

Self-introduction

My name is Junichi Fujino. I was a pastor of a Mennonite Brethren church in Hirakata, Osaka for 35 years. Then I retired. I still live in Hirakata and I am now a part-time pastor of a same denomination church in Komaki, a northern suburb of Nagaya for three years. Three years ago, Pastor Alistair asked me to preach here, at OIC, for the first time. I am glad to be invited again. But, to preach in English is really a challenge for me. I think I will make many mistakes. You might say, "O-oh, we don't say it that way." Please forgive me.

Let me pray.

Dear Father, I thank you that you have led me to share your Words here at OIC. I pray that you would speak to us and teach us to know you better and live according to your Words. I pray in Jesus' name.

This morning, I would like to focus on a prayer that Apostle Paul prayed.

Read Ephesians 3:14-19 in ESV

¹⁴For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

In this passage, Paul bows down his knees and prays.

I sometimes prayed this way. "Dear God, I'm kneeling down and humbling down myself before you this way. I am praying earnestly. So, please listen to my prayer!"

But Paul was not trying to appeal to God this way.

He was just marveled and overwhelmed by the greatness and splendor of God, the Father. So he knelt and prayed.

His prayer itself starts with verse 16.

The prayer content, No.1,

1. You may be strengthened according to the riches of God's glory. 3:16

Let me read verse 16.

¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

This prayer is not that "I have this much of faith, or I'm working so hard, so please answer to my prayer!" It does not mention any conditions we ought to fulfill. Paul just sees Who God is. And he prays, "According to the riches of God's glory, you may be strengthened."

How much is God's glory. Of course, much greater than the Sun and even greater than the whole universe.

Paul prays that “according to the riches of his glory you may be strengthened.”

Is it possible that we may be strengthened according to the riches of God’s glory? If so, we would just have to explode.

Now, isn’t this a huge scale prayer.

Today’s title is, “An ordinary prayer.” But this prayer is far from ordinary. Even unimaginably big scale prayer.

And here, in this verse,

“he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,”

What is our “inner being”?

Let’s turn to Second Corinthians 4:16,

2 Corinthians 4:16

¹⁶So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day.

What is our “outer self” or “outer being”? Of course, our physical body is so. Since our body is seen from outside and is wasting away little by little.

Then, how about our mental part or mind?

After I retired, I feel that my mental capacity is becoming weaker gradually. I find it hard to actively keep on doing something or concentrating on my work. So I have to say that my mental capacity is also wasting away. Therefore, the mental part or mind should also be classified into our “outer self”.

Then, what is our “inner self” which is being renewed day by day.

As I spend years as a Christian, I feel God closer and more intimate as I read the Bible and pray and fellowship with Him.

It is through our spirit that we feel God and communicate with Him. When we believe in Christ and being saved, we start feeling God and communicating with Him. So our “inner being” must be our human spirit and is being strengthened by God’s Spirit day by day.

Paul prays,

¹⁶that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being,

A tremendous prayer!

The content of the prayer, No.2.

2. You may know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge. 3:17-19a

About knowing love.

Verse 17 starts,

^{17a}so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—

When we believed in Christ, God’s Holy Spirit came into our hearts.

Just turn to Ephesians 1:13

¹³In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit,

For all the Christians, when we believed in Christ, Holy Spirit came and started to live in our hearts. If God's Holy Spirit lives in our hearts, then Christ also lives in our hearts.

The prayer reads,(3:17) "Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith"

For Christians, this does not mean, "I believed in Christ, but Christ has not yet lived in my heart, so let Christ live in me from now on. For I will believe so!"

No! In every Christian's heart Christ lives already.

This prayer means that, "I believe that Christ lives in me and since He lives in me, He wants to reveal Himself through me. Yes, He does! I believe in Him."

If Christ shows Himself through us, our closest people, our family, for example, cannot fail to recognize the differences that Christ makes within us.

Then, latter half of 3:17

^{17b}that you, being rooted and grounded in love,

What Paul assures is that, "Christians are sprouting from the root of Christ's love, and firmly set on the ground of His love."

After I retired, we planted petit tomatoes or cherry tomatoes on planters. We watered every day, applied some stakes to support the branches. Then tomatoes grew very easily. We got more than we could eat. So we shared them with our close neighbors. They were pleased to have them which they had just seen for several weeks.

What we did was, just planted, watered and did some help to grow. Then we could, with some others, enjoy the taste of tomatoes that God created.

In the same way, Christ lives in us. We are rooted in Christ's love. So Christ's love naturally appears through us. This is not because how much hard we work. But we simply trust Christ that He would show His love. We do what we can or what we feel we ought to. Then Christ reveals His love, and shows Himself through us. Love comes to us from Christ, Who is love.

The next verse, 18 is just amazing.

¹⁸(you) may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth (of love),

"To comprehend what is the breadth and length and height and depth of love" means, to know the size and extent of Christ's love. How can we know the totality of Christ's love? This seems utterly impossible.

Paul's prayer goes on.

^{19a}and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge,

How can we know the love of Christ, if it is beyond our knowledge?

But Paul himself prays this prayer.

Then, if Paul prays, how would God respond in answer to his prayer?

The answer should be, since Christ lives in us, even though we cannot understand His love, He can make us know His love directly just by filling us with His own love.

So, to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge is quite possible! Because Christ works within us.

The last part of the prayer, no.3. At the end of verse 19.

3. You may be filled with all the fullness of God. 3:19b

^{19b}that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

This is the last part of today's passage. But I think this might be the greatest prayer ever in the world, that we are to be filled with all the fullness of God?

We are humans. We are no more than the creatures of God. How can we be filled with all the fullness of God? For years I thought this prayer was impossible.

If it happens, aren't we to violate the dignity and holiness of God? So, I thought this prayer was impossible.

This is too lofty.

But this is what the Bible says. So we have to face this prayer anyway.

Then, how can this prayer make sense?

Years later, when I read Genesis Chapter 1: v.26-27, I thought, oh, this must be the answer.

²⁶Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." ²⁷So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

God, at the very end of his creation process, made us, humans, in the image of God. The "image of God" means, "man is made like God, or similar to God. But the point is "how much similar"?

In this passage, in verse 26, man is said to be in "our(God's) image", "after our(God's) likeness", and in verse 27, "in his own image", "in the image of God". Four times, God's image or likeness is emphasized. This means that man is not just somewhat similar to God, but must be very, very, very similar, even almost identical to God Himself.

God created the world and everything in it just to show His glory. Then, God made man to represent not just God's glory, but God Himself on the earth. This is the core of God's creation.

Then, man rebelled against God and became unable to fellowship with God. Since man, made in the exact image of God, left God, man lost his identity and could no longer recognize after whom he was like. So, man lived without God.

Then, we humans lived this way. "I have made this much of effort and have accomplished this and that, so I am valuable." This is how we think we are worthy.

For such mankind, God sent Christ to die on the cross, redeemed all our sins. So that, when we believe in Christ, all our sins are forgiven. And we could regain the glory and dignity that He first gave to us humans.

His image in us and perfect access and fellowship with God was recovered.

^{19b}that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

To us, this prayer seems so lofty and even impossible. "Being filled with all the fullness of God." But, for God, this is just to be when God created us.

So, this greatest prayer is nothing special to God. This is just an ordinary prayer for God.

This is not only ordinary, but this is a core prayer for God. Because God made all of us to become this way.

After I learned prayers of today's passage, my posture to prayer changed from "what I have to" to "what I like to".

Once I prayed for someone who sometimes had small conflicts. I prayed, "God, please change him into your fullness so that he can reveal yourself fully. Lord, change me also so that I can also be filled to be like you." I started to pray this way. Then I noticed that God is somehow changing him. So I felt glad. And I prayed even more. Then somehow I sensed that he is even more, being changed. So I felt encouraged and I prayed more for him, and for me.

This way, when I feel that God wants me to pray for this or that person, I start praying. "God, please change this person (whether Christian or not) and me. And God intervenes and changes that person and me. God is close by. He wants to change people and wants to show Himself through us.

Shall we pray.

God, You saved us when we believed in Jesus. And even after that we have often tried to serve you just by our working hard. But You always want us to be filled with Your love and Yourself. Lord, help us to ask you to fill us, not just a little bit, but fill our hearts with all Your fullness, so that You reveal Yourself from within us, so that You, Yourself can be seen by the people around us. They can all see Your glory and Who You are.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.