

Study 10. The Father of Glory (Ephesians 3:14-21)

This series on 'The shame and the glory' has been about the Father's glory breaking through our shame to bring us to glory and so glorify God, but now, we make the Father our focus. He is called 'the Father of glory' (Eph. 1:17). All revelation is, finally, of him and from him.

Our Lord lived in the glory of the Father and sought to make it known (Jn. 17:4-5, 19, 24; and his holiness and righteousness too—vv. 11, 25). He was raised by the glory of the Father (Ro. 6:4). That is, the Father revealed his glory by raising his Son from death. Jesus also knew he would return in the glory of his Father (Lk. 19:26) and wanted to be seen as such (Jn. 17:24). We may say that for Jesus, the Father was what life was all about.

The return of Jesus in glory will be terrifying for any who reject his grace (2 Th. 1:9-12), because it will be the revelation of the Father's moral glory first announced to Moses... 'who will by no means acquit the guilty' (Ex. 34:7). But the purpose of God is to be glorified in his saints, by what he has bestowed on them, and by the way he has sustained them.

When our Lord returns, he will hand the kingdom to the Father so *he* may be everything to everyone (1 Co. 15:24, 28). In that day we will know fully what is still partial, but Paul wants us to know what we can now: may this Father of glory give us 'a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him' (Ep. 1:17-18)!

In this last reference, Paul says we are the Father's inheritance (Ep. 1:18). The Father receives those who believe in his Son as an outshining of himself—'the glory of his inheritance in the saints' (cf. Ps. 33:12). As always, God's glory is not about mere display but about bringing his creatures to enjoy, share and reflect who he is. In finding out about the Father, we are finding out about ourselves. In fact, we have no other true way to find out about ourselves.

What it means to live in the Father's glory is opened up for us in **Ephesians 3:14-21**. May the Father grant us to be strengthened according to the riches of his glory!

Paul has seen the Father at work in the preaching of the gospel, bringing Jews and Gentiles into one family (3:1-13). Through the gospel, they, and we, have come to praise 'the glory of his grace' (1:6). As Paul says elsewhere, the riches of God's glory have been poured out on those destined to receive mercy (Ro. 9:23). It is this gospel, and this action of the gospel, that brings him to worship and pray.

He knows that to whatever nation he goes, God is Father. This Father names, and so has authority, over all families or nations (Gen. 12:3), and companies of angels as well because he includes families in heaven. The whole creation has its particular manner of existence because God is Father. He wants to be known and sets out to make himself known (Jn. 4:23; Ac. 14:17; 17:26-29).

God being Father to the creation must include our personal experience of familyhood. We are meant to learn from infancy, the dynamics of familyhood and of God as Father. None of us have an isolated existence; we are born into a family and a nation. The truth of God's fatherhood should be known by all but is revealed to believers in Christ. His glory is expressed in supplying, in Christ, all that we need (Ph. 4:19).

This glory of the Father is moral glory, requiring that we live according to its shining. So Paul is praying that the Father will supply what is needed from the riches of his glory.

The first prayer (taking the repeated Greek word for 'so that' as our clue) is for *strengthening* (v. 16). It does not take much imagination to realise that if God is about something magnificent in the creation by the sending of his Son and the preaching of the gospel, that to live in that glory requires some growing up! A physiotherapist told me that the body 'cheats'; that is, it uses different parts of the body than what it should to get things done if it seems easier. The same can be said for the spirit. But when it comes to living before the Father we can't afford to let ourselves do 'what comes naturally' but should pray to this Father of glory to strengthen us.

This strengthening happens by the Spirit coming *towards* or *into* the 'inner man'. This expression is always used about a Christian, someone who loves God's law (Ro. 7:22) and is constantly renewed (2 Co. 4:16) by the Spirit's indwelling. Jesus promised one lady that rivers of water would flow from within her (Jo. 4:14), or we may say, from her innermost being (Jo. 7:38). Living according to mere form, or according to our own passions, tends to close off this inner person, but we are made to live from the depths, not in ignorance of it (Pr. 4:23; eg. 1 Pe. 3:4). The pain we often feel there may keep us from acknowledging these depths in ourselves but it is here that the Father comes to meet our need by his Spirit. Perhaps this is in mind when our Lord says 'your Father knows that you need all these things' (Ma. 6:32). We cannot afford to be anxious but should live in the peace of the Father who will meet all our needs (Ph. 4:6-7, 19-20).

This is the same as 'Christ dwelling in your hearts through faith' (*lit.* 'Christ to dwell'). This fulfils the promise Jesus made, linking the coming of the Spirit with his indwelling (Jo. 14:16-19). Paul lives with this miracle of grace but still wonders at the personal truth of it and awakens us to our need for it (Gal. 2:20; 4:19). This is to be 'rooted and grounded in love'. We do not look for the source of love within ourselves but in him, and this is constant.

The second prayer (v. 18) is that we may have *strength to comprehend* 'the breadth, length and height'—perhaps, of the mystery of which he has been speaking (Ep. 3:3-6, 8-10), a mystery that can only be conveyed by a personal experience of the love of God in Christ, and him being our life. Through Christ, we are caught into God's love for the nations.

The third prayer (v. 19b) is that we may be *filled* with the fullness of God, that is, to know the glory of the Father, shining on in Christ by the Spirit, and then from us in love to the nations.

This prayer to the Father (vv. 14-19—one sentence) concludes with praise. The Father (v. 20) is able to do far more than we can ask or think. The power at work within us is nothing less than the power that raised Jesus from the dead and established him at the Father's right hand (Ep. 1:17-20). Always, the measure of his working in us is the measure of his working in his Son. At the Father's right hand, Christ is head over all things *for* the church, that is, he administers all things with a view to the Father's glory being seen, not only in himself, but also in us, and especially in us (also 2 Th. 1:12). If a wife is the glory of her husband (1 Co. 11:7), then the Church is the way in which Christ displays his fullness (Ep. 5:27). So the Father's glory is seen in the fullness of what he has done for us in his Son. There is 'one God and Father who is over all and through all and in all' (Ep. 4:6).

'When God is above all He controls all things for our benefit. He has authority over us for our good. He is not locked into His family so that He is controlled by them. On the other hand, He is through all, co-ordinating it, giving it reality as family, and so is not locked out of His people. Finally He is present intimately and personally to all His family, that is, to each and every member, so that none is lonely, none unassisted, none without emotional and personal fulfilment' (G. Bingham, *Oh Father our Father*, pp. 52f).

It remains to say that we must live in a manner worthy of this calling (Ep. 4:1). This does not mean that we should try to be as good as God or Christ, but rather, that fully receiving all that they have done, we obediently let that be the rule of our life. Paul illustrates this in his sufferings for the believers: he does not seek to secure himself but, like Christ, lays his life down for them, for their glory (Ep. 3:21). Christ's love in Paul is witness to the glory of the love in which they are held. This is the manner of love we are to have for one another.