

Ephesians 3:13-21 – Lessons About The Christian Life (1)

Paul has begun teaching the Ephesians about the Christian life. From chapter 4 onwards, he will give us practical details – how to speak and act like a Christian, how to be a Christian in the family, at work and in the world, etc. But first, he gives us the foundation. We need a strong foundation. The foundation of a building is not seen because it is underground – but its strength supports the whole building.

1. A lesson about suffering (v13)

Paul mentions his sufferings (v13). He was a prisoner (v1), in Rome. This was because of his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (non-Jews) – see Acts chapter 22. This had brought him a lot of trouble. But it was all for Christ's sake. He was persecuted because God had powerfully used him to save sinners, even in Ephesus. These sufferings did not cause Paul to be discouraged. He did not care for himself, but for the Ephesians – he was concerned about how they would respond. He wanted them to remain strong. In fact, he told them that his sufferings were “their glory” (v13). He had become like Jesus Christ to them, coming to suffer to bring them the gospel, and God had blessed it mightily. God's plan is often to use sufferings for his purposes. Sufferings test us, purify us, save the church from false believers, and draw us nearer to Christ. So Paul said, he rejoiced in them (Romans 5:3). How do you respond to challenges? Do you thank God for them, and use them to climb nearer to him? Do you understand the way of the cross? Christianity is not a way to quick earthly glory, but to deeper glories which come through suffering.

2. A lesson about praying for other believers and God's desires for us (v14-19)

How did Paul pray? Firstly, we can see he believed in the Trinity. He believed that the Father is God, the Son is God and the Spirit is God. As he prayed, he made mention of and fellowshiped with all three. Our prayers should be based on truth! He prayed with confidence, because of the gospel – God accepted him through Jesus! What did Paul pray for? He prayed for the believers to have spiritual strength (v16). He wanted them to have the presence of Christ (v17). He wanted their whole lives to be based on and driven by love (v17). He wanted them to know more about Christ's love, and to become mature in God (v18-19). Are these your desires? Do you pray most of all for this, for other Christians? Notice: Paul was suffering, but his prayers were not focussing on this life's health, wealth or prosperity. He was looking to far greater riches; those of Christ. His goal was for the believers to become mature, more like God (v19). Is that your goal?

3. A lesson about where we should be aiming for (v20-21)

It is not wrong to be immature – for a short time! If a baby acts as a baby, it is fine. If a man acts like a baby, it is seriously wrong. Christian maturity is growing to an always-deeper knowledge of God in Christ, and labouring for others to do so also. Paul's final aim was for all the glory then to be given back to God. He saved us from the “riches of his glory” (v16). Now all the praise should return to him. The Father sent the Son to die for us, and the Son sent the Spirit. Now, by the Spirit, we come through the Son to the Father and return all worship. God's glory is seen in believers and especially in the church. So the church must fight to glorify God, or else it is blaspheming him. “All glory to God alone” is the cry of real Christianity; is it yours?