

## A Legal Mentality

John R Gavazzoni

February 2000

As we seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, we are encumbered by a legal mindset that keeps subtly corrupting our understanding of how God relates to us. God is intimately connected with all of us (and I mean saint and sinner alike) for we are all His offspring (Eph. 4:6). God relates to us according to His relationship to us and until we realize that how He relates to us constitutes our relationship to Him, we will not know how to relate to Him and we will suffer great confusion.

Just what is God's relationship to us and how does He relate to us? At the heart of our need to be reconciled to God is the need to relate to God in like manner as He relates to us. The Apostle Paul taught that our problem is that we have a mindset of enmity, alienation and hostility toward God (Col. 1:21). That is our mentality but, it is not God's. He relates to us with uninterrupted love, grace and friendship, for "He is kind to the ungrateful and wicked" (Lk. 6:35).

The reason we have not reached a meeting of minds concerning our mutual relationship is because we relate to God according to law, but God relates to us according to grace (Rom. 5:15-20; Eph. 2:8-10). Even believers who fancy that they are well versed in the preeminence of grace still have a substantial residue of legal mentality in their understanding of where the Lord is coming from. How did this parting of the way occur? It happened in Adam. God said, "Don't feed your mind from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (the law) You weren't made for it. It is alien to the nature I've given you and it will wreak havoc with all your systems, and, in fact, it'll kill you" (Paraphrase of Gen. 2:17).

Well, as you know, the serpent deceived Eve (II Cor. 11:3; I Tim. 2:14-15). Since Adam couldn't leave her to die alone, he ate the fruit, and because of this, we've had this dissonance in our dialogue with God. We came to know what God knows; that He is perfect and can't settle for our being anything less (Mat. 5:48). The problem with being like God, in that respect, is that it is a partial understanding of God, and as such it is more devastating than no knowledge at all.

To know that we must be perfect without knowing the grace that will perfect us, is to be pushed inevitably into deep resentment that issues in rebellion. I hope the reader knows that grace is not something that allows God to overlook our sin (Rom. 5:20-21; 6:14-15). Grace is God coming to us in our sin (Rom. 5:6, 8) and doing all that's necessary to bring us to the very perfection of God (Eph. 5:25-27; Col. 1:22; Phil. 2:13; Jude 24).

Recently I've received spoken and written messages that had a great deal of insight into how God Has done this in Christ; how, with us being in Christ, God has ended the reign of old man Adam through Christ's death and burial and has brought us forth, in Him, into newness of life that is fit to rise up to God Himself and join Him on His throne (Rom. 6: 3-4; 7:4; Eph. 2:6; Col. 3:1). Wonderful!!!! But, something disturbs me. I keep hearing words used that indicate that our understanding of that is still laced with the Adamic mentality.

Many are still saying that what occurred through the work of God, in Christ, which accrued to us since we were in Him, was a legal work. I keep hearing that we have a legal status before God, and that He legally crucified the old man and legally raised up a New Man. Somehow that falls short of Him REALLY doing it and it pulls God down to our mentality. The law that exists in the nature and mind of God is the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2).

What drives God is the desire to fill you with Himself and to cause you to commune in the perfection of His love. This is different than laying down a standard requiring us to live up to legislation. God, in Christ, does not relate to us legally but, Paternally and Fraternally. Law exists in the economy of God to serve as the blatant antithesis of what God is all about, so that its very antithetical nature will stir in us the desire to know Him as He really is.

In His atoning work in Christ, God was not meeting the demands of the law; He was carrying out the purpose of His love which was to deliver us from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10, 13) and to bring us to know Him by the mind of Christ (Rom. 12:2; I Cor. 2:16). Then, what did He mean when He said that He didn't come to destroy the law but, to fulfill it? (Matt. 5:17) He meant that the perfection of the law had come to them in His Person, not as legislative demand, but as fulfilling grace.

The grace of God had interwoven, even in the demands of the law, promises, that would be fulfilled in Christ. As my good friend, Jan Antonsson has said, the law was God's concession to the fallen (legalized) mind of man. It was God's way of contact with men until He could lead them out of it. I find it absolutely enthralling, that the Apostle Paul, who by the Spirit was the master of this subject, had as his old testament frame of reference, God's dealing with Abraham, which preceded and preempted the law. For the law was interjected until Christ would come (Gal. 3:16,19,24).

But with Abraham we see, not an interjection but, a line of relationship that leads one directly to the new covenant which fully discloses the heart of God, so much so that the Lord calls Abraham our father (Rom. 4: 12,16). What is so enthralling to me (and I had known the Lord and something of His grace for many years before seeing this) is that, when God came to Abraham, to give him those wonderful promises, He never mentions anything about a sin problem. No mention of any failure to live up to some moral standard, which at that point

would have existed subjectively in Abraham before the formal giving of the law.

The Lord simply comes to the man and tells him that He's going to bless him out of his socks (Gen. 22:17; 26:3; Heb. 6:14). There is no mention of a sin problem that would have to be addressed before God could even think of blessing him. God made promises to be indulgently good to Abe; Abe believed God, and it was reckoned unto Him as righteousness (Rom. 4:3; Gal. 3:6). Later on, as God, by His grace, brought Abraham to the point where He could sacrifice his son Isaac, the Lord told him he was ready for even greater promises since He had come to commune with God in the pain of slaying his Son of promise (Gen. 22:12, 16).

Many have imagined that stage of relationship with Abraham as being conditioned on his willingness to obey. But, they fail to realize that it was God who brought him to that place not some superior willing of obedience that lay in Abraham. God's relationship with Abraham was the exact opposite of the law. God's first posture toward him establishes the relationship and says in effect, "I'm going to bless you because I choose to and neither any sin in you or any righteousness in you is a determining factor" (Heb. 6:13-14).

When God says to Abraham, "because you have done this, I will bless you further still," the mature expositor of the Word knows that God is the "Because." He is the "Unconditional" behind every condition. When Christ died for us He was not paying dues to the law but, with love beyond measure, meeting us where we were in our mentality that said, "We demand justice. You let the serpent in the garden. You penned us all up in disobedience. The buck stops at your desk. You should pay" (Rom. 11:32). And pay He did.

"But none of the ransomed ever knew  
how deep were the waters crossed,  
nor how dark was the night  
that the Lord passed through  
ere He found His sheep that was lost."

We were lost in the darkness of our own minds at a level of subconscious despair much deeper than any psychologist has ever dreamed. Yet, He has delivered from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). Lord, renew our minds till every vestige of spiritual adultery is purged from us. We have been betrothed to Christ. Deliver us from returning to our former husband concerning whom we have died in Christ (Rom. 7:2-3).

That former husband of bondage which we carried within ourselves has been nailed to the tree with us. The certificate of debt has been canceled for we have the mind of Christ, not the mind of legal indebtedness. Stay tuned for further serious, seminal samplings.

Stay tuned for future serious, seminal samplings.

John Gavazzoni