***‘Getting to Know Pastor Joe’ Columns #15***

**"Do you know the importance of missions?”**

Christianity, compared to other religions, is particularly enthusiastic about missions to different cultures. While exact numbers are hard to pin down, it's estimated that there are around 300,000 Protestant missionaries worldwide.

The reason Christians are so passionate about missions is that it's the greatest commission Jesus gave us (Matthew 28:19-20). Many missionaries endure poverty and discomfort, and sometimes even face life-threatening situations, to spread the gospel. Non-Christians often criticize this zeal, asking, “Why not let people live according to their native traditions?” However, these criticisms often come from a lack of understanding of how much suffering exists in these communities.

For example, in many Islamic countries, people face widespread suffering. Many are plagued by guilt, women often do not receive proper treatment, and children are frequently abandoned. If we look at Korea a hundred years ago, before Christianity arrived, there was similar suffering. Society was divided into strict classes where people were not treated equally, women’s rights were violated, and children were often abandoned. It was the Christian missionaries who came to these places, built hospitals and schools, and started to change people's thinking. As the gospel of Jesus Christ spread, society began to value equality, human rights improved, and people learned to care for their disabled neighbors.

Another criticism non-Christians have about missions is, “Why bring Christianity to a country that’s doing fine with its own religion and create division and conflict?” Again, this comes from not understanding the corruption and suffering that can exist when a single religion dominates a country. Historically, when religious freedom is introduced, societies tend to see improved morality, increased diversity, and greater maturity, which sociologists acknowledge as key factors in societal development.

The reason we do missions is not just to increase the number of Christians. We believe that spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ ultimately helps societies develop and brings happiness to people. We understand that where the love and heart of Jesus are absent, there is often only desolation and oppression, and we hear the cries of those suffering in such conditions.

I am deeply grateful that our church is currently supporting overseas missions. I am especially delighted that the Outreach Committee has decided to support two missionaries I know personally—one serving in Uganda and the other in Nicaragua. However, my heartfelt desire is for our church to support even more missionaries, becoming a channel of blessing that shines the light of Jesus' life to countless souls trapped in darkness, poverty, and suffering. I ask that you also pray for this to become a reality.