

“Loving Fellowship in Christ” (Eph 6:21-24)

We’ve been studying Paul’s letter to Ephesians as the series entitled “In Christ”. Today is the last message from this series. The title is “Loving Fellowship in Christ.”

6:10, Paul says “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.” And he talks about God’s armor. Then, he says “With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints” (6:18 NASB).

1. For the loving fellowship

Paul encouraged the people in church in Ephesus to pray at all times in the Spirit (Eph 6:18). And he also asked them to pray for him (6:19-20). And he sent Tychicus to the church so that he can let them know how Paul was and what he was doing (6:21). While in prison, Paul still had the loving fellowship in Christ. That was Tychicus. And he sent Tychicus to Ephesus. He hoped that the loving fellowship in Christ will spread through Tychicus’ fellowship with brothers and sisters in Ephesus to all the saints in Christ.

What kind of person was Tychicus?

Eph 6:21 ESV

So that you also may know how I am and what I am doing, Tychicus the beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord will tell you everything.

1) Beloved brother

Paul is the writer of this letter. He was a great apostle. He called his disciple Tychicus his brother. Not just his brother, but his beloved brother. Here, we can see what kind of relationship Paul had with Tychicus.

Tychicus was loved by Paul. He was the person Paul wanted to introduce to the church in Ephesus as his beloved brother. Did Paul use Tychicus as a handy man? I don’t think so. We can see that they respect each other, serve each other, encourage each other, lift up each other, though their positions were different.

Tychicus was Asian (Acts 20:4). He knew about Asia and churches there. While in prison, Paul was thinking about the churches and interceding for them. Tychicus also prayed for them with Paul. Tychicus wasn't just fulfilling his duty just because he was asked to do so by his boss, but he was happy to go to meet the need of Paul because of loving fellowship he had with him

For Paul, Tychicus was his fellow worker. Paul grew disciples. He trained, taught and strengthened Tychicus until he became his fellow worker. And Tychicus earnestly learned from Paul. He not only learned from Paul and helped his work. He visited Paul in the prison, encouraged him and strengthened him.

If we keep our disciples in the position of our pupils, we are not really growing disciples. John Maxwell says, "The goal of all teachers should be to equip the students to get along without them."¹ Of course, our experiences and knowledge may be different from those who are under our training. But it is not until we can say "he is now my fellow worker" that we have completed the discipleship training. In other words, Tychicus had done what it takes for him to reach there. No wonder Paul called him the "beloved brother".

2) Faithful minister

Paul called Tychicus the faithful minister. We can see Paul's trust and hope in Tychicus when he sent him out. If the messenger is not faithful, you have to worry a lot whether he will arrive his destination and so on. Depending on how he says, he may communicate a different message even though the content may be the same. So it requires faithfulness for the messenger to carry out even the trivial things with sincerity. Paul could send Tychicus out with trust, in peace.

Faithfulness is the evaluation criterion for a minister. It does not rely on the content of the service.

In Matthew 25, Jesus shared a parable. One man went on a journey. Before he went, he called his servants and entrusted to them his property. To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one. When he came back from his journey, he settled accounts with his servants. The man who had received the five talents made five talents more. And the man who had the two talents made two talents more. The man who made five more talents brought two and half times more profit to his master than the other man. But the master said the exactly same thing to both of them. "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been

¹ John C. Maxwell, *Becoming a Person of Influence*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997, p.87

faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master” (Matt 25:21; 23).

What the master valued was the faithfulness. It was not how much profit they made. The faithfulness of the two servants brought joy to their master.

Paul entrusted his letter to Tychicus who was his beloved brother in the Lord, and faithful minister, and sent him out to Ephesus as a messenger. While in the prison, Paul still had the loving fellowship in Christ. That was Tychicus. And he sent Tychicus out to Ephesus.

Then, what was the purpose of his sending out Tychicus?

Eph 6:22 ESV

I have sent him to you for this very purpose, that you may know how we are, and that he may encourage your hearts.

1) To let you know how we are

At that time, it was the only fellowship Paul could have with the church in Ephesus to let the church know how Paul and others were. By letting them know how they were, they could feel they were in fellowship. This was something Paul sought after more than anything.

It seems Paul was in the complicated situation which cannot be expressed in his letter. He was going through hectic changes. We can see that by his expression “how we are”, instead of “how I am”.

In this letter, other than this section, we have the impression that it was just Paul alone who was chained in prison (Eph 1:1; 3:1; 3:13; 4:1; 6:20). It was the same with his letter to Philippians (Phi 1:12-14; 17; 30; 2:23; 4:11; 14). But, when we look at his letter to Colossians, we can see Aristarchus was his fellow prisoner (Col 4:10). However, when we look at his letter to Philemon, it was Epaphras who was his fellow prisoner at that time. And Aristarchus was with Mark and Luke (Plm :23-24).

What about Mark, Luke and Demas? How have they been doing? How did Aristarchus and Epaphras end up being in prison in different timings? And was there anyone else who was chained in prison? There is no way we can know all these just through the letters.

Tychicus was sent out so that he can explain and let the church know how Paul and others were doing. In a situation like this, the only kind of fellowship is “to be known”. What an encouragement it was for Paul to be known and specifically prayed for his needs.

In May, my mother-in-law let us know my father-in-law was hospitalized. And we found his condition was worse than we thought, my wife Yumi went back to Japan in late May. And each time his condition changed, she emailed to us. It was a great comfort and encouragement for her that many people know the situation and praying specifically for the needs. She was exhausted physically, downcast emotionally, and was in the fierce spiritual battle. She couldn't have coped alone. But knowing her friends in the Lord knew about her situation, and was praying for her, she was supported, strengthened and encouraged, and could continue to run the race without giving up. Thank you very much for your prayer.

Paul and others were in the complicated situation which letters couldn't describe. That was their reality. When others come to know the reality and empathize with them and pray for them, the loving fellowship in Christ is realized, strengthened and become alive.

2) To encourage your hearts

Tychicus was sent, not only to let the church know how Paul was doing. But he was sent also to encourage the hearts of the people in the church in Ephesus.

What was the situation of Paul which Tychicus was to report? Paul was chained in prison because of his faith in Christ. How would they feel if they hear about it? They may think, “Oh, how difficult it is to have faith! The sacrifice is too great! What can I do if I was in the same kind of trouble?” Ephesus is the city where the whole city worship Artemis. That is where the church is. Christians are still minority. Once there was a great uproar in the whole city because of faith (Acts 19:29). If they hear that Paul is chained in prison, they may become more worried and uneasy.

But Tychicus was sent out, not to discourage them. He was sent to encourage their hearts.

What was his talk?

He reported that Paul's being in prison has served to advance the gospel (Phi 1:12). The word of God is not chained! (2 Tim 2:9). Even though he is chained,

Paul is still faithfully fulfilling his role as the ambassador of the gospel. God's plan is far higher than man's plan. We can do all things through him who strengthens us (Phi 4:14).

What Tychicus reported about Paul was none other than how great God's mighty power was.

Tychicus could encourage people in Ephesus, not because he just repeated what Paul told him, but because he was in the same situation as Paul and he was experiencing the same power of God as Paul was experiencing. As he was listening to Paul, God's grace, power and joy became tangible and began to move within him. And through his words, people in Ephesus received encouragement.

We can also encourage others.

We may face hardship. Though we pray, the situation remains the same. But we still trust in God, and keep praying with perseverance. That testifies that God is real, He is great and he will never leave us. By doing this, we can point to God and encourage others who are facing the same kind of difficulties.

We may be in the midst of sadness, anxiety, despair, in the situation where we can only cry and ask "Why?" But we still come to God and pray with groanings too deep for words. It was God who allowed that situation. In the ordinary way, we don't want to have anything to do with that kind of God. But we still draw near to him. We still seek his face. That is because he is our peace. That shows to the people who are under similar circumstances that God's love and mercy are immeasurable. That will encourage them.

The loving fellowship in Christ. That is church. That is us in Christ. "Experiencing the Life, Changing Lives." Amen?!

2. In Christ

Who are we in Christ? In Christ we have been blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3). In him, we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins (1:7). In him we have obtained an inheritance (1:11). In him we were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (1:13).

So Paul prays like this.

Eph 1:17

I 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.

The Holy Spirit will give us wisdom and revelation. What does he reveal? Let's continue to read.

Eph 1:18-19

I 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, ¹⁹ and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

The Holy Spirit clearly reveals to us three things. First of all, He reveals what is the hope to which He has called us. Secondly, he reveals the riches of God's glorious inheritance in his holy people. And thirdly, he reveals God's incomparably great power for us who believe.

How does this knowledge help our prayer? When we come to know these, we can continue to pray with perseverance. As we have this assured hope, we can persevere and keep praying. As we know the riches of God's glorious inheritance in his holy people, we will never give up, but keep interceding for other saints. As we know God's incomparably great power, we will continue to pray to God. Here, loving fellowship in Christ is realized.

To pray with perseverance. It is not that we try hard, persuade ourselves and drive ourselves to do it. The Holy Spirit will reveal these three things, so we can keep praying with perseverance. No matter how it appears, we can keep praying because of the faithfulness of God who promised.

We can keep praying not only for ourselves, but also for others.

Sometimes we may be discouraged and feel, "That's it." We may even feel it is no use praying, we may be disappointed. But then, the Holy Spirit reminds us of these three things. He encourages us to be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer (Rom 12:12). He reminds us of the depth of loving fellowship in Christ.

So Paul says, "With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints" (6:18 NASB).

When we pray with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God will do great things beyond what we have been praying. Even the things that seem impossible to us, that seem never be accomplished, God can make them happen. Sometimes, even the things that seem against the truth to men God can realize them.

In Acts 10, it talks about Cornelius. He was a Roman centurion, a gentile. But he was a devout and God-fearing man, and was always praying to God. One day, as he was praying, he saw a vision. He saw an angel of God, who came to him and said, "Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God." And the angel told him to invite Peter. So he sent men to bring Peter to his house.

Now on Peter's side, he started to pray, but he fell asleep. And he saw a vision. The Lord said, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius arrived at where Peter was. And the Holy Spirit said to Peter, "Do not hesitate to go with them." So Peter visited Cornelius. While Peter was sharing the Word of God, Cornelius and others who were listening to him were filled with the Holy Spirit.

"Wow, amazing thing can happen when we pray. God can even speak to us while we are sleeping!" Yes, that is amazing! But that is not the point of this incident.

In those days, it was against their law for the Jews to visit Gentiles (Acts 10:28). Peter was a Jew. Cornelius was a gentile. For Peter to visit Cornelius was against the law, according to the understanding of the Jews in those days. Peter never dreamed of visiting Cornelius and share the gospel with him. Most likely Cornelius also never expected about it.

However, even the things which seem impossible in human eyes, if that is God's will, He can make it happen. Sometimes, even the things that appears to men against the truth, if that is God's will, He can make it happen.

The Bible doesn't record what Cornelius was praying about. But through this incident, the early church clearly understood that the gospel of Jesus' cross was given to gentiles as well. Jewish Christians finally accept the fact that God gives the Holy Spirit to gentiles as well. We don't know how Cornelius had been praying. But his prayer opened the door for God's great work. That was far beyond the understanding of Jewish Christians.

In Christ we are the temple of the Holy Spirit whom we received from God, who lives in us (1 Cor 6:19; Eph 2:21-22). The Bible says, “You are no longer your own. you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:20).

God purchased his church with his own blood (Acts 20:28). God is the owner of the church. In Christ, we all belong to one body (Rom 12:5). There is neither Jew nor Gentile, there is neither slave nor free (Gal 3:28). We are all redeemed, purchased by Christ. We are his (Gal 3:29).

I think this church NLIF clearly shows this truth. This may be very natural and not strange for us. But for the early church, for Jewish Christians, they would never dream of that, and that would be against their law. The prayer of Cornelius, a gentile brought the early church into the truth of God. The loving fellowship in Christ began to grow into God’s size in church.

God does great things that is far beyond our imagination. The Holy Spirit is the grace given by God’s calling, which is inherited by God’s saint for God’s glory. The Holy Spirit will make us see clearly through the eyes of our hearts how great God’s mighty power that works for those who believe in Jesus Christ. And He will enable us to keep praying with all perseverance.

Finally, let’s pray Paul’s prayer together. Let’s think of someone. Let’s imagine God is now working for that person’s situation, and declare blessing for that person.

Eph 6:23-24 ESV

Peace be to the brothers and sisters, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible.

For Lifenet groups and personal reflection:

- 1) Have you ever experienced encouragement in the fellowship at NLIF? Have you ever experienced that God used you to encourage someone? How was it?
- 2) Read 1 Cor 6:19-20. Is there anything surprising for you? Is there anything that doesn’t agree with your idea, or anything you find difficult to accept? What kind

of help do you need? What is the significance of this scripture for fellowship in church?

3) Read Eph 6:23-24. Let's think of someone. Let's declare blessing for the person this one week using this scripture. When you pray, imagine God is now actually working for the person's situation.