever. It is not necessary that God pronounce us sinners for each and every sin because in the act of justification God has taken care of all our sins. Consequently, we find that it is biblically and logically not necessary for God to change His dealings with us or His emotions toward us each and every time we sin. Far to the contrary, God has been able to convey His attribute of immutability to humanity by linking His immutable character directly to certain of His promises.

God cannot change His dealings with believers as believers because they cannot become unregenerate or unjustified. A believer may cease to functionally believe but he cannot cease legally and ontologically to be considered a believer in terms of the benefits of his justification and regeneration which were irrevocably conveyed upon him when he first believed. The believer may no longer be a believer functionally, but he certainly is one legally and ontologically. Just as one who has committed murder and been sentenced to death does not have to continue to commit murder in order to be considered a murderer under the sentence of death, so a believer does not have to functionally continue to believe in order to be considered a believer. Just as it is impossible for God to lie, it is impossible for the believer to die (Jn 11:26). It certainly is possible to fill in the above blank with the word *impossible* also. There is no philosophical reason why the blank could not be filled in differently, dependent on various

biblical conditions. The question expressed by the blank in fact poses a false trichotomy between the possibilities.

Sometimes God may or may not choose to respond differently to man when man sins. It is not necessary that the Lord discipline us for everything we do wrong. (For example, it is not necessary that a mother discipline her little child each and every time her daughter does something wrong. Love makes it possible at times to overlook the offense of another.) On the other hand, sometimes God may necessarily have to respond differently to man when man sins. There are some things that God in His righteousness cannot overlook. (Likewise, there are things that even a loving mother simply cannot overlook.) Yet then again, sometimes God cannot respond differently to man when man sins. God will still regard His child as His child. (A loving mother is still going to regard her sinful daughter as her daughter.)

The writer of Hebrews certainly found no difficulty in tying the immutability of God's character together with God's promises in such a way as to convey a sense of security to humanity (Heb 6:17-19). Now to be sure, he does so in this text with a discussion pertaining to linear contingency regarding rewards. But if he can derive a sense of security (even when dealing with forfeitable rewards) from immutable misthological promises, then how can we derive less than soteriological security (regarding a nonforfeitable gift of eternal life) from God's soteriological promises? Do not both sets of promises flow from the same source—from God's immutability? Of course, they do. For insecurity, such as Corner, to think that God can only make linear conditional promises and for security, such as Geisler, to imply that God can only make punctiliar conditional promises is shortsighted both biblically and philosophically. Surely it is within the realm of God's creative ability to make both punctiliar and linear conditional promises.

From the perspective of the Lord's mutability in dealing with men, we are not surprised to hear, "The Lord said to Solomon, 'Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant'" (1 Kings 11:11). Okay, God is going to take the kingdom away from Solomon. God is changing His dealings with Solomon. No problem. Realization of rulership is a reward. Solomon will certainly miss out on the eternal rewards he would have had otherwise (cf. 1Chron 28:9). But the surprise comes in the next verse: "Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son" (1Kings 11:12). What happened to God's temporal threats in which He promises to punish the righteous if they become wicked? Did they evaporate into a hypothetical vapor? No. Solomon has actually sinned and deserves the death sentence. But below this surface conditionality, there is an underlying unconditionality, not conditionality, which comes bubbling to the top.

For the sake of another, God does not give Solomon the punishment he deserves. God refuses to change His temporal dealings with Solomon because of His love for David. We take this as an OT picture of unconditional security. For Jesus' sake, God does not deal with us as with lost sinners but as with sinful saints. He will punish us for our sins, but there is a limit to how far He will take that punishment. At the very least, we have here an OT confirmation that God does not necessarily in every situation have to change His dealings with man in the conditional manner prescribed even when man changes in his dealings with God. There are grounds for finding a bedrock of unconditional love in His treatment of one wayward person because of His love for another faithful person who loves that wayward person. Just as there is to be a depth to our love which allows us to unconditionally love the children of God simply because we love their Father, there is an unfathomable depth to God's love which allows Him to love us just because His Son does.

Parents may find that in going through the drudgery of picking up some of their child's toys or clothes that they feel an emotional attachment to that toy or piece of clothing because of the love they have for their child. If their child were to die, the parents might find a measure of solace in lying in the child's bed and looking at the child's closet full of clothes and toys. Paternally, we would expect them to have tears streaming down their faces after such a tragic loss and feel a touch of their child's presence conveyed to them through their child's belongings.

Indeed, it may take a considerable amount of time before the parents would be able to bring themselves emotionally to the point of letting go of those objects. If parents can have such a sense of unconditional attachment to old, ragged, childish toys and to tattered clothing because of their love for their children, then who is Haley or Corner to say that just because we change that God's feelings toward us must change. There is nothing that such a toy or piece of clothing could do to cause the parents of the departed child to love it any more or any less. A toy that honks or beeps under those circumstances would not be loved because it could honk or beep. A torn pair of jeans would not be loved less because of its defect. Although we certainly affirm misthological love in that we recognize that there are degrees and expressions of intimacy with God that are conditioned on how we as children respond to His love, we also believe that there are depths to His love for us as His children which are unconditional and undisturbed by the change in surface conditions. At those depths, God could not love us more, and He will not love us less.

Our disappointment with Haley's articulation is not with his discussion of immutability per se, but with the limitations his own understanding of immutability has on his apprehension of eternal security. Thiessen, in contrast, takes much the same position as Haley concerning immutability: "It is necessary for an unchangeable God to change in his dealings with changing men in order to remain unchanging in his character and purposes." But to his credit, Thiessen takes one small, yet crucial, step further than Haley in clearly affirming that God "cannot change with regard to...his **promises** (1 Kings 8:56; 2 Cor. 1:20)."<sup>16</sup> Thiessen even does a commendable job of subsequently linking God's immutability directly to eternal security. These immutable promises need not be limited to linear contingencies but may be applied to punctiliar contingencies as well. Geisler assumed as much in using these classic texts for immutability to defend eternal security.<sup>17</sup>

Despite the fact there are statements in Thiessen's chapter on perseverance with which we would disagree, his quote of Boettner's *Reformed Doctrine* is surprisingly right on target: "The nature of the change which occurs in regeneration is a sufficient guarantee that the life imparted shall be permanent."<sup>18</sup> Sometimes even Calvinists break rank and acknowledge the obvious implications of the text, though doing so puts them at odds with their Calvinistic peers. We commend Boettner on this occasion for proving to be an exception to the rule that Calvinists tend to condition retention of regeneration on perseverance. And to Thiessen's credit he, like Geisler, quotes Rom 11:29 in support of eternal security. Stated syllogistically in terms of this verse, our thesis is simple:

1. Eternal life is a promised gift from God which the believer already possesses.
2. "The gifts...of God are irrevocable" (Rom 11:29).
3. The promised gift of eternal life is a gift which the person who has already believed irrevocably possesses and is therefore no longer conditional.

Surprisingly, support for our defense of unconditionality is not limited to positive specimens. There are also examples of God reaching a point where He says in effect, "Enough is enough." Moses flatly stated as much: "The Lord was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me; and the Lord said to me, 'Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter'" (Dt 3:26). When God swore in His wrath that the children of Israel would not enter His rest (Heb 3:11; 4:3), the Lord was not speaking hypothetically. The Lord was making a declaration that was actually immutable and unconditional. There was nothing they could do to reverse it. They repented. But it was too late to enter that land and take possession of it or experience a restful inheritance in it (Num 14:39-40; Dt 1:41-46). It was impossible for them to enter the rest. Even so, it may be impossible for God's children today to obtain that promised reward even if they repent (Heb 6:6). God's immutable nature enables Him to make immutable promises and threats which cannot be overthrown by subsequent obedience or disobedience.

God has irrevocably promised to remain unchanging in certain aspects toward changing man if man makes certain changes. By the sheer nature of the case, in such cases man cannot make

subsequent changes that will undo the results of the earlier changes if God has already responded irrevocably to those earlier changes. If a person takes the mark of the beast, for instance, God has irrevocably committed Himself to sending that person to hell. If a person is sealed with the Spirit, God has irrevocably committed Himself to saving that person from hell. Regardless of what change or changes a person may make after having taken that mark or seal, his fate is unconditionally sealed by the punctiliar change that he made which resulted in that mark or seal. Put differently, we can glean arguments in favor of eternal security even from God's unconditional threats because they serve to remind us that our immutable God can make unconditional promises. The fact that the Lord can be steadfast in carrying out certain threats regardless of our subsequent change in performance gives us reason to believe that He can be just as steadfast in carrying out certain positive promises regardless of our subsequent change in performance. In such cases, we cannot change the outcome regardless of what subsequent changes we make. The outcome has already been unconditionally determined from the moment God responded irrevocably.

### Summary

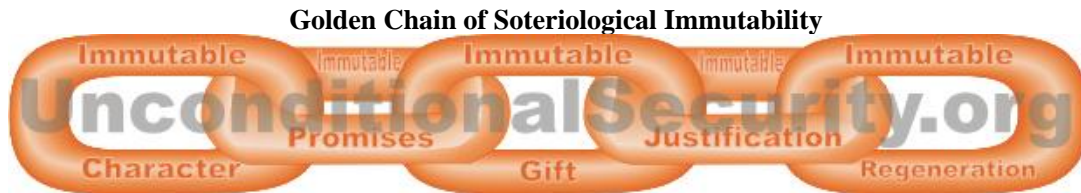
We will briefly survey our primary points and fill in one more blank. God's immutable character makes it possible for Him to make both conditional and unconditional promises. (This is yet one more way we can fill in the above blank.) God can communicate His immutability to us with propositional statements and convey that immutability to us with immutable promises. Not only is this a philosophical possibility, it is a biblical reality that the Lord has in fact done so.

1. God's immutable character makes immutable promises possible.
2. Immutable promises are not only possible, they are also actual.
3. One purpose of such immutable promises is to give absolute assurance.
4. Immutable promises rule out remaining contingency for those who have fulfilled the condition. God cannot change the condition subsequently.
  - a. Although *some* immutable promises are based on linear contingency, there is no logical reason to believe that *all* immutable promises must be based on linear contingency.
  - b. God's gifts are conditioned on punctiliar contingency.
    - i. The gift of justification requires punctiliar contingency.
    - ii. The gift of regeneration requires punctiliar contingency.
    - iii. Since these gifts are punctiliarly and permanently bestowed, they are no longer contingent. They are unconditional to the one who has received them.
  - c. God's rewards may be conditioned on linear contingency, but even these rewards may cease to be conditioned on ongoing contingency once the condition has been met. Some promised rewards may become unconditional upon the realization of that reward.
  - d. One purpose of immutable unconditional promises (whether they be regarding gifts or rewards) is to give absolute assurance of their irrevocable fulfillment.
5. Just because promised rewards may have an underlying contingency of works does not prove that a promised gift may be conditioned on works.
6. God is not necessarily mutable in all His dealings with man.
  - a. Not every change in man necessarily causes a change in how God deals with man.
    - i. Not every human action requires a corresponding divine reaction.
    - ii. God may have already taken countermeasures to make certain divine responses unnecessary, even impossible, when man sins.
    - iii. Just because a believer ceases to believe does not mean that he must necessarily no longer be regarded as a believer.

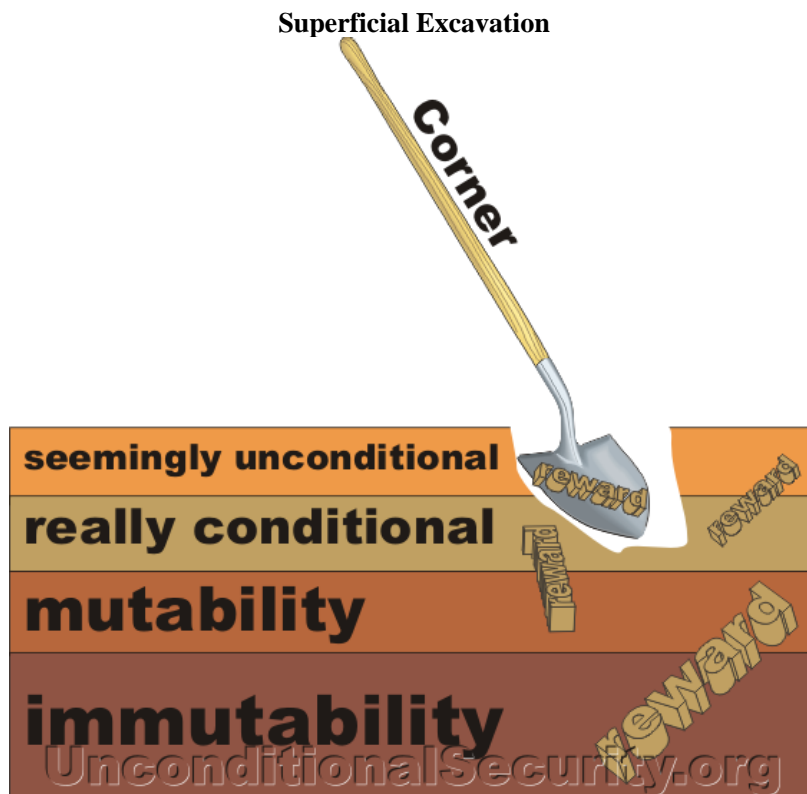
- b. God has responded positively to us even when we have responded negatively to Him. It is therefore irrational to presume that a negative response from us must necessarily nullify any positive response from Him.

### Conclusion

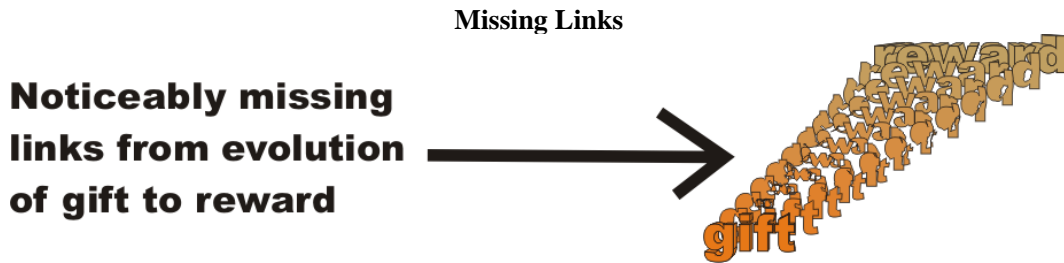
Lest there be a charge that we have a few missing links of our own in our response, we will take pains to illustrate the connectivity in our thought in such a manner that the logical cohesiveness will be readily apparent.



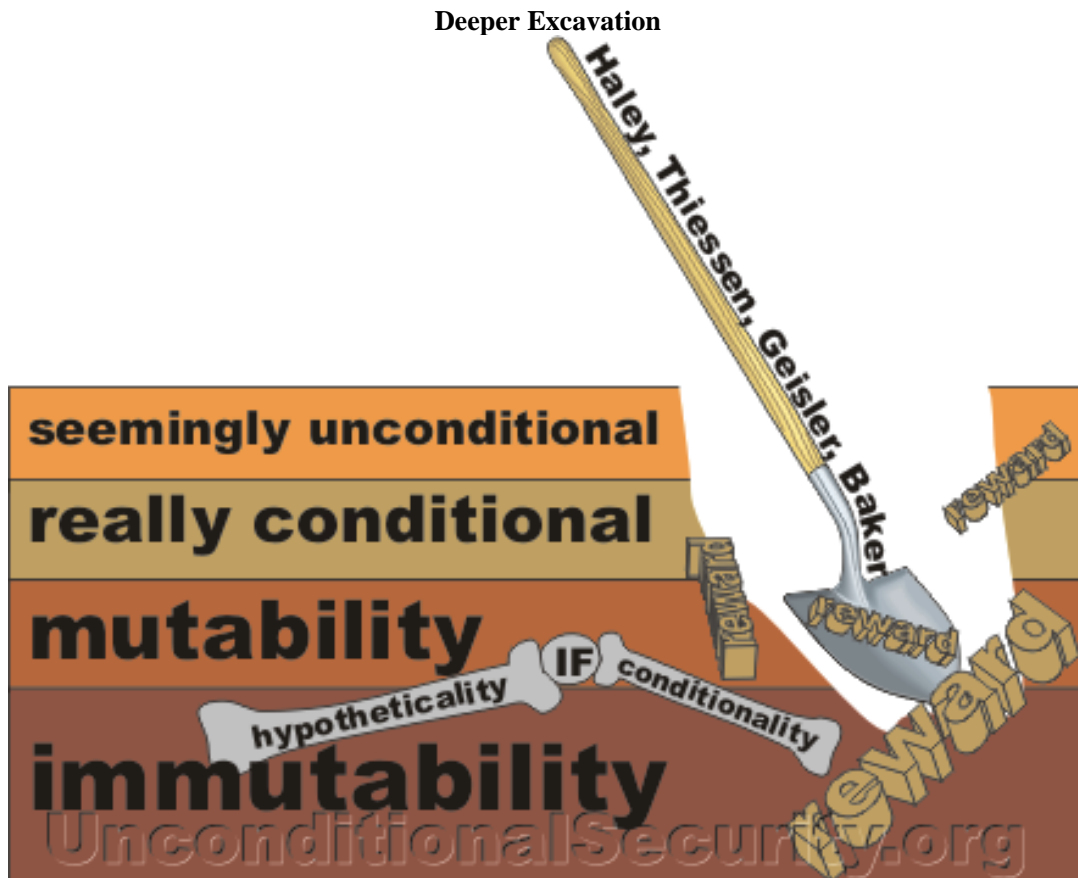
God's immutable character enables Him to make immutable promises that immutably bestow gifts, such as justification and regeneration, in such a manner that these promises cannot be conditioned on ongoing contingency. The end product is unconditional security.



Corner's superficial analysis only dug deep enough to prove that some seemly unconditional promises are really conditional. In having only gone thus far, Corner fails to acknowledge that what he finds are simply rewards in the strata he examines. His error is understandable, to a degree, in that there are those within the Calvinistic camp who likewise believe that the presence of underlying conditionality demonstrates a bedrock of mutability beneath all of God's promises. Still, the error of one camp does not justify the error of another camp.



In our assessment, by regarding a gift simply as an evolved reward just because he has found an underlying, ongoing contingency for some rewards, Corner confuses the artifacts that he excavates. Regrettably, there are Calvinists who likewise believe that they can legitimately hypothesize that a gift is a reward. They then regard their theory as an established theological fact, regardless of the missing links in their exegesis.

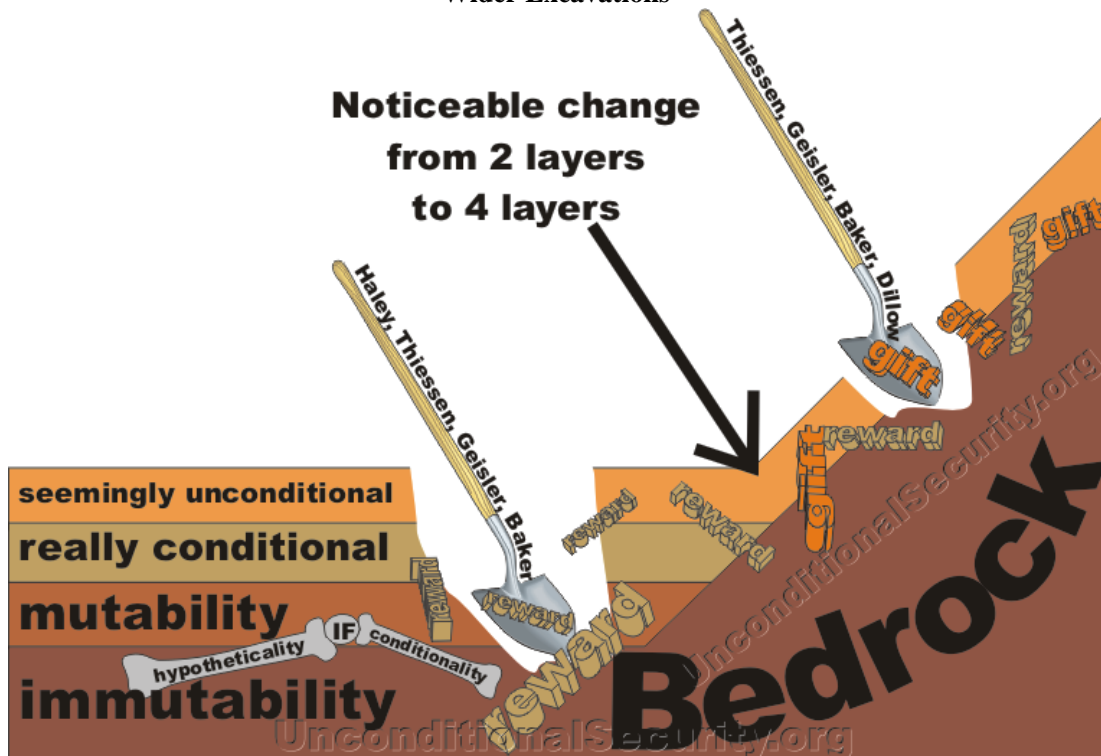


Corner was certainly not the first to dig down below the topsoil and find underlying conditionality. Haley does so as well. But Haley does not confuse this conditionality with bedrock. Like many others, Haley digs much deeper and finds a strata of mutability underlying the conditionality. Not stopping there, Haley probes even deeper until he hits true bedrock and finds that below the mutability there is a principle of immutability.

Nevertheless, Haley confuses the facts as well but for a different reason. Realizing that a gift cannot actually be conditioned on ongoing performance, Haley attempts to break the artifacts

apart into their composite parts of hypotheticality and conditionality and then tries to arrange the pieces into two separate piles labeled accordingly. In this way, he hopes to avoid making the gifts he finds in the text truly conditional on ongoing obedience. His motives may be well-intentioned. But in doing so, he destroys the state of the artifacts as they are frequently found in the text, resulting in disjointed articles that were intended to be semantically joined together. As we examined the exegetical findings that Haley has uncovered, we noted that others have dug just as deeply into the text as he has but have come away with vastly different conclusions than what he derived. These securitists (such as Thiessen, Geisler, Baker, and Dillow) found that God's promise of eternal life is firmly and unconditionally grounded in His immutability. In making this observation, not only did they dig as deeply as Haley, they dug more widely in their theological observations.

#### Wider Excavations



In examining the work of securitists who have gone before us, we have been able to substantiate their primary findings by correcting some of the inconsistencies in their labeling, while at the same time cataloging the strata in which they have made their discoveries. Their defense for unconditional security has been found to rest solidly on the bedrock of God's immutable word (Is 55:11). God's gifts are irrevocably tied directly to His immutable character. Accordingly, His promises of soteriological gifts inevitably lead to unconditional security for the believer who has received those gifts so that punctiliar, immutable contingency must be affirmed.

To elaborate our findings in terms of the excavations done by others whom we have pictured in the above illustration, it will be noted that those who have dug down through the layers of apparent unconditionality to find underlying conditionality have further found that this conditionality rests atop God's mutability. But this mutability, in the final analysis, is grounded upon the bedrock of God's immutability. Corner prematurely concludes that he has dislodged unconditionality from immutability by pointing out that the promises he examines in his section on the conditionality of God's promises indicate that one would have to dig down through conditionality and mutability before one could reach immutability. Given the parameters of his limited analysis, one could see how such a mistake could easily be made. As a result, he has failed to note that rewards were the only thing he found down this shaft.



Securitists have done further excavations and moved up the hermeneutical slope to dig other shafts as well. In doing so, they have discovered that God's promised gifts, such as eternal life, are directly embedded in God's immutability. There are no intermediate levels of conditionality or mutability left as one commences up the ridge. The mountain of unconditional, soteriological security remains unscathed by Corner's limited excavations in the valley below. As a geologist must carefully record the strata of the geological column in which he finds his artifacts, so we (as misthologists) must carefully note the context in which we discover facts pertaining to conditionality. While doing so, we have unearthed some mistakes made by soteriologists while digging on the mountain of immutability and discovered that the doctrine of rewards may be found embedded in the soil of this mountain as well. The difference between these rewards and those found in lower altitudes is that there is no longer any remaining condition for these mountain rewards. These rewards have been removed from the shifting sands of linear conditionality and moldable clay of mutability and gravitated to the granite of the mountain by the power of God's solemn oaths and become permanently embedded therein.

Unlike the rewards found in the valley, these mountain rewards are not contingent on any remaining conditions and therefore do not transverse the various sublevels of contingency found in more diverse subterranean levels of the valley. Like gifts which have been realized (at least partially) by their acceptance and are therefore no longer conditional, so these rewards are no longer contingent, even though they may await future realization. For example, the realization of the gift of life (although partially realized in the present by the believer who has experienced regeneration) still awaits even further realization in that this believer is assured of living with God in heaven and then on earth at the realization of the millennial kingdom. Yet those believers concerning whom the Lord has sworn that they will not enter His rest will find that there is nothing they can do to undo the future realization of that misthological exclusion. The outer darkness unflinchingly awaits such believers when they more fully partake of His misthological displeasure.

Most importantly, it must be noted that there is an immediate drop from four to two layers as soon as one starts up the slope where securitists have found proof of unconditional security. This two-layered mountain ground is also home of unconditional threats as well. Both promises and threats found in the topsoil of *seemly unconditionality* on these mountain slopes will be found to be lying directly upon the bedrock of God's immutability so that there is no longer any conditionality to detract from unconditional soteriological security or to buffer one from misthological consequences which have now become certain of fulfillment. There is no disparity between being *seemly* unconditional and *truly* unconditional once one reaches these slopes. The reason eternal security seems unconditional is because it really is unconditional. The seeming unconditionality on the mountain rests directly upon God's immutability and therefore is actually unconditional.

We have looked under the bed and found no room for lurking invisible monsters waiting to devour the soteriological life of the believer should he doze off. A believer can soteriologically rest in eternal security knowing that we have looked under the bed and found nothing but bedrock. There is no room for invisible, unfulfilled conditions. Any such speculations have been crushed to death by the weight of the evidence. Corner's argument has died of a coronary as it attempted to climb the steep slopes of unconditional security and has been completely decomposed and disposed of in the soils of that altitude where we have made our soteriological bed. That altitude dispels an attitude of soteriological fear.

Almost as equally emphatically, we must point out that conditional promises are found in the four-layered soil of the valley. There are no gifts in those soils. While misthological themes might penetrate all four strata and some may have their conditionality hidden from superficial view, there are no soteriological benefits found in the valley because those who have partaken of soteriological benefits have received a gift which is immutable in its fulfillment and must therefore be found entrenched in the unshakeable mountain slopes. Although unconditional gifts and rewards may both be found on the slopes, they are located on those mountain slopes because their condition has been met. These mountain artifacts may be distinguished from one another by

discerning the fulfilled condition which resulted in their being placed there. Rewards are based on works; gifts are not. A gift is not to be confused with a reward or a reward with a gift just because both share the similar characteristic of being grounded in God's immutability. By retaining our ability to discern a gift from a reward, we can avoid the mistakes of conditional securitists when mining in the valley below and the errors of the unconditional securitists when mining in the mountain above.

To conclude, we dug much deeper into the theological column than Corner. Like others before us, we found that underlying conditionality rests atop God's mutability in His dealings with men. We dug even deeper and found, as others have also, that God's mutability in dealing with man rests atop the bedrock of His immutable character. But we have further discovered that securitists have found an indissoluble direct link between eternal security and immutability. We have pictorially represented this discovery in the mountain slopes. At best, Corner's limited excavations merely show that misthological promises have undergone microevolution in clarification. Our more thorough misthological investigations, on the other hand, have uncovered passages which show that not even all of God's misthological promises or threats can be overturned by a subsequent change in a people or a person. The principle of unconditionality applies both collectively and personally, both positively and negatively to artifacts found in the mountain strata, and they are devoid of any remaining conditionality for those who have already met the soteriological or misthological contingencies, whether those contingencies were initially punctiliar or linear. Unconditional security rests directly upon the bedrock of God's immutability.

There is no excuse for Corner to take the head of a soteriological animal found on the mountain slopes and attach it to the body of a misthological animal found in the valley and then proclaim that he has found the missing link that proves unconditional security through a process of theological macroevolution. The only thing such a claim proves is that his argument died on the slopes. Perhaps his thesis found the slope too slippery for it to retain its footing, and so (after finding the head of an argument for eternal security on the steep slopes and after severing that unconditional head from the buried body of literature defending its unconditional status) his thesis lost its footing, fell dead, and dropped the severed head, which then rolled down the slope into the hole that Corner had dug into conditional security in the valley. And Corner, subsequently finding the severed head of unconditional security in the hole which he had dug for conditional security, imagined that an argument from the pages of unconditional security would fit just as well within the confines of his conditional premise, not realizing that his argument had detached the head of an unconditional promise and attached it to the body of a misthologically linear commitment. One has to be highly imaginative, after all, in order to imagine how Corner could imagine that a gift is a reward.

Evolutionists are notorious for mislabeling and cross matching fossil remains. Martin elaborates concerning one infamous example:

By the way, did you know that there never was an actual dinosaur called Brontosaurus? Brontosaurus fooled the scientific community for many, many years. It turned out to be the head of one creature and the body of another. The evolutionary community was too embarrassed to admit this mistake for more than fifty years.<sup>19</sup>

We hope the Arminian community will not take as long to admit Corner's mistake. We contend, in contrast to conditional securitists, that a gift is not a more highly evolved reward. A gift is not, never has been, and never will be a reward. The immutability and integrity of the giver of the gift requires that we not confuse the two. There is no such creature as an eternal gift that can be taken back by its giver once it has been given.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel Corner, *The Believer's Conditional Security*, 106.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>4</sup> It is the integrity of Corner's position rather than his personal integrity that we are questioning with this statement concerning unconditional promises. We have even brought Calvinists to the witness stand who evidently share Corner's opinion that all God's promises are conditional. Naturally, Corner would not mention any unconditional promises if he does not believe they exist or does not believe that the statements of God's immutability can be used to affirm unconditional promises. Hopefully, it will be seen that, with such a concession, we are attacking his position, not his person.

<sup>5</sup> John Haley, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*, 64-65. Haley also provides an interesting two-page discussion of how God could make the change He does in 2Sam 2:30 without violating His character.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Haley seems to be positively inclined toward the Calvinistic view that loss of salvation is only hypothetically possible and that final perseverance is guaranteed. One would be tempted to think that his contrasting columns dealing with that subject in a section entitled *Final Perseverance* (pp. 169ff) would serve to indicate that falling from grace is soteriologically impossible because of the promises of eternal life. Yet Haley responds, "The first series [which he labeled *impossible to fall from grace*] does not teach the *impossibility* of falling from grace, but merely the *certainty* that this will not occur" (p. 170; emphasis his). He refutes his own heading of the first series by claiming that it is **not impossible to fall from grace** after all. At first glance, his solution to the possibility of apostasy appears to be at odds with itself in asserting that it is both possible and impossible.

Nevertheless, the remark that Haley appears to be at odds with himself is not pertaining to the oddity which exists internally within his discussion of perseverance but to the discrepancy between his solutions for immutability versus apostasy. For Calvinists, Haley's comments regarding perseverance would appear reasonable in that Calvinists typically affirm both OSAS and conditional security. Calvinistically speaking, God's promise that a believer will never perish in Jn 10:28 (to cite one of Haley's examples) does not mean that it is *impossible* for the believer to perish, only that he *will not* perish. In other words, hypothetically speaking, it is possible for a believer to apostatize and perish. A believer's keeping the regeneration which God promised him is contingent upon the believer remaining a believer and not committing apostasy. In TULIP, regeneration does not prevent apostasy. Rather, God's irresistible electing grace prevents apostasy, which in turn prevents one from losing one's regeneration: election → perseverance → retention of regeneration. Some Calvinists, particularly at the popular level, think that the order of causation in Calvinism is: election → retention of regeneration → perseverance. But this is a mistaken understanding of the prevailing view within Calvinism. Although exceptions have been noted in our discussion, the predominate Calvinistic consensus tends to regard the *perseverance of the saints* (POS) as necessary for the *preservation of the saints* (POS). For them, POS refers jointly to the *perseverance of the saints* and the *preservation of the saints*. The former being the means of the latter. If (hypothetically and Calvinistically speaking) a believer were to not persevere, he would lose his regeneration. As Laurence Vance has documented in his chapter *Perseverance of the Saints*, Calvinists by and large do not believe in eternal security (*Calvinism*, 555-606).

We agree with Haley that there are things that a believer *could* do (hypothetically speaking) but which the believer simultaneously *cannot* do (actually speaking). This is how we reconcile OSAS with the possibility of a believer taking the mark of the beast. A believer *could* take the mark of the beast and remain saved, but he *cannot* take the mark of the beast because God would kill the believer before allowing the believer to actually take the mark of the beast. Despite the similarities in our approaches to similar problems, there is a fundamental difference. We affirm *unconditional security* (US), whereas Haley's Calvinistic solution tries to reconcile OSAS with *conditional security* (CS). Our solution is OSAS + US and thus eternal security. In contrast, Haley's Calvinistic solution to this alleged discrepancy between security and conditionality is OSAS + CS and thus hypothetical insecurity. Some Calvinists, in trying to escape this conclusion, attempt to make perseverance descriptive rather than prescriptive, but their attempts are futile in that the verses to which they apply these attempts include an array of conditional passages, thereby effectively ruling out US in favor of POS. Such attempts to speak descriptively are actually examples of speaking deceptively, whether intentionally or not.

Haley is not being entirely consistent with his earlier discussion of God's immutability in that it may be deduced from the texts he cites there that some of God's promises (such as the promise of eternal life) are immutable. Alternatively, it might be asserted Calvinistically in Haley's defense that God's promise of eternal life to the believer is actually immutable but only hypothetically mutable in that God irresistibly causes the believer to perseverance as the means of keeping His promise that the believer will not perish. In other words, God immutably uses perseverance as the means of preservation.

But does it really make sense to speak of God's character being immutable if the only way He can relate to us is mutably? Can we actually affirm that God's character is really immutable if the only kind of promise He can make is only hypothetically immutable? Can God's promises never truly reveal His nature? From a hypothetical standpoint, must we think that God is never immutable? Perish the thought! A believer cannot perish because God is in fact actually immutable and that immutability can carry over to His promises and thereby effectively reveal the immutability of His character. God is not forced to change just because man changes. Man does not make it impossible for God to be immutable in His dealings with man. Just as we may strongly assert that it is impossible for God to lie, even hypothetically speaking, so we equally assert that the promise that He has made that a believer will never perish cannot be nullified, even hypothetically speaking! God cannot actually or even hypothetically lie. We thus conclude that a believer cannot actually or even hypothetically perish. Since the gifts of God are immutable, the promises of those gifts are immutable.

To address this matter in a less philosophical manner, Haley appeals to Gal 1:8 as an example of Paul speaking hypothetically: "Even *if* we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!" We have no quarrel with Haley taking this third class sentence hypothetically. The same would be true of his appeal to the third class conditions expressed in 1Cor 13:1-3: "*If* I speak...*If* I have...*If* I give." Third class conditional sentences can be rather far removed from reality. But there are numerous conditional statements that are not so far removed from reality. For example, Rom 8:13 is a first class conditional warning: "*If* you are living according to the flesh, you must die." This statement is not merely hypothetical; it is fully conditional. Even conditional securitists among the Calvinistic ranks have concluded from Rom 8:13 that if a regenerate believer were to live according to the flesh, such a believer would die spiritually and lose his regeneration. Such Calvinists agree with Arminians regarding the conditional nature of the verse. Hypotheticality does not rule out conditionality in such cases.

Moreover, Calvinistic insecuritists likewise conclude from 1Pet 1:5 that the reason God soteriologically keeps us is because we persevere in faith. Perseverance in faith is the condition for being kept soteriologically. Accordingly, Calvinists generally teach conditional security. Yet Haley makes the sweeping claim "that the quotations from Hebrews and Peter are so obviously hypothetical that no comment is needed" (p. 171). On the contrary, his statement is so blatantly false that no comment is needed. In fact, his summation is so blatantly false that he appeals to Barnes to justify his hypothetical understanding of Heb 6:6—a text which has no *if* in it in Greek! Even worse, on the same page, Haley quotes one of our texts under discussion as being an example of pure hypotheticality: "When I shall say to the righteous, that he shall surely live; *if* he trust to his own righteousness, and commit iniquity, all his righteousnesses shall not be remembered; but for his iniquity that he hath committed, he shall die for it" (Ez 33:13; KJV). In agreement with Corner, we emphatically take this verse as an expression of conditionality, not mere hypotheticality.

First, it is questionable that the word *if* should even be translated as such in Ez 33:13. The NKJ translates it as *but*. Second, if verse 13 is merely hypothetical, will we assume the same is true in the next verse: "Again, when I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' *if* he turns from his sin and does what is lawful and right... he shall surely live, he shall not die" (Ez 33:14-15; NKJ). This time the NKJ does use the word *if*. So if anything, verse 14 is more likely hypothetical than verse 13. But no one would conclude that the promise of v. 14 is merely hypothetical. Therefore, it is logically inconsistent to claim that v. 13 is simply hypothetical. If logical consistency is assumed between the two verses, then it may be logically deduced that Haley does not even believe his own claim.

Earlier, in his discussion of immutability, Haley had correctly noted: "A wicked man repents and becomes good. He is not now the individual whom God threatened. He sustains another relation to his Maker." Yet on this same page, he likewise says, "Suppose a righteous man should turn and become wicked. He is no longer the man whom God promised to bless. He occupies a different

relation toward God” (p. 65). Is Haley merely speaking hypothetically? Not at all, he correctly notes that God is actually mutable in His dealings with men—whether they be righteous men who become unrighteous or unrighteous men who become righteous. Haley does not believe that God’s mutability is merely hypothetical. God’s reaction actually fluctuates as men move back and forth between the poles of practical righteousness. Consequently, Haley’s affirmation of God’s mutability offsets Haley’s attempt to appeal to hypotheticality regarding the believer’s ability to apostatize. God is mutable toward the believer because the believer is mutable toward God.

The problem is that, given the confines of his Calvinistic grid, Haley evidently does not know how to reconcile the apparent discrepancy that this tension between God’s mutability and the believer’s security would pose with OSAS. If Haley were to admit that a believer can actually become an unbeliever, then an Arminian could challenge, to use Haley’s words, “He is no longer the man whom God promises to bless. He occupies a different relation toward God.” In other words, since the believer is no longer a believer, God’s promise of eternal life to him as a believer would no longer be applicable. Our solution to the tension between immutability and security is to affirm OSAS by dualistically affirming God’s soteriological immutability toward the person who has believed while at the same time acknowledging God’s (limited) misthological mutability toward the person who no longer believes.

We say *limited* because we find the terminus for the linear misthological contingency in the believer’s death. Keeping eternal rewards is not based on eternal contingency. While it is true that the believer will not sin after death, his keeping his eternal reward is not conditioned on his not sinning after death. His eternal reward is not conditioned on his being faithful *after* death but *until* death (Rev 2:10). If crowns are to be lost, and they can be, then these crowns must be lost due to a failure in temporal performance (Rev 3:11).

There is a soteriological continuity between the person who believes and then ceases to believe in that this person was yet an unbeliever when he was promised that if he were to believe he would be given **eternal life** as a **free gift**. This promise of a free gift means no strings were attached. It was as an unbeliever that the person received the gift of eternal life by becoming a believer. To claim that the person in question no longer has the gift of eternal life because he reverted to being an unbeliever is to ignore, among other things, the fact that it was to the person as an unbeliever to whom the original invitation was given. To speak hypothetically, if under such circumstances such an individual were to appear before God bereft of eternal life, then the person in question could rightly respond that what he had been given was neither a **free gift** nor **eternal life**. He is still the same person he was before in that he is the person to whom the free gift had been eternally given. If this gift is subsequently taken away, then he may rightly claim that he had been lied to by a God who cannot lie. Given that God cannot lie, we conclude that this scenario is impossible because the free gift of eternal life is nonforfeitable.

<sup>8</sup> The logical deduction from Haley’s continued comments on p. 65 and from his section entitled *final perseverance* (pp. 169ff) is that Haley is a Calvinist who affirms conditional security. This is the typical Calvinistic stance. In affirming OSAS and POS, Calvinists offset eternal security with conditional security. The bottom line is that Haley, like Corner, advocates conditional security.

<sup>9</sup> R. Payne Smith, *1 Samuel*, Pulpit Commentary, 55-56.

<sup>10</sup> Just because *some* seemingly unconditional promises are really conditional does not necessarily imply that *all* seemingly unconditional promises must be conditional. Some ≠ all. This faulty logic apparently caused Corner to make a catastrophic, categorical failure in failing to acknowledge that *some of* God’s promises are unconditional. As a result, the underlying integrity of his entire argument was nullified at its foundational level.

<sup>11</sup> Norman Geisler, *Four Views on Eternal Security*, 82.

<sup>12</sup> Idem, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, 217. Although we take similar views as Geisler regarding immutability, we differ from him in that we affirm (in the manner described by Haley, Murphree, and Thiessen) that God does actually change His mind. Similarly, we believe that immutability does not result in impassibility in that God’s emotions can change in response to man (cp. Murphree, *Paradoxes*, 106-107).

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Dillow, *Servant Kings*. In his chapter on eternal security Dillow correctly grounds his argument in the irrevocability of the gift in Rom 11:29 (p. 499) and wisely does not ground it in what

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he correctly perceives to be a misthological text in 1Pet 1:3-5 (p. 497), but he wrongly cites Heb 6:17-20 as a soteriological text in defense of eternal security.

<sup>14</sup> Harold Barker, *Secure Forever*, 52.

<sup>15</sup> Our statement that the reservation in 1Pet 1:4 is not eternal might be countered by a securitist (who insists on making 1Pet 1:4 a soteriological text) that just as the believer's inheritance is reserved in heaven, so the unbeliever's punishment in the darkness is reserved (2Pet 2:17), and this reservation is forever (Jude 1:13). Thus, contrary to our statement, it might be claimed that the reservation is eternal after all. Our response would be that the realization of the reservation is contingent; therefore, the reservation itself is not eternal for those who have not yet come into the realization. Unbelievers, in other words, are not unconditionally sent to hell. Their going to hell is linearly contingent upon their remaining unbelievers. Likewise, the believer's misthological inheritance is contingent upon his remaining a believer and remaining faithful. Once he reaches heaven, his reward is no longer contingent. Conversely, once a lost person reaches hell, his punishment is no longer linearly contingent upon his remaining an unbeliever. The rich man may have become a believer when he saw Lazarus in glory. But it was too late. The rich man's punishment was no longer contingent; it was eternal. In similar fashion, we do not perceive Lazarus' glory to still be contingent; it is eternal. Therefore, in saying that the reservation is not eternal, we mean that it is not yet eternal for those who have not realized that reservation. Neither the reservation for the righteous in 1Pet 1:4 nor for the unrighteous in Jude 1:13 is unconditionally reserved for those who have not reached their postmortem destination.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Thiessen, *Lectures*, 83. Also see Murphree, *Paradoxes*, 104.

<sup>17</sup> Geisler's argument that God makes unconditional promises of eternal security are, of course, meant to be taken as affirming that once a person meets the punctiliar requirement of becoming a believer there are no remaining contingencies. Affirming that such promises are unconditional is not a denial that the promises were ever conditional, but only that they do not remain conditional for the person who has met the qualification. These promises are unconditional for the person who has now fulfilled the condition. In the case of eternal security, the promises are now unconditional for the person who has met the punctiliar condition of trusting in Christ alone for eternal life which logically results in unconditional security.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>19</sup> Jobe Martin, *The Evolution of a Creationist*, 171-172.