

To Him be glory in the church (Eph. 3:14-21)

1. I kneel before the Father

3:14-15

For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name.

Paul became a servant of the gospel by the gift of God's grace. The mystery of Christ was revealed to him and he shared it with others. That is, by the gospel, gentiles can also be the people of God's kingdom (Eph. 3:4-7).

In the gospel, in God's kingdom, there is no discrimination between gentiles and the Jews. And they will be joined together and built together as God's temple by the Holy Spirit. He's been preaching this gospel. And, he's been persecuted by his own people, the Jews. In spite of the hardship, he kept preaching the gospel, built up churches and strengthened them.

The church in Ephesus was one of these churches. When Paul visited Ephesus, he met dozens of disciples. He found that they had not been baptized in the Holy Spirit yet. Not only that, but they hadn't even heard that there is a Holy Spirit. Paul prayed for them and the Holy Spirit came on them (Acts 19:1-6). Before the gospel, it doesn't matter whether they are the Jews or gentiles. The Holy Spirit will come upon those who seek Him. The Holy Spirit will overflow in the people and among the people. Christians in Ephesus experienced that through Paul.

And this Paul is now pouring out his heart to pray for them. He is praying, kneeling before God.

How much were the people in Ephesus encouraged when they received this letter! How thankful they were when they read this prayer!

Paul is kneeling, showing his deep respect toward Him, and praying. To whom is he praying? To "the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. (NASB)"

NIV says, "His whole family," but NASB says, "every family." It makes the meaning more personal. By saying "every family," it is referring to every and each family, who are already in heaven, who are still battling on earth, Jewish family, gentile family, God's family in Ephesus and everywhere in the world, rather than

all the believers in heaven and on earth as a whole. God the Father calls each group of believers His family, who were born from Him and live new life given by him.

Every family member in heaven and on earth will receive new name from the Father and will be called by the name. They are His family, God's family. Paul is praying to this God the Father who gave us salvation and new life, God the Father who calls us His family.

## 2. May Christ dwell in your hearts

### 3:16-17a

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.

What is leading Paul's prayer? He prays "out of God's glorious riches". Prayer must be led by reflecting on God's glorious riches.

As long as our wish is the center of the prayer, our prayer is like a telephone without antenna. It is not connected to the one it should be connected. Though we pray, we doubt, and feel uneasy "Will God answer this prayer? When and how? Can God really do such a thing?"

And we worry, "Can I ask God things like this? Does God really care for me? Can He really accept my prayer?" We may pray, but our hearts are not connected to God.

In our daily life, we have anxieties, worries, and hardships. But in the midst of those, we can reflect on God's glorious riches. We can pray according to God's glorious riches.

What is Paul seeking here? In plain words, he is praying "May Christ dwell in your hearts." But it doesn't mean Christ is not in the believers in Ephesus. Since the day they believed in Jesus, He lives in them (see Rom. 8:9).

What is Paul praying here then? He is praying: "By the Holy Spirit, may you be strengthened spiritually, to become more like Christ who is in you. May Christ not only live in you, but also fill your every part. May you be totally one with Christ spiritually. May Christ's thoughts be your thoughts. May the nature of Christ

flow out from you.” He is praying like this.

### 3. To know Christ's love

#### 3:17b-19a

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--

Paul prays for the people who will read this letter that they may know the love of Christ though it is too great to understand fully (NLT). Actually it sounds an impossible request, because he himself says that Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know (NCV). How can we know this love then?

This is God's call for us: to know Him, to experience how much he loves us. We will recognize him in our daily lives, we will experience his love, and then gradually our understanding of Him will be deeper and wider.

One of the keys to “know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” is “to be rooted and established in love.”

In order to know the love of Christ, it is essential for us and our lives to be firmly established on the foundation of His love. We can experience that God is love. We can know the love of Christ, even though our knowledge of his love may not be perfect. We can know who he is and what he is like. We must look at ourselves and incidents happening in our lives through God's viewpoint. And we will find how God's love is working in ourselves, and how He is working among people with His love. When we do this, our understanding about the love of Christ will be deepened.

The second key is “to experience His love together with all the saints.”

We can meditate on His Word, spend time with God and know His love alone in our quiet time. And also as I mentioned just now, we can experience His love in our daily lives. Those are wonderful, valuable time! But that is only personal, individual experience. That is only a fragment of the whole picture of His love. That alone is too partial to grasp how wide and long and high and deep the love of Christ is.

But when those experiences are share with other believers, we will start

to see the whole picture gradually. It is just like the scattered pieces were joined and we start to see the whole picture of the puzzle. It is like with one photo we only saw one side of the whole thing, but now other photos are joined and we can see 3 D digital image of the thing.

In our church, NLIF, we have LifeNet groups. They are just the right place to experience this. Just as the name describes, our lives in Christ are knitted together, and the width, length, height, and depth of Christ's love are shown among us.

#### 4. To be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God

##### 3:19b

that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

In 1:23 Paul said the Church, the body of Christ is the fullness of him who fills everything in every way. Now in v. 17, we can see a phrase, "in your hearts." So here, he is praying that each believer may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. This is amazing!

When I see his prayer, I feel how small the scale of my prayer is. I say "God is almighty", but I limit God according to my faith. In my head, I draw a line and say "He can do this kind of things" and I pray within the limit I created. I limit God. But of this weakness of mine, all the more I need this prayer so that I will be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. I am thankful that someone is praying for me. But we should also pray for ourselves. And also, we would like to be able to pray this prayer for others with confidence.

These prayers of Paul were not lined up like that accidentally, but continuously piled up one after another, and progressing.

First, he prayed that Christ may dwell in their heart. And it has become a prayer to know Christ's love that surpasses knowledge, and then it progressed into a prayer that they may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Having Christ live in our heart is the starting point for us to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

And by being filled to the measure of all the fullness of God, Christ can truly dwell in our heart.

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another” (John 1:16). We who believe in Christ will all receive one blessing after another from the fullness of Christ’s grace, and will be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Paul prays that all Christians, every one of us may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. This prayer cannot be fulfilled by just praying one time. This is not the kind of prayer that can be fulfilled immediately after we pray. We will be filled day by day, and will be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God in due time.

When I recognize “Now I’m in the love of Christ”, then I see “how small my love is. There is still much more to be filled in me.” Then I pray and seek. As I know “Now the love of Christ is growing higher inside of me”, then I understand “Wow, the love of Christ is actually much longer and deeper. There is still much more to be filled in me.” And I pray and seek again.

The more we know the love of Christ, the more we want to come closer to Christ. The more we come closer to Christ, the more we come to know how wonderful he is. Then we will spend more time with him. And we will be more and more transformed into Christ likeness.

If we pray and seek, God will answer and do what we seek according to the riches of his glory by the Holy Spirit.

## 5. To Him be glory in the church

### 3:20-21

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen.

Paul calls God “him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine”. Paul is sure that God is God like that. Because of this confidence, he could dare to pray this prayer.

Paul says “all we ask or imagine”. “All we ask” is what we ask God in prayers. And “all we imagine” can be various thoughts in our hearts which are not expressed as prayers.

God can give immeasurably more than what we ask in prayer, and moreover even more than various thoughts in our hearts that are not expressed as prayers. He can give exceedingly more than what we ask or imagine. That is our God. God almighty, the creator, a true God, a living God.

We are praying to this God. He is listening to our prayers. And He is going to answer our prayers. Then we don't have to worry about how weak and imperfect our prayer is. When we pray, we don't have to worry about how limited our understanding of his love is. All we need to do is to draw near to God with all our faith that we have now.

To him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. That is, just as Christ Jesus gives glory to the Father, the church also is the one who gives glory to the Father. That is Paul's prayer for churches, and it must be our prayer too. And it should not be done as duty, it must be our devotion, our peaceful response to the perfect love, our joyful submission to the glorious God. That is worship.

Through prayer, not only this particular prayer but any prayer, we're actually submitting our mind, our plan, our wish even ourselves into God's hand.

"Surrender to God flows out of the experience of love that will never let me go. It is the response of the heart that knows that since God is for me, nothing can come between me and the perfect love that surrounds me and will support me."<sup>1</sup>

Prayer is the moment in which we come near God who loves us so much, and in which we express our love to him. Prayer is the process of choosing his will rather than our wish. So then, in prayer we learn his greatness and faithfulness, his love and care, and our trust in him will grow.

Paul prays for the church: "Grant them out of the inexhaustible riches of his glory" Then through the church God will be glorified.

Paul prays for the church: "Be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner person." Then through the church God will be glorified.

Paul prays for the church: "Have Christ dwell in our hearts through faith." Then through the church God will be glorified.

Paul prays for the church: "Be rooted and ground in the perfect love of God." Then through the church God will be glorified.

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<sup>1</sup> David G. Benner, *Surrender to Love*, IVP, 2003, (p.67)

Paul prays for the church: “Be strengthened to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the perfect love of God.” Then through the church God will be glorified.

Paul prays for the church: “Be strengthened to experience the love of Christ which surpasses knowing.” Then through the church God will be glorified.

Paul prays for the church: “Be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.” Then through the church God will be glorified. <sup>2</sup>

With the help of the Holy Spirit, let us make this pray our prayer.

*We pray that out of his glorious riches God may strengthen us with power through his Spirit in our inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in our hearts through faith. And we pray that we, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that we may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. <sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in our church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen. (Eph. 3:16-21)*

For LifeNet groups and personal reflection

- 1) Do you have any experience in which you felt God’s love is bigger than you thought? What was the experience? Can you share it with others?
- 2) How does the experience of God’s love affect your faith, your relationship with God? What is the difference between having the head-knowledge of God’s love and experiencing God’s love?
- 3) God will answer our prayers according to the riches of his glory by the Holy Spirit. How does it change your prayer?

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<sup>2</sup> Darrell W. Johnson, *Experiencing the Trinity*, Regent College Publishing, 2002, (pp..93-103)

4) God wants us to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. What is our part? What action will you take?