

“Free to Receive from God”

Galatians 3: 26—4:7

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An Informal Relationship with God: Though we may know in our minds that God is near to us each day and lives in our hearts, many Christians still experience God as somewhat distant. Prayer to God on a daily basis and several times each day helps us receive from God and progressively experience God’s closeness.

In the Old Testament God is referred to in several places as ‘Father’ in relation to his people. This designation of God as Father certainly carries over into the New Testament. In the New Testament, in fact, there is a progression of the concept of God as Father. Jesus teaches directly to his disciples that they are to relate to God as their Father in heaven. In comparison to the New Testament where the fatherhood of God is a big deal, the Old Testament deals with it more as a minor doctrine. The address of God as ‘Father’ in the New Testament is a more familial/close relationship than implied in the Old Testament. We are New Testament people and are meant to relate to God the Father and God the Son in a close/more intimate way as children in a loving family address their parents.

27 As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. When you start your day, and plan to leave the house, it is important that you put on clothes. Each day we make the decision of what we will wear. Paul uses the image of clothes to make relevant to the Galatians that just as they put on clothes, they are to ‘put on’ Christ who they have received as Lord and Saviour in their Baptism. In putting on Christ, there is an intentionality to live our life covered or surrounded by Christ. As you would not leave your home without wearing clothes, don’t leave your home without Christ. Furthermore, similar to how others see your clothing immediately as you meet them, make Christ visible to others in your life. In other words, make the love of God clear in your life.

All are made in the image of God. As we go out ‘clothed with Christ’, we are to remember that others we meet on the street, in the grocery store, in traffic, are all holy and loved by God because they were made in God’s image. We can also say that God has both male and female attributes because we are all made in God’s image.

28 There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. As you go out clothed with Christ, you will have the ability to see others as God sees them – as dearly loved people made in his image. They are dearly loved by God – equally loved by God as we are –though they may not have accepted/received Christ in their heart. God’s love is called grace because it is unconditional on any reciprocal action by the one being loved.

29 And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring,^[a] heirs according to the promise. When we do not receive Christ, we are still equally loved by God in Christ Jesus, but remain under the confines of the law and not under the freedom of God’s Grace.

The freedom in receiving: We do not need to find God – God has come to us through Christ Jesus. We cannot earn our way to heaven and in so doing ascend closer to God. Rather, God has descended to us – comes to us in Jesus Christ. Our part is to receive the gift of his inheritance which is offered freely to all. How do we know we have received the gift of faith? How do we know it has gained traction in our lives? In our Bible study this week, we shared how one can see the evidence of receiving God’s grace. One person shared that they see a change of thinking and doing in their lives. Another once shared that they received God’s grace through a definite message from God. Another person received it (or caught it) through a Christian mentor in their life whose faith was clearly evident. It could be a combination of things. How have you received the gift of God’s grace? Perhaps without being aware, you have put up road blocks stopping the grace from penetrating further into your thoughts and actions? It is important to also remember that we are all on a journey growing in grace throughout our lives.

Freedom experienced in the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit has been given to each of us as a free gift to be our great comforter, our helper, our guide and our counselor. Prayer is always connected to the Holy Spirit. It states in Paul’s letter to the Romans (Romans 8) that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us when we do not have the words to say. Verse 6 of our Galatian reading today states, *“And because you are children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts crying, Abba Father!”* Our personal/close relationship with God is strengthened through the conduit of the Spirit. When we open the door to receive God in Jesus Christ, then the relationship grows. We can help one another do that. Each day we can make a habit and ask one another where we saw God? This daily reminder tunes us in to the presence of God and the gifts God provides.

People of God: Be free to receive from God. Don’t settle for living in the way of the law--limited by your own resources and strength. As God’s loved child, receive God’s grace freely given and move with increased confidence clothing yourself with Christ. Amen.