

CHRISTMAS 1
28 December 2008
Galatians 4:4-7 Adopted as Children of God

I once read that the way you see God shapes the way you see the church. If God is a teacher then church is a place of learning. If God is a policeman then church is about rules and regulations. If God is our Father then the church is about family.

How do you view this community we call church?

Each Christmas season I'm reminded that God sees us as family. Paul spells that out; "God sent his Son (*a family term*) born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive – a good education, rules to follow – no, so that he could adopt us as his very own children" (Gal. 4:5 Living Bible) This says to me that God is interested in growing a family.

In Jesus he has paid what it cost for us to be his legal children. As his children he invites us to call him – Mr God – hardly. He has 'sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out 'Abba Father'." (Gal. 4:6) Jesus was born that we might call God, Dad. God yearns for that close intimate relationship of Father and child.

Each Christmas season I'm reminded that God has given his life that I might be his son, that we might be his children. We are the children he loves. And he loves to hear us call him 'Abba Father', Dad. God paid for this with the life of his Son Jesus. That's how much God loves you and eagerly desires to hear you call him 'Dad'. That's how much God eagerly desires his family to love each other celebrating life together with him.

It saddens any parent's heart when their children fight and the family is stressed. That's not my goal as a father, and it certainly isn't our Heavenly Father's goal. He's given his all that we know we are loved and precious to him, and treat each other the same way, growing at his children and as his family to maturity – reflecting the very nature of Christ in all we say and do.

God's not my teacher, he's not a policeman, he is my dad. He's adopted me and has taught me to call him dad.

When kids are young often the first words they learn are 'mum mum' or 'dad dad'. And those simple words bring joy to their parents.

When Jesus' disciples asked him to teach them how to pray, what was his answer? The first two words; 'Our Father'. Call me 'Dad' you're my loved child who I'm over the moon about. That was God's response when you were baptised, when you were officially adopted as his child. A day of great celebration to God – another child who will call me 'Dad' and share life with me. That's God's great joy to share his life with his children. That they grow closer together as they grow in loving each other and knowing the love their Father has for them.

As God's legally adopted children we're not just left to our own devices, we're not left to bring ourselves up. That's 'Good News'. Our Dad loves us, and wants his children to grow up healthy and strong, to grow up well adjusted knowing the difference between right and wrong, growing to become mature adults who know how to live and love just like their old-man.

Every Christmas season I'm reminded that God, my Heavenly Father has totally invested himself in loving his family, that they might grow to become all that he has dreamed possible. Why would we want to sell ourselves short, just living by what everyone else says is possible?

Paul later in Galatians spells out the difference between growing to maturity and being spoilt.

"It is obvious what kind of life develops out of trying to get your own way all the time: repetitive, loveless, cheap sex; a stinking accumulation of mental and emotional garbage; frenzied and joyless grabs for happiness; trinket gods; magic-show religion; paranoid loneliness; cutthroat competition; all-consuming-yet-never-satisfying wants; a brutal temper; an impotence to love or be loved; divided homes and divided lives; small-minded and lopsided pursuits; the vicious habit of depersonalizing

everyone into a rival; uncontrolled and uncontrollable addictions; ugly parodies of community; I could go on.” (Gal. 5:19-20 Msg)

This is NOT what our Heavenly Father, our Dad has dreamed for his precious children. This isn't what he's given his life for. This doesn't reflect the maturity he so passionately seeks his children to grow in. This certainly doesn't reflect the richness of life Dad has dreamed for you, his precious child.

Paul continues; “This isn't the first time I have warned you, you know. If you use your freedom this way, you will not inherit God's kingdom.

But what happens when we live God's way? He brings gifts into our lives, much the same way that fruit appears in an orchard – things like affection for others, exuberance about life, serenity. We develop a willingness to stick with things, a sense of compassion in the heart, and a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people. We find ourselves involved in loyal commitments, not needing to force our way in life, able to marshal and direct our energies wisely.” (Gal. 5:22 Msg)

As children of God, our Dad has such high hopes and amazing dreams for us. There's so much living Dad wants to share with you, to enjoy with you, to experience together with you. It certainly would be a shame to waste it on selfish consuming.

Dad doesn't only come at Christmas time with gifts to enjoy, but he comes daily wanting to flood our lives with gift to enjoy. He comes daily that we might unwrap life lived as his precious children, dearly loved by him. Our Dad comes daily that we might unwrap the gift of maturity as we grow more and more to reflect Jesus. Reflecting our family character in all that we say and do, bringing great joy to Dad.

Let us pray.

Dad, thanks for adopting me. Thank you for not leaving me to drag myself up, but that you guide and direct me through the Holy Spirit. Forgive me when I've been stubborn, rebellious, determined to do things my way. Give me ears to hear you speak and a heart to joyfully obey, doing your will, living faithfully as a member of your family. Thank you for Jesus, may I

grow to be more and more like him, growing in maturity, giving you a good reputation and keeping our family reputation sound. Amen.