

My Dad, God

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Whatever he may or may not have been, Luigi Gavazzoni was certainly my Dad. He died suddenly of a massive heart attack thirteen years ago, as of this writing, and his spirit has gone to be with the One who is Father to both of us; the greater Father "from whom every family in heaven and earth is named" (Eph. 3:15). Yet still, the memory of him can moisten my eyes with a mixture of joy and sorrow. Joy, because the thought of him still nurtures me, and sorrow, because I can no longer reach for the phone and hear the words, "Hi son, how are you?" There was always in the simple greeting the note of spontaneous delight. As he grew older and especially after he surrendered to Christ, the treasure of his heart, after Christ Himself and my mother, was his children. As the oldest of the children, I had the privilege of being taken into his confidence at times when something moved him deeply.

One such time had to do with my younger brother who was going through a period of youthful rebellion. As Dad shared with me his concern and consternation, he suddenly stopped short and with a great surge of emotion that seemed to sweep aside all other considerations, he spoke exactly six words. I remember them as if it were yesterday, though it was over forty years ago: "God, how I love that boy!" Rebellious boy, stubborn boy, disrespectful boy, but a boy loved with a father's love. I wouldn't suggest that you ever speak a disparaging word about Dad in the presence of my brother Ron today, because you might get your clock cleaned. Love conquered and remains the sweet scent of memory. One thing Ron and I know and agree upon: we had a Dad.

I remember the day before Dad's funeral when my youngest brother, overcome with grief, but revealing the fruit of Dad's love in his heart, spoke almost identical words with tears coursing down his cheeks, "God how he loved me." I could go on about the relationship he had with our "baby" sister, the apple of his eye, but that would take a book in itself. I know I may not have avoided coming across as maudlin in

this very personal introduction, for that is what I have written thus far; an introduction to a teaching on the fatherhood of God. One thing stands out clearly to me when I compare my father's relationship with his children to the way our Heavenly Father is presented in conventional orthodox theology. It is simply this: Lou Gavazzoni's relationship with me was paternal, not legal. Whatever factors came into play, all was built on a familial, not a forensic foundation. There may at times have been a friendship element, associate-in-business element, fellow-musician element, boss-employee element, even lord-servant element and yes, the element of judgment came up as well. But, I never stood before one who was essentially a judge, who might, after legal matters were settled, then allow himself to be fatherly.

I stood before my father who might, as necessary, act in a firm, unyielding and corrective judgment as part of his love for me. Yet, it seems clear to me, that most of Christianity assumes that a relationship with God is only possible after legal matters are settled. Our minds are so entangled with what we perceive to be legal, judicial and forensic necessities that we miss the Father-heart of God.

If we fully understand the implications of what is thought to be the soundest theology we will see that our religious teachers have led us to believe that God relates to us as in the courtroom rather than the family room. The great words in our English Bibles that have to do with the very foundation and structure of our relationship with God are made to convey cold, legal austerity and then a noble attempt is made to wring some warmth of kinship from them. Some of the words are; "advocate," "atonement," "justification," "redemption," "propitiation," "righteousness," etc. I hope, by the Spirit, to pull aside the veil over our minds, at least a little, concerning the first word in our list: "advocate." It is the Greek word, "parakletos," which conveys this range of meaning: "intercessor, consoler, comforter, counselor, helper, advocate, strengthener, standby." It is used at least in the following scriptures verses: Jn. 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7, I Jn. 2:1.

In the King James Version, "parakletos" is translated "advocate," only once, in I Jn. 2:1. In all of the other verses listed above, it is translated "comforter." Any Bible teacher worth his salt knows that the word "parakletos" in the Gospel of John passages, deals with Jesus

Christ ministering His riches in glory to His disciples through the Holy Spirit (the intercessor, consoler, helper, strengthener, advocate, standby). But most fundamentalists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, Charismatics and orthodox teachers change the whole meaning and direction of the word in explaining its use in the 1st Epistle of John (I Jn. 2:1). Here, it is taught to mean that Jesus Christ, our "parakletos," instead of ministering in concert with the Holy Spirit to the heart of the believer, is said to be acting as an advocate in the sense of a divine attorney pleading the case of the believer before the bar of God so that the Father, upon hearing Christ's defense of the believer, and the ultimate evidence of the shed blood of Christ on his behalf, will find the sinner/saint not guilty. Even as I must confess that I once believed and taught this perversion, now, I wonder how did we ever get this scenario so turned around and upside down? It goes back to certain church fathers, such as Augustine and Tertullian, who had an obsession with Romish law, and who lacked a full revelation of God's grace.

It does not make sense that John would suddenly take the Greek word which indicates an action of God toward and in the heart of man, (i.e., from heaven toward earth), where in effect, there is a pleading of God's case toward men, and change it to mean a pleading of man's case before God.

How can it be that John in one instance is said to use this word "parakletos" to convey the idea of the Son having to convince the Father to be merciful, when in every other instance, the word clearly means that God is commending His love to us in His Son by the Spirit (II Cor. 5:19). This kind of reasoning is stupid, perverse, nonsensical, idiotic and yes, demonic! I John 2:1 does not reveal Christ advocating before a recalcitrant Deity, but rather demonstrates that He is our advocate with the Father. That is to say, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all acting as one in the advocacy of us and for us. They are, together, helping us, consoling us, counseling us, strengthening us, in order to get us to receive and understand the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. The only sense in which Jesus makes a presentation before the Father is in the sense of presenting His redeeming work for the Father's approval. This, He has done once for all (Heb. 10:12). Then the Father, in effect, says to Jesus, "Yes, your blood is what they need. It

was shed just as I commanded you for them. I am for them; you are for them; the Holy Spirit is for them."

We must become clear on this.

Jesus is NOT acting on our behalf in the legal sense of an advocate, but in the sense that He comes to us because He is for us and He is advocating God's cause in our lives. Several times, the blood is presented in scripture as that which our hearts need, not what an angry God needs in order to forgive. Heb. 9:14 speaks of the blood cleansing our conscience from dead works to serve the living God. According to I Pet. 1:2, we are the ones that need to be sprinkled with the blood of Christ. Again in Hebrews 10:22, it is our hearts that need the blood to sprinkle us clean from an evil conscience. In Luke 22, 19,20, Jesus tells the disciples, "This is my body, which is given for you, this cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood." This verse and the other ones just mentioned, indicate that the blood is for man rather than for God.

Since the Holy Spirit is the "parakletos" and Jesus is the "parakletos" with the Father, that means they are together, the triune God in perfect harmony coming to us to advocate, strengthen, console, comfort and help by transmitting to us by the Spirit the Father's love freely given in the grace of Christ. There is no courtroom scene here with one member of the trinity convicting another member not to be angry. There is only togetherness and singleness of purpose with Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, insuring that the work which He began, He will finish. "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). The believer may rest comfortably in the knowledge that "we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10). And finally, we take our stand in the sure knowledge that "If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

Stay tuned for future serious, seminal samplings.

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