

"God Urges Us by His Mercy"

Including Japan and the United States, many people all over the world are interested in "education". Especially, in the kind of education that the younger generation receives because it greatly impacts the country's future. Although education does not provide immediate benefits to the country, surely we have learned that it has a large long-term influence in forming our country and our society.

In 1987, there was a conference at Harvard University for higher education educators. At the conference, Frank Rose, the president of Cornell University at the time, proposed an education reform. He said to the audience "We are reaching the point that Universities should pay more attention to students' "sound values" and "healthy moral values".

Immediately the audience started to be noisy and criticized him. Then, a student stood up and said, "Whose sense of values are you going to teach us? Who is going to deliver the teaching?" The audience enthusiastically applauded the student's statement. Mr. Rose went back to his seat without answering any questions.

Why did the audience strongly disagree? Because they defined "sense of values" as a "personal matter", and each one of us should decide "what we should do and shouldn't do" based on our own moral standard. Therefore, the audience didn't want others to lecture them regarding "sense of values" or "morality". They want to live as they please, because that's what we defined "freedom" in today's world.

This conference was held in 1987, meaning, it happened 31 years ago. Not only has our "sense of values" and "morality" not changed since then, but more people support the audience's ways of thinking all over the world.

Furthermore, this way of thinking is nothing new, but it has been around since the ancient times. The book of Judges in the Old Testament records as the following. In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as they saw fit. (Judges 21:25)

The kind of world that this way of thinking creates is recorded in Judges. That's right. The time of the book of Judges was an especially chaotic era in the history of the Bible. Keep this in mind, and let's look at the verses from Roman chapter 12 again.

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

Everyone, we are looking at Mr. Rose's words of advice and Paul's words of advice in the verses. Did you realize that there is a difference between in these two views?

Mr. Rose urged his opinions. I assume that his opinions were based on his experiences as an educator; therefore, I believe they were not irresponsible opinions.

However, when Mr. Rose urged his opinions "It should be this way", the audience responded "No." "Leave us alone, who can lecture us on "sense of values" and "morality?" And then, Mr. Rose couldn't answer their objections. Why was that? I've thought about the reason. Because he, too, is a human just like the audience. "How could a human just like us lecture us on his sense of values? How could he teach what's right and wrong to us?" There is no way to respond to these questions.

On the other hand, Paul urged God's mercy. That's the difference between Mr. Rose's advice and Paul's advice. There is a great difference in between these two. Paul's advice is with "God's mercy" not his "own thoughts".

Of course, even though the advice is done "in God", we know that we can simply choose to ignore it, stand against it, or reject it.

We, Japanese people, have a negative legacy towards the subject "God" from World War II. Because, within a day, the Japanese people's point of view had to change from "The Emperor is God" to "The Emperor is a human". Therefore, we are extremely cautious towards the word "God".

Ever since, we don't take seriously about God, rather, we avoid dealing with the subject. I have heard the following scenario from many individuals. When they told their parents that "Recently, I started to go to a Christian church.", their parents said " You might learn something valuable to you, but don't go too deep into it." Yet, we can't remove God's existence completely from our lives (because at heart we feel fear). We pray for God when we are in trouble, when we need God's help, and out of obligation we pray to God a few times a year.

If your relationship with your God is just to accomplish moderate obligation, you won't obey his word. Rather, you live as you please, and only when you are suffering, you say "I rely on you, God." It is much easier to be carefree; More than we can imagine, we value being carefree.

However, for those, who believe in God's existence without doubt, they can't ignore the word of advice with God's mercy. Because obeying God's word has great meaning to them, and even as time has passed, the word remains unchanged. Furthermore, we believe that this advice tells us what the best way of living on this earth is.

We need the sense of values, which is not what we conveniently created by ourselves, but what we are given from up there (in heaven). In the world of "everything is ok.", what we really need is unshakable things like this.

Nowadays, we often hear the word "motivation". Athletes often use the word when they retire in their prime. Such as "I lost my motivation, therefore, I have decided to retire."

After a big competition such as the recent Olympics, I think many athletes tend to struggle with things like this. For the last 4 years, their focus was to perform their best at the Olympics, but that is over. What's now? Are they going to aim to be in the next Olympics in 4 years? If they can't find something to make them inspired, it's going to be difficult to face the hard training for the next 4 years because they don't have the motivation.

One motivation for high school students to study hard is go to the college they want to go to. Someone, who is trying to lose 20 more pounds, has motivation to fit in the clothes he/she wants to wear. For baseball players, high school students, trying to enter the college, to someone, on a diet, we all are moved by motivation.

Everyone, let's read today's scripture again. Paul urges us in the following:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ²Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2)

If we receive this advice as an obligation, we won't last long. However, these words have something to motivate us. That is "God's mercy on us".

In fact, what is the motivation for us to obey God's teaching when we live as Christians? Do you think that God will protect us from various disasters because we are Christians? Or, do you think that God will help us reach our dreams or goals?

If a Christian has these motivations, one day the person will get stuck in his/her situation because even to Christians, unexpected events happen time to time. All of your goals can not necessarily be achieved, and if you have perfunctory faith, you always have sense of obligation.

Paul first said "God's mercy". "God's mercy", in other words, is "God's blessing". Why did people in the Bible happily serve God? It is because they got to know God's blessings. That became their motivation. Faith is not "I must to do things", but Faith is "I can't help not doing things."

Apostle, Paul said in I Timothy 1: 13-16.

¹³ Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵ Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. ¹⁶ But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. (1Timothy 1:13-16)

He was once a man who arrested Christians and murdered them. Therefore, there is no room for excuses for him. However, God had bottomless mercy on him. Without doubt, Christ came to this world to save sinners. And, among those sinners, Paul declared himself as the worst of sinners. He knew well about God's mercy shown to him.

He also said God showed him "immense patience". Unquestionably, God showed immense patience to Paul because he was persecuting Christians. We talk like it is someone else's business.

However, once you ponder in your heart, not only to Paul, but God also shows immense patience with you. How long have we turned our backs against God? We have God in our lives only when it's convenient for us and when we need him. Once it's over, we just leave God aside and forget about him until we need him again. If you do the same thing to your spouse, I am sure that he or she will get fed up with you.

But, God doesn't leave us. He lets us live today, and he gives us our daily bread. He continues to give us an opportunity to live our lives with God. Therefore, God also shows his immense patience with us, just like he did to Paul.

And, the more Paul knew about God's patience and mercy on him, the more he desired to live for God, from the bottom of his heart. Paul said, "You also receive God's mercy just like me. Therefore, offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God. That is not out of an obligation, but that is a natural response to God's blessings".

In the past, I saw a movie called "Amazing Grace". In the movie, a young politician called William Wilberforce was steering anti-slave trade legislation. And, The Hymn Amazing Grace's writer, John Newton, who lived at the same period, gave advice to Wilberforce.

In the movie, Before Newton loses his eye sight at old age and his memory fades away, Newton told Wilberforce his experiences to testify what he has done in the past, and

he made Wilberforce record diary entries. What kind of experiences did he have? I read some documents written about Newton as the following.

The English man, John Newton went to sea at an early age, and he sailed to Africa. The reason was, as he wrote in his autobiography later on, "to commit crime to my heart's content". His life was going downhill, and he kept falling down. And, he became the captain of a slave ship carrying slaves from Africa to the New World. I can imagine that Newton did many things other than "transport slaves" because he said that he had a spirit "to commit crime to his heart's content".

The ship he was on was hit by a violent storm in the North Atlantic Ocean, and it almost sank. The vessel was badly damaged and filled with sea water. The storm didn't slow down and they bailed out sea water day after day. It was certain that the vessel would sink, he would sink, and he would be drowned.

However, strangely, when he was bailing out sea water with bucket, Newton remembered the Bible verses that his mother used to teach him in his childhood. The ship passed through the storm, and then he studied to be a preacher, and at last he became the great preacher.

Later, As Newton became old and his memory was fading, he had to quit preaching. When his friends visited him, he used to say: "Although my memory is fading, I remember two things very clearly: I'm a great sinner and Christ is a great savior."

Amazing grace how sweet the sound

That saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost but now am found

Was blind but now I see

Jesus Christ said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners." (Matthew 9)

Jesus said "It is not the healthy who needs a doctor.", however, in reality if God looks around at the people who live in this world, the Bible says no one is "the healthy". Jesus said, "For I have not come to call the righteous", however, in reality if God looks around at people who live in this world, the Bible says no one is "the righteous".

Once, Paul had a strong motivation to "destroy Christians" ,at the same time, he was thrilled to kill Christians. Newton's motivation to sail to Africa was "to commit crime to his heart's content". However, they both reached the motivation, worth changing their lives because of God's immense patience and mercy, apart from their previous empty motivations.

They both realized the same things in their lives. There is 1600 years difference in between their times, but they both realized that "I am a sick and I am a sinner." And, they came to know that Jesus forgave them unconditionally and accepted a "worthless man like me."

Ever since, their motivation of their lives has changed. Paul went to the gentiles to spread the word of Jesus, as for the slave ship's captain, Newton; he became a preacher in order to spread the word of God. Surely, Christ the Lord's blessing moved them to the very end. When we realize that God's blessing is upon us, we will change into one who responds to this God's blessing.

When you do something out of obligation, you feel the time passes slowly. When you are doing work you don't like, you feel that the day is so long until the time to leave work. However, if you are doing something worthwhile, you feel that the time to leave work comes in no time. You don't feel hardship as hardship. You might go home with strong reluctance, wishing you could keep working.

We all want to get such a job if we get a job anyway. Work is only one part of your life. However, don't you want to live your life including the time you spend at work, motivated by joy, thankfulness, and something worth doing, even if you encounter many hardships, from time to time?

Yes, what we need in order to do that is to realize God's bottomless blessings upon all of the people, and to live with his blessings. This motivation doesn't have to renew every four years like Olympic athletes, but it moves us until we return to the heaven.

Finally, Paul was changed and accomplished his life by God's blessings. Let's close this message by likening our hearts to his words with his thoughts pouring out of his heart. Let's read Epiphanes 2:1-10.

As 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.³ All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh^[a] and following its desires

and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath. ⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

Paul is not special. We all are God's handiwork, and through his handiwork, we are invited to a life in order to glorify God. This word isn't saying to us "It has to be this way", but it is the word to move us to "we want to be this way".

That's right. The reason for what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us was to make us reach this thought. Let us pray.

Translated by the Scarlett Family