

2 Corinthians 4 (Part 1): 1-6 • The light of the knowledge of the glory of God

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2 Corinthians chapter 4, we're going to read the first 6 verses here. See what the Lord has for us.

It says, "Therefore, having this ministry by the mercy of God, we do not lose heart. ² But we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God.

³ And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. ⁴ In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. ⁵ For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. ⁶ For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." (ESV)

All right, let's stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, open our hearts. Open our hearts, Jesus, just as You talk about, Lord, through Your servant Paul in this passage. Shine the light, the illuminating light of Your Spirit in our hearts to help us to understand what the scripture says today.

Help us, Lord, to be guided by Your Spirit. Help us to be teachable today as well.

Lord, we humble ourselves before You that we might learn, that we might grow. Our flesh says, I already know, I know enough.

I pray Father God that in humility, we would sit at Your feet today and hear Your voice. We ask it in Jesus precious name, amen.

Going into this chapter, and frankly this is a reminder for all of the Book of 2 Corinthians, I want to just tell you again, that this whole letter is a one sided conversation between the apostle Paul and the church at Corinth. And we don't have the other side of the conversation and that makes it challenging from time to time.

As I was studying through this chapter to bring it to you, there's a lot of things I read here and I go, what in the world is he saying? And the reason we feel that way is because many times it's our best guess to figure out why Paul is saying what he's saying. We don't really know, we hear what he's saying, but we're not really sure why he's saying it.

In other words, is he responding to a comment that he got? Or a question maybe in one of the letters that he received from the Corinthians? Maybe he's responding to a comment that Titus made. Remember, Titus had been sent to Corinth with the letter, the very stern letter that Paul wrote to that church, and then Paul met with Titus later on to hear how things had been received. Maybe Titus said something that just stuck in Paul's mind, and now he's writing, making reference to it.

Sometimes we just don't, we don't know and that means that a lot of what Paul says in this letter are statements that are sometimes challenging to understand the context. Just like you're listening again to one person on the phone and you can't hear the other person on the other end of the line and you're trying to put together a picture of what is happening, what conversation...

Well if you're like me, you're trying to put together an idea of the... Sue teases me all the time in restaurants and stuff, because I listen to other people while we're eating out, at least as best I can. And she'll be talking to me, and then she'll finally say to me, okay, what's going on over at that table? And I say, well, he just got back from Germany, and she's..., anyway.

But it's really difficult if you can't hear both sides and we can't hear the Corinthians side of this conversation. And I want to remind you of that because this can be a challenging letter to read through. But in and amidst of all of the things that Paul says here, he's going to repeatedly make statements and you probably noticed some here in these first 6 verses, that are going to resonate with our hearts.

And even though we may not know both sides of the conversation, we have enough from Paul's side to piece together an idea of what was going on and we can certainly understand what he was saying to them. And we remember that

the Jewish legalists had infiltrated the church in Corinth. They came after Paul had been there for a while and now they were criticizing Paul, and they were criticizing his message.

And so Paul is writing this letter to address those criticisms, to appeal to the believers for the love that he has for them, and for the truth of the message that he shared with them.

And by the way, before we get into these verses, we know that where these Jewish legalists started, because it's actually recorded for us in the Book of Acts. If you look with me in Acts, don't turn there, I'll put it up on the screen for you. It's in Acts chapter 15. Look here. It says,

Acts 15:1-2 (NIV1984)

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and they were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question."

Some men came down from Judea to Antioch (because Antioch was the happening place there for a while for the church) and they were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." (that was their message, right? And it tells us here that) This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question."

Now, you can read all about that in the Book of Acts. How they went to Jerusalem and they said, okay, what about this? Do we need to be telling Gentiles that they need to be circumcised? And they discussed it. And Peter got up and talked, and James got up and talked, and Paul got up and talked. Paul and Barnabas talked about the grace of God that had met them on their missionary journey so far. And so on and so forth.

And basically Peter got up and ended up the thing and said, listen, we're not going to tell these Gentiles anything more than what is the essence of the gospel? Believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved. We're not going to put any yoke of legalism on them regarding what else is necessary, right, for salvation. Now you would think that would end it, wouldn't you?

It's like, well, they went and they had talked with the council, and Peter got up and who's going to dispute with Peter. And Paul was giving his opinion and they told everybody. And so..., in fact, they the council even wrote a letter that Paul distributed to the churches when he went back out to tell them, hey, listen, this is not necessary. It's believe in Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

You would think that would be the end of it, but it wasn't the end of it. Those legalists obviously continued to disagree, and not only did they disagree, we know from Paul's other letters like Colossians and Galatians that those legalists added to the regulations they were telling people. It went beyond circumcision.

They were telling them they had to keep food laws. They were telling him they had to keep special days, keeping specifically the Sabbath and all the other special days that were part of, the Jewish way of doing things according to the Old Covenant. And they were passing these... And so this is what was going on and this is what Paul was fighting against because those statements by the Jewish legalists fundamentally changed the Gospel.

Remember what Paul said to the Galatians? He said, you know what you get when you take the gospel and you add to it? You get no gospel at all. You don't get Jesus plus something else, you get nothing. You get a gospel that is no good news any longer, right?

That's what Paul is dealing with and by the way, that's why in the previous chapter which we covered last week, Paul took time to actually contrast the Old Covenant with the New Covenant.

He talked about the Old Covenant as having the ministry of death. He talked about the New Covenant, the life of the Spirit, the ministry of the Spirit, having the ministry of life. And he made the point that all the law can really do is condemn us. Condemn us to death, but that the ministry of the Spirit through the gospel, gives us life.

And so having established that contrast between the Old and the New Covenant, Paul now says here in verse 1 of the verses that we're looking at today.

“Therefore, having this ministry...” And he's talking about the ministry of the Spirit. In other words, having the message of the Gospel, that's for you and I, right?

He says, therefore, having the message of the Gospel by the mercy of God. And let's never forget that it's through the mercy of God. He says, *“we don't lose*

heart.” And that phrase about losing heart essentially means, we don't give up. We don't give up.

Instead, he says, verse 2, “...*we have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways.* (he says) *We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with*” the Word of God and so forth.

It's pretty obvious that Paul's saying these things because he's attempting to draw a contrast between his own ministry to the Corinthians and that of the Jewish legalists who came there, whom he called false brothers and were criticizing his message.

In other words, Paul is saying here, he's saying everything we've told you guys has been said and done in a very simple and clear way without any attempt to deceive you, without any evasive answers.

You ever had somebody, you're asking them questions about something and they just evade the question. They give you all, they'll go all the way around the bramble bush without actually talking about the subject you really want to talk about. He says, we've renounced that stuff. And he says we've renounced even playing fast and loose with the Word of God. It's easy to do, particularly by taking a verse out of context and making it mean something that it really was never intended to mean.

And he says, the only thing that we did with you Corinthians is we gave you an upfront, simple, clear presentation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And I like that reminder because that's a reminder to you and I, that we don't... Listen, we don't have to get all fancy and we don't have to know all kinds of big words and understand deep theological meanings necessarily to just make a simple presentation of the Gospel.

I mean, honestly, I can share the gospel in 10 seconds, and it doesn't take long. Not that you're going to limit every presentation to 10 seconds, but it's so simple, it doesn't take long. Jesus died for the sins of the world. If you accept and receive Him as your Savior, you will be forgiven and born again.

Now, everything we basically talk about from that point forward, we're just adding just some understanding, maybe increasing the dynamic of understanding, but the essence of it isn't going to change. There's nothing really else to add, and that's what Paul is saying. He says our gospel that came to you was just incredibly simple. I just laid it out for you.

And then he says in verse 3, he says, “... *even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing.*” He says, “*in their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.*”

This is the interesting point about what Paul is saying here. He's saying, in fact, the way I presented the gospel to you was so simple, so clear, so open, that if there is any veiled essence to what my gospel is, it's only veiled because people have closed their minds by running after the things of the world.

At which Paul, by the way, you can see, he ascribes to the work of the enemy. He says that the enemy has blinded their minds so they can't see the gospel. Who are those who have been blinded? It's those who choose to be blinded.

You can't look at this verse and say, well, well that's obviously why people can't come to the Lord, they've been blinded. I mean, that seems like a pretty good excuse for not coming to Jesus, right? I couldn't come to Jesus, I'd been blinded. The enemy blinded me. There's really no reason that God should punish me. I'd been blinded. I had nothing to do with it.

That's not what Paul is saying here. He's not saying that, there's these people who God just blinded and they're blind. I mean, well, they can't see because they're blind. A blind person can't see. He's not saying that.

He's talking about people who have been drawn away from the Lord or away from thinking about the Lord, or even pondering or contemplating the things of the Lord, and they're just so distracted and drawn away to the things of this world, the things of this life, the life of the flesh, they've become so enamored by the pleasures of sin. That Satan has used their desire to draw them further into their sin, away from the Lord, and into that place where they are now blinded, right?

They are now in a position of blindness, but it's not just this arbitrary thing where God says, okay, you're going to be blind, you're going to see, you're going to be blind, you're going to see. That's not what's going on here.

First of all, you need to understand that people can be saved and then still be blinded to various things. And you need to understand too that it is possible for somebody to be blind and then to turn to the Lord and have that blindness removed. Again, why are people blind? Look at this passage from John chapter 3, verse 19. This gives some great insight. This is Jesus.

John 3:19 (ESV)

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil.

And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, (but why haven't people seen the light?) and people (because they) loved the darkness rather than the light (right? They love the darkness, that's why they become blind. Because their love was for the darkness, and so they refused to look at the light. They chose not to look at the light) because their works were evil.

And they didn't want to come into the light because, it's pretty obvious, nobody wants to be exposed. But I want to remind you again here. Just because somebody has been blinded, that doesn't mean they can't turn to Christ and then receive their sight. Right?

Many of us here today could stand up and say, that's me, that's me. I was blind and now, I see. You remember how that happens? Paul said it. He talked about it in the last chapter. Instead of having you turn back, let me show you. Right up here from 2 Corinthians 3:16.

2 Corinthians 3:16 (ESV)

...when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

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And the blindness is gone. What does it take? It takes us turning to the Lord. And then, that blindness is gone because the veil is removed. And by the way, that's why we pray for people to have that veil removed. That's part of our prayer process, right? When we're praying for loved ones, family members and so forth who are unsaved. We're saying, God, just remove the veil.

Most of the time what we pray for people is that they would be so miserable that they would turn to the Lord. Because often isn't that what it takes? I mean, how many of you, you don't need to raise your hand or anything but how many of you had to go through just a life shattering a circumstance in order to get you to even think about the things of God?

I think that probably many of us went through that sort of a situation. I've told you, how many times have I told you that after Sue and I had been married for 5 years, our marriage failed miserably. I mean, hit a wall and it was one of the

most painful things I have ever endured in my life. And I'm not even sure why I thought it was painful because I saw it coming.

It's funny human nature being what it is, we can watch something heading full, steam toward a wall and just sit there until it hits, you know what I mean? And we just sit and just, and then kalami (catastrophe) and then all of a sudden we're all just (Pastor Paul screams). Rather than being the wise, prudent man that the Proverbs talks about, who sees danger from afar, and does something about it. (Proverbs 22:3)

That wasn't me at all. I watched as that freight train just got faster and faster, and then it hit the wall and life just absolutely exploded into pieces. But as I look back on that now, I'm thankful. I'm actually thankful for the devastation that occurred in our lives and even in our marriage at that time because it caused us both to turn to Jesus.

We turned to Him. We turned to the Lord. And when that happened, when we turned to Him, the veil was taken away. The blindness was taken away. And we could see. And we could suddenly see what we had done with our marriage and done with our... Oh Lord, what have we done? And we realized how idiotic our lives were from the standpoint of how we were living them, and the things we were doing, and things we had allowed into our hearts that were devastating and destructive. Because the light came on, the light came and the blinders were off. You guys know about this. You've been through it.

Now, some of you were raised in a Christian home, and you never, maybe you never went through a devastating sort of a circumstance to bring you to the Lord. I'm not saying that has to happen. Don't sit here and go, gee, I wish I had a devastating circumstance too. That's not the point of what I'm saying.

I believe with all of my heart, you can be raised from your earliest days to know Christ, and never have to go through the devastation of that sort of a thing in order to have the Lord get your attention, and you can be just great.

But for the vast majority of us, we had to go down idiotsville, to really come to that place of really having our heart opened up by the Lord. And, I want you to notice that it's Jesus who opens the heart.

Look again with me at verse 6, if you would please. He says, *“For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”* This verse, it's

a little bit wordy, but it, this is a description of what happens when you turn to the Lord.

We talked about it in communion, but when you turn to the Lord, then it... Paul uses the example of the light of creation which began to shine on a particular day; the first day, as a matter of fact. He refers to that as it being what it's like to come to Christ.

He he says the same God who said on the very first day of creation, "*let there be light*" is the God who shines that same light into your hearts. Now, not the same light of the sun, S-U-N, but the light of the Son, S-O-N, right? That is shined or shown into our hearts that we might understand, that we might be illuminated and so forth.

And He gives us, what Paul calls here, "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.*" Now think about that phrase. When you come to Christ, you receive "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.*" Ooh, wow, what does that mean? I mean it sounds a little theological or a little bit fancy.

Basically means you were in darkness and you were brought into the light. By the way, the darkness that you and I lived in, that I lived in until I was about 25 years old, and that I walked in, is not the light, or is not the darkness of a room with no light bulbs, or the dark of night here in this... It's not a natural darkness.

It's a spiritual darkness, and it envelops us, and it keeps us from knowing God and knowing His love, and what he's done for us. It keeps us. But when we come to Christ, the light is dispelled. Do you remember what Jesus said about the light? Let me put a passage up from John chapter 8. I love this one. It says,

John 8:12 (ESV)

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Again Jesus spoke to them, saying, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

Now He's not talking there again about a natural light. He's talking about a supernatural light that we can walk in, that we do walk in when we come to Christ. But He says you'll "*have the light of life.*"

Now it's a very neat verse, isn't it? "*Have the light of life.*" Do you know how many Christians never ever get around to asking the question, what is the light of life? What is it? What's the light of life?

Well, it's obviously not something you turn on from a lamp. The light of life. That's what Paul's talking about here in 2 Corinthians, in the first part of this chapter, when he talks about how God has shown His light into our hearts to give us "*the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.*" That is the light of life. "*The light of the knowledge of the glory of God.*" And it's basically what we call knowing God.

Just try to explain knowing God to somebody. Have you ever tried? We tell people, Hey man, you just really need to know God and they go, what's that? I don't know. I mean, we know. When you're saved, when you're born again, you know what it is to know God, but just try to explain it to somebody. It really defies human explanation, but it is a very real experience that causes a person to understand the things of the Lord.

And how exactly does it take place? Well, we know, excuse me, that the knowledge of the Lord comes through the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, it's through the agency of the Holy Spirit who actually turns the light on in an individual when they come to Christ? Well, it's God, the Holy Spirit. He's the one who comes and does the work, right?

But I want you to notice how this knowledge is seen. Again, if you look at verse 6 with me again, you'll notice that it speaks of the light of the knowledge of the glory of God. Look at the last words, "*in the face of Jesus Christ.*" Did you catch that?

You and I have received the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, but where do we receive it? How do we receive it? Again, it's through the agency of the Holy Spirit, but it's as we look into the face of Jesus. It is literally the knowledge of God is in the face of Jesus. Okay? Let's not forget that. It's in His face that we have the knowledge of God.

Do you guys remember when Jesus was talking to His disciples just before His crucifixion about the coming of the Holy Spirit and the work that the Holy Spirit would do. He talked about some of the things that the Holy Spirit would do. Let me show you this one from John chapter 16 verse 14. Jesus says,

John 16:14 (ESV)

He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

He (the Holy Spirit) will glorify me, (here's why) for he will take what is mine and declare it to you.

Okay? Here's what Jesus says, the Holy Spirit, when He comes, is going to take from what is mine and He's going to reveal it to you. All right.

What is it that belongs to Jesus? What is it that belongs to Jesus that gets revealed to you and I? Well, to answer that question, you go to, and I'll put this up, Hebrews chapter 1. Should be Hebrews, chapter 1. Did I not put that there? Okay. All right. Well, let me read it for you. Listen to this, you guys, very important.

“The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being...” (Hebrews 1:3) What does Jesus have that the Holy Spirit reveals to us? The light of the knowledge of God. He is the exact representation of God the Father. What Jesus reveals in His face, in other words, looking upon His face in the sense of knowing Him, is to be illuminated with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

That's what Paul's talking about here in second Corinthians, *“the light of the knowledge of the glory of God.”* This is what Jesus gives us when we come to Him and accept Him. And that's what we... We talk about this in a lot of different ways. We talk about the light being turned on in somebody's heart, and you can see it.

As a teacher, I've watched it. I've watched people come to church who literally came in darkness. Who sat in a chair, sometimes in it for years, sometimes for years, and then, and they just keep hearing the Word of God, and so on and so forth. And then suddenly, it's like I make eye contact with them one day and I can see the light. You know what I mean?

It's really exciting. I can see the light in their eyes and they're just like, I get it. And it's not that they have come to a place of intellectual knowledge where they've gone, oh, like algebra or something, which I never got. I don't know about you, I went through algebra, I got tutored by an algebra teacher one on one and I still didn't get it. I hated algebra. As much as I tried to understand it, I just couldn't get it.

That's not what we're talking about as it relates to understanding the knowledge of God. It's when we open our hearts finally to Him and He shines His light within our hearts and we understand who He is. We know Him. We know God.

And that's what we say to unbelievers. You need to know God, like I know God. And they don't understand what that means. Fundamentally, you don't really understand what that means. And you can't explain it, but you know what it is to know God. You know why? Because the Holy Spirit has taken up residence in you. And now you know Him in a very intimate way.

Do you understand that this was prophesied way before the New Covenant came. Way before God brought the Holy Spirit. You understand that the Holy Spirit could not come and reside in an individual until the New Covenant, right? Do you know why?

See, people in the Old Testament didn't, they were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit came upon people, but He never indwelt them. Right? Why? The vessel had not yet been cleansed. It was not until the vessel was cleansed through the blood of Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit could now come in to indwell an individual. Which is why Jesus came on the very night of His resurrection, met with His disciples in that little locked room where they were all hiding, and it says, He breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit. (John 20:22)

This was the very first time mankind was receiving as the indwelling presence God's Holy Spirit in their lives. And it was just, I mean, how cool it is just for Jesus probably to sit there and watch the light come on in these guys, like, dang! It's just amazing.

But this was prophesied! This was prophesied hundreds of years before it took place. Let me show you where it was prophesied. Jeremiah chapter 31. Here's, this is God speaking through Jeremiah. He says,

Jeremiah 31:34 (ESV)

“...no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”

“...no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, (hey!) ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD.”

Do you guys understand that the word, know, that is translated here can also be referred to in a physical way. It can actually refer to sexual intimacy between a man and a woman. Now it's not talking about sexual intimacy here, but it is referring to intimacy. It's referring to an incredible intimacy, whereby, as we

come to faith in Jesus, we are given the illuminating knowledge of the glory of God. What Paul's talking about here in 2 Corinthians.

We have received the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And it was prophesied hundreds of years ahead of time. God said, listen, you're not going to have to walk up to somebody anymore and say, know the Lord. They're all going to know me. He's talking about those all who come to faith in Christ.

Now, He's not saying there's not going to be any need for teachers to teach the Word of God. But we're not going to teach the knowledge of God in the sense. Do you understand that I cannot teach the knowledge of God to somebody? As a teacher, I can't. It's not possible for me to teach somebody the knowledge of God who has not been illuminated by the Spirit.

If I were sitting in front of a bunch of people right now who did not know Christ and had not been illuminated by the Spirit, I would be just going, wonk, wonk, wonk, wonk, and nobody would get it. They all go, oh, that's really exciting, thank you for that. And they would walk away unchanged.

Do you understand people that the reason that when we sit down and open up the scripture, like here on a Sunday morning or a Wednesday night, the reason you walk away fed is because you've been illuminated with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

And because of that illuminating knowledge, you now have the ability to see and understand spiritual truths. You have a hat rack in your life where you can hang all this stuff and make use of it. But unbelievers don't have that.

That's why Paul says the man without the Spirit cannot understand the things of the Spirit. They're foolishness to him, right? It's foolish, it's foolish. What's this bozo talking about? He just doesn't have the Spirit. There's no illuminating presence of God's life in him whereby he can say, yes, that's true. Right? It's all because of the Spirit. Guys, we cannot overestimate the power and the necessity of having God's Holy Spirit in our lives.

Now the Holy Spirit comes, as for two primary functions in our lives as believers. First he comes to indwell, and that's what happens when we accept Christ as our Savior. He comes to take up residence, literally within us, glorious. God lives in me. Praise God.

But next He comes to do another work and that's to empower. And that's why you see that in the end of the Book of John, first Jesus breathes on them and says, receive the Holy Spirit. Then He says, now guys, don't run off halfcocked because in just a few days, you're going to receive power from the Holy Spirit so stay here in Jerusalem until you have been clothed with power from on high.

That's what happened in Acts chapter 2, when they were all sitting together praying and the Holy Spirit went boom!, and just fell on them. And there was just this expression of power that caused people to come running. What in the world is this noise, this sound. And we hear these people praising God in our own native languages and they don't even know these languages and so forth. It was a powerful experience.

You see, there's this work of the Spirit that God wants to do in our lives. What we're focusing on here so far in first, in 2nd Corinthians is the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It's knowing Him. It's knowing Him through Jesus Christ.

And He wants you to know Him. He knows you. He wants you to know Him. If you've come to know Christ as your Savior, if you've opened your heart to Him as your Savior, then you have that light of the knowledge of the glory of God.

If you haven't opened your heart to the Savior, then for you it's not there. But all it takes is for you to invite Him. Yet to all who received Him, remember we said that in communion? To all who believed on His name, He gave the right to become children of God. (John 1:12)

You don't become a child of God because you were born in a Christian family, or you read your Bible, or even go to church.

You become a child of God because you receive Jesus Christ.