

“How did They Grow as Christians?”

Greeting:

Thank you for inviting me again to share a message of the Bible with you.

Now let's pray.

Prayer:

Dear Father, we are together here to worship You and to hear Your Word. Please talk to us, and teach us through the Bible, Your word. So that we can walk with you and show Your glory. So that Your name be glorified here on earth. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me read **Colossians 1:3-10 (ESV)**

**³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,
⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, ⁵ because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,
⁶ which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth,
⁷ just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf
⁸ and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.
⁹ And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,
¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**

The letter to the Colossians is Paul's letter to the Christians in Colossae. The city of Colossae is in the Roman Province of Asia, present day western Turkey. The capital of the Province of Asia is Ephesus. Colossae is about 160km in the east of Ephesus. Paul had never visited this city at least before he wrote this letter to the Colossians. Epaphras brought the gospel to this city and many were saved. Paul wrote to them and especially appreciated their love.

Now, how were they changed?

The Change that occurred on Colossian Christians

Colossians 1:3-4

**³ We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you,
⁴ since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints,**

It says that their love was so evident especially among the Christians.

Why could they change?

Colossians 1:5

5 because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel,

We, Christians when we believed in Christ, we received the Holy Spirit and felt heavenly blessings for the first time. This is far beyond the earthly love and hope.

I occasionally teach a class at our denominational seminary. The class deals with the growth of Christian faith, or how we can minister for the growth of Christians. In the class I ask this question. “Do Christians keep having the joy and love as we had when we first believed in Christ?” The answer in the class is unanimous, “No, we Christians do not keep having the joy and love we had when we first believed.” The next question I ask is, “Then, how long does the initial joy and love last before it decreases?” Their answers depend on people, but the average is “About two years.” And after that Christians’ growth slows down.

But in this epistle, it says that the love of the Colossian Christians was so abundant.

Here, in verse 5, it is mentioned that the Colossian Christians heard the gospel and were saved. We are the same.

What is the Gospel?

A very famous passage on this is found in the first chapter of Romans.

Romans 1:16-17

16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.

17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

This passage says, that the gospel is “the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.” To The Jew who had the Old Testament knowledge and also to the gentiles who did not have any Bible background.

It says that the gospel itself has the “power of God” to save us.

In verse 17, for “the righteousness of God is revealed from faith.” When one believes in Christ, it is not our righteousness, but God reveals His own righteousness in us. As we experience it, we can rely and trust God even more. As we feel that God is righteous, faithful and trustworthy, our faith in Him grows. This way, “The righteous shall live by faith.”

The faith is simply trusting God. Not trusting my faith. Not that, “I have a big faith. So I am OK.”

My Example 1

In the middle of March, my daughter who works in Tokyo felt a severe pain in her head at night and she fainted. The next day she did not show up for work. Her boss kept calling her. But my daughter did not respond. So the next day the boss, a lady, decided to visit my daughter’s apartment. Of course, the door was locked. So she asked the owner of the apartment to open the door. Her boss found my daughter on the floor. She woke her up and called the ambulance. The ambulance arrived and the crew asked questions to my daughter and told her to stand and walk, do this and do that. She answered the questions and did all that she was told. So, the ambulance crew thought “There’s nothing wrong.” And they returned. But her boss believed that something was very different in my daughter. So she put my daughter in a taxi and brought

her to the best hospital of the region that she had just heard from the ambulance crew. The doctor examined her and gave her a CT scan. Bleeding was found in her brain and she was admitted to the hospital as an emergency patient. It was a rupture of an aneurism, or a knob on the pressured blood vessel broke, and the blood spread out in her brain.

So, we went to Tokyo to see her and her doctor. Her surgery was scheduled on the first Monday of April. Of course, we, my wife and I, should go. So I reserved a hostel in the area to stay the night before. The hostel requires the check-in by 9 p.m.

On Sunday, the day before her surgery, I preached at the church in a suburb of Nagoya, I preach there three times a month. In the church, we had a concert in the afternoon. It was well attended by the people of the area, and the music and the testimony of the musicians were very good. We enjoyed fellowship after the concert. Then in our car, we left for Nagoya Station. I wanted to look for an inexpensive parking lot at a distance from the station. I drove around to find a good one. Then we went to the station. It was a bit dark. We got on the Shinkansen for Tokyo. Then I realized, "Oh, we had to arrive at the hostel by 9 p.m. Now, it's impossible!" So I checked for other hotels of the same region. But the inexpensive hotels were all full. Then I changed my mind to find out when we were to arrive at the hostel. My smartphone indicated 8:55 to the nearest station. The hostel is five minutes' walk from the station. Then I thought, "it may be possible to get there by nine." At Tokyo station, we changed trains and we could catch the earlier one. So, finally we arrived at the hostel at 8:55. I thanked God! "God, I forgot that I had to arrive here by nine. But you are so faithful to lead us through everything, so that we could make it by the time required. Probably I will have to go to Tokyo several times from now for my daughter, and it will be a very busy month. But, you will perfectly lead us through everything." So I stopped worrying over my business or shortage of time. Because God leads me perfectly.

I have to preach every week. My class at the seminary starts in April. I have to prepare for this as well. But I could simply trust God, that "You will lead me through everything to let me do anything you want me to do. Because You are God, You rule everything."

A close pastor friend had asked me to officiate a wedding in English and Japanese for the Indian bridegroom who lives in the US and the Japanese bride. I had to prepare the bi-lingual program and the message. But thanks to God, trusting Him was in my heart.

As for my daughter's surgery on the first Monday of April, in the process of her anesthesia, (causing her to sleep) she got an anaphylaxis shock to the medicine used in the process. So her surgery was stopped and postponed to the second Monday. We had to visit again. On that second Monday, it took more than ten hours for the operation. It was very successful. We were glad. But on the very next day, the test to see the blood vessels in her brain showed another aneurysm and her doctor phoned me and told me, "another surgery is necessary" and it was scheduled on the third Monday. For each surgery I went to the hospital twice, once to hear the explanation and to write letters of approval, and then for the operation. So we could trust the doctor and the staff. The surgery this time took nearly ten hours again. It was successful. I thanked God and the staff. They are very dedicated specialists. Therefore, I actually went to Tokyo seven times in four weeks. But I have never worried about the shortage of my time. I had peace and thanks that God would let me to do everything he wants me to do.

As for the bi-lingual wedding, we, the couple, pastor of the church and I met for the preparation, a week before the wedding. The bridegroom who is a Christian for many years wanted her to be baptized before the wedding because she believed in Christ just very recently. There the bride agreed to be baptized since

she knew that she believed in Jesus and she was saved. So the pastor of the church with a pleasant surprise, baptized her then and there. I think it was God who wanted this to happen. So God even put me into His plan to help with the wedding. The wedding was small. But everybody realized God's blessing was on it.

What Paul and others are doing for Colossian Christians.

Colossians 1:9-10

² And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding,

Here, Paul prays that “you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding”

For the word “knowledge” the Greek word, [epignôsis] is used, [epi] which means “above” and [gnôsis] which means “knowledge.” So here, the “knowledge” means higher knowledge or knowledge from above. This is not the knowledge that we can earn simply by studying. It comes from God. So Paul asks God to fill them with this knowledge of God's will in all spiritual (it comes from the Holy Spirit) wisdom and understanding.

Then this knowledge comes from above,

¹⁰ so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;

“To walk in a manner worthy of the Lord”

I have thought for many years, how can this be possible that we “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord.” And “fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work.” I have tried to be a good Christian. But I felt in my heart a competitive spirit, dissatisfaction, sometimes anger, or hatred. I thought I could hardly have a pure heart pleasing to God. But God prepares them all for us. And God provides them all for us, simply by our asking. So God wants us to trust that He would do it.

God changes our behavior. This is prepared by God not for a special order but as the standard equipment.

Ephesians 2:10

¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

God has already prepared for us all the good works He wants us to do. God does this not as special “add-on” requests but He prepares as the standard equipment for all Christians. God leads us through everything so that we can walk in good works that He has prepared for us.

My example 2

To go for my daughter's operation on the third Monday, I again parked my car in downtown Nagoya on Sunday. But this time, I found a parking lot closer to Nagoya Station. On the first Sunday, the maximum charge was ¥700 a day. And I paid ¥1400 for Sunday and Monday. But this time, the maximum charge was ¥600. I thought, “Good. God blesses me further!” I felt in my heart I was feeling “I have faith in God so I can well be blessed” and I parked there. I came back at Monday midnight. I tried to pay at the machine. I parked for about 31 hours. The bill came, “¥3900.” “How come?” I thought. Then I looked at the signboard, “Maximum price, ¥600 per six hours. The charge will recur every six hours.” I was careless. But what was worse before God was that I prided myself on my faith. I think God wanted me to realize this.

Proverbs 3:5

⁂ Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

We should not rely on our own understanding or faith. We should just trust God with all our heart so that He will lead us through all things.

Prayer:

Dear Father, You sent your Son Jesus to die on the cross for us. So, our sins are all forgiven and we can well go to heaven. But not only that you have prepared all the good works you want us to do, here on earth, as we go through everything. Lord, help us to trust you always. Help us to be with you. So that Your glory be seen abundantly through us.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.