

Title: Christians: What kind of people?

Ephesians Chapter 2: v.1-7

Self-introduction

Several **months** ago when I met Pastor Alistair for the first time, he invited me to preach a message here at OIC, when he is absent for furlough in England. This is my first time to preach in English in Japan.

I have been a pastor of a church in Hirakata, Osaka for 35 years. And then I retired in this March.

I liked English ever since I started to learn it in junior-high school. I dreamed of studying abroad. But I haven't had such a chance. So I say, "My English is 'Made in Japan.'"

Please forgive me for I will make many mistakes.

Read Ephesians Chapter 2:v.1-7 in NIV

¹As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, ² in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. ³All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

My title is "Christians: What kind of people?"

Now, most of you are Christians. You might say, "I've been a Christian for many years. I know what it is to be a Christian very well. So, I don't have to listen to this message!"

Now what kind of people are Christians?

When asked, we will probably answer this way.

Christians are:

No1. Believing in Jesus Christ as Savior. So all our sins are forgiven and therefore we are saved and have the eternal life with God.

No2. Being saved, we will surely go to heaven or the Kingdom of God when we die.

You may add,

No3. "We have the Holy Spirit or the Spirit of God living within us.

These probably are the main things that we would answer.

Yes, these are all true, as the Bible promises.

But, I think, the Bible says even more than these in today's passage.

1. Before we become a Christian v.1-3

Now, in v.1-3 we see what kind of people we were before we became a Christian.

¹you were dead in your transgressions and sins

This means that even if we were alive and physically and mentally very active, our spirit was dead. Now, what is the function of our spirit? When we read the Bible, I think we come to know that our human spirit functions to interact or fellowship with God. So, if our spirit is dead, we cannot feel God nor interact with Him. People say, "I do not feel anything about God. So there is no God." This is not the sign that there is no

God. But this is the sign that their spirit is dead.

²you followed the ways of this world

“this world” means, people not knowing the true God.

Following the ways of life of the people who don't not know God.

²you followed the ways (of this world and) of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient.

Here, “the ruler” and “the spirit” are in singular, so these cannot be just the evil spirits but their head, Satan. Not knowing God, we sought what we like, what delights us, what we feel safe with. Satan’s purpose is keep people away from God. So by simply following our desires, we were following Satan.

³Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of (God’s) wrath.

We were in this state. But God intervened into our life.

From verse 4 and on, the subject is God.

2. What kind of people are Christians v.4-7

⁴But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,

⁵made us alive in Christ even when we were dead in transgressions

This means that before we believed in Christ, our spirit was dead and so, we could not know God nor feel Him. But when we believe in Jesus as our Savior, our sins are all pardoned and we have God’s life in our spirit, and we can know God and we can communicate with Him and feel His love.

I have seen Christians once believing in Jesus soon have a conviction that “I am saved by Christ, because I believed in Him!” I have officiated a number of funeral services of our church members. These people, coming close to the end of their life here on earth, I did not have to persuade them that “You can go to heaven because you believed in Jesus.” In every case, each one had the peace and conviction within that they will go to heaven to be with God.

I have met and talked with many non-Christian people in my life, sometimes even argued with them. I have not known anyone with a confidence that they are saved or that they can go to heaven. I met many religious people. However, I have never met a person with the peace that they are saved or have the assurance that they can go to heaven. The situation is the same with the religious people who call themselves “Jehovah Witness.” Many of them say, “I dedicate myself in this practice because I want to be saved. If I stop doing it, I will not be saved. So I keep doing this.”

Christians assurance of being saved may be quiet but it comes from God. So it is powerful. God sustains the peace of being saved in our heart.

I hear sometimes Christians say, “I will surely go to heaven but probably I will sit at the edge of heaven.” This, I think, is an honest confession that “I have not been a good Christian. So I am not worthy to be close to the center of heaven. But anyhow I can surely go to heaven.”

Now, for verse 6. What did God do for us?

⁶God raised us up with Christ

After Christ was crucified and killed, on the third day, God raised him from the dead. With that same power, God raised our spirit and put God's life into our spirit when we believed and accepted Christ as our Savior.

Verse 6 goes on.

⁶God raised us with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,

Therefore, we are already sitting with Jesus in heaven even while we live here on earth. In the New Testament Greek, 'seated us with' is just one word. This picturizes that we are sitting together with Jesus, side by side with Him in heaven. If so, we would be overwhelmed with his love and compassion, his tender heart and his passion for lost people. Also we would be overwhelmed with the glory of God that fills heaven.

But, does this happen when we live here on earth as Christians?

Years ago, this statement of verse 6 puzzled me.

When Christians die, their spirits go to heaven to be with Christ, right?

But this passage says, "God ...seated (in a past tense) us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,"

This should mean that when we believed in Jesus, God seated us with Christ in heaven, already?

Is this correct?

Being a pastor, for many years, I explained it this way. "Christians can go to heaven when they die. This is very certain. So it is stated as if it is an already happened fact. Therefore it is mentioned in the past tense." Is my interpretation right? Probably not.

I kept pondering this issue.

Then I came to realize that there is a clue, in Paul's prayer right before this passage, namely, Chapter 1: v.16-19

Read in NIV

¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers. ¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. ¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, ¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength,

¹⁶I have not stopped giving thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers.

Paul did not stop giving thanks and praying, here for the Ephesian Christians.

Now what did he pray? Paul did not stop praying this prayer, so this must be a very important prayer.

¹⁷I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better.

Paul keeps asking that God may give them the Holy Spirit. But, they are Christians. So they already have the

Holy Spirit. So, Paul's prayer means that the Holy Spirit within them may reveal them God Himself so that they can know Him better.

Paul's prayer continues.

¹⁸I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people,

That they may know the hope and glorious riches that they inherit. He constantly prays this prayer.

¹⁹and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength,

Verse 19 tells us that God's incomparable great power is working for Christians. And God's mighty strength is in that power. So they may know it is the essence of Paul's constant prayer.

I think this verse implies that there are two types of Christians.

Type 1: God's mighty power is working in them and they know it.

Type 2: God's mighty power is working in them but they do not know it.

So, since in every Christian, God's mighty power is working within, Paul's prayer is for those who do not know that they may know it for themselves. For this he constantly prays.

I became a Christian over 40 years ago. I was so glad because I was saved. Then I started to grow as a Christian. But within just a few years, the growth slowed down. I saw the Christians around, I saw their growth also slowed down in a few years after they became Christians. Was that your experience, too?

In my denomination, we have a small seminary. Pastors teach the classes. I teach Pastoral Theology(牧会学). This deals with how Christians grow in their faith. In the class I ask this question to the students. Do Christians keep growing continually at a good pace after they become Christians, or does their growth slow down after a certain period? The students' answer is, usually, "Christians growth slows down in 2-3 years after they become a Christian." I agree with them.

I know of a Christian who was earnest but often had conflicts with others. This annoyed others and me. I complained to God. "God, he is a Christian. Why is it that he does not grow for many years in this aspect?" This problem lingered with me for many years. Then I slowly realized that Paul is constantly praying for Christians to grow in their faith mightily. Why shouldn't I just pray for this person? Then on occasions I started to pray following Paul. "Lord, help him, so that he may know you much, much better. And also, I may know you much much better and we together be filled with your Holy Spirit as if we are sitting together with Jesus." Then soon after that I sensed that he was being changed little by little. I occasionally prayed for him and for me. I realized he was continuing to be changed in the course of a few years. I know now that he is a people-loving, humble and dedicated Christian. I am simply overwhelmed with what God did for him and for me.

I know of a Christian couple who often started quarrelling. Seeing them I often sighed, "they are Christians for many years but why is it that their marriage relation is so divisive." After many years I started to pray for the couple so that God might show His presence in the couple, and in me also. God started to change the couple. After a few years, I heard a person say about the couple, "**Oh, that couple are the happiest couple in the church.**" I praised God for what He did.

Now Ephesians Chapter 2 :v.7.

⁷in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his

kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

When are 'the coming ages?'

Paul wrote this letter in about AD 60. So 'the coming ages' mean any time after this in the first century, and also in the 2nd century, the 3rd century, also 20th century, and even in this 21st century. In any age, God "might show the incomparable riches of his grace" in what way? The previous verse, "God raised us up with Christ and seated us (together) with him."

We are still here on earth, but Jesus is always sitting together with us, side by side, so closely and wants to show Himself and His abundance.

What kind of people are Christians?

Believing in Christ Jesus and saved.

Sitting closely together with Christ in heaven already.

Therefore, we are with Him, and walk with Him, and talk with Him, so that He may reveal His abundance on us and through us, that people around us may know His glory shines through us day by day.