

THE REVELATION OF CHRIST

Lesson Aim: To instill in believers a deep concern for the welfare of their spiritual lives.

Suggestion: Have the students read the Scriptures and answer the questions in the student lesson and insert the questions below where they fit your lesson for class discussion.

Introduction: There are many blessings that we receive from Christ, but the most important of these blessings are those that improve our spiritual lives. When a person's spiritual life is blessed of God, the rest of his life is already blessed by God. "...To be strengthened with might by His Spirit in the inner man...and to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge, that you might be filled with all the fullness of God." (Eph 3:16b, 19).

What was the mystery that Paul preached? 3:2-6

Paul introduced the dispensation of the grace of God to the Gentiles. This new plan had not been revealed to the Old Testament prophets. It had been hidden in the mind of God, and so it had been a "mystery" to all men, but now it was revealed by the Spirit to Paul and to other New Testament prophets and apostles (3:5). What was this "mystery" that Paul was making known? He said that Gentiles were now given the same privileges through the Gospel of Jesus Christ that Jews had enjoyed under the dispensation of the law given by Moses. It was mind boggling news for the Jews. Gentiles were now joined together with Jews. They were fellow heirs of God's riches, fellow members of Christ's body (the church) and fellow partakers of God's promises (3:6). This message so maddened the unsaved Jews that many desired to murder Paul for preaching it, but Paul was faithful to his divine commission and continued to proclaim this Spirit-revealed "mystery." For this reason he was now a "prisoner of Jesus Christ" (3:1) and was honored to be such. We need to have Paul's attitude and never be ashamed of the glorious church of Jesus Christ.

What was the ministry of Paul? 3:7-13

Paul was made a "minister" by God before he was a "prisoner" of Christ. God graciously empowered him to do this ministry by His Spirit (3:7; cf 3:16, 20). He felt unworthy of this ministry because he had persecuted the church (1 Cor 15:9), but he faithfully did his job. What was his ministry? First, he was to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ to the Gentiles (3:8). Then, he was to make all men understand the "mystery," namely, that Jews and Gentiles were equally united in one body, the church (3:9). Finally, as a result of doing these two things his ministry in the church would be a good testimony of the manifold wisdom of God to angels (3:10). Such wisdom, previously hidden to humans, even to angels, was the eternal purpose of God (3:11). Now all believers, Gentiles as well as Jews can have boldness and confident access before God (3:12; cf. 2:18). Since these blessings were so glorious, Paul felt highly honored to be the minister of them and did not want the believers to feel sorry for him while he was suffering in prison for their sake (3:13). Paul's spiritual blessings put his physical sufferings in proper perspective. When our spiritual life is properly tuned to God's will, our physical trials will be relieved of their agony and we will be able to sing and pray like Paul and Silas did in the Philippian jail.

What was the "cause" that affected Paul's ministry so greatly? 3:14-15

Paul began his prayer again in 3:14 with the words, "For this cause" (cf. 3:1). The "cause" he had in mind is the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile accomplished through the Gospel (2:1-22). This cause impressed him so much that he bowed his knees in humility before God the Father when he made his request for the spiritual lives of the believers.

What were the three requests that Paul made for the Ephesian believers? 3:16-19

Paul made a three-fold request which is easily identified in the Greek text by the word translated "that" (*hina*). This word appears in 3:16, "that He would grant you...to be strengthened with might"; in 3:17b, "that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend...and to know the love of Christ"; and in 3:19b, "that you might be filled with all the fullness of God." This is what God wants to see in our lives, too. Also ask God to make this a reality in the lives of others as you pray for them.

Why do we need to be strengthened with might by the Spirit? 3:16-17a.

Paul prayed that believers might be strengthened with the Spirit's power in the inner, spiritual part of their lives, so that Christ might "dwell" (feel at home) in their hearts. Christ lives in us by the Spirit when we receive Him as our Savior, but He cannot feel at home in our lives, when we tolerate sin in our hearts. The Spirit has divine power (3:20) and will take those sins out of our lives when we yield ourselves to His control and ask Him to deliver us from them. When the Spirit is in control of our lives, Christ will feel at home in our lives. Then we will have sweet fellowship with Him (1 John 1:3-7).

Why should we grasp and know the love of Christ? 3:17b-19a

Paul prayed that the believers might be able to "comprehend" ("apprehend" or "to lay hold of" is a better translation) and to "know" the love of Christ. Although Christ's love can never be fully grasped and known by anyone, a believer should seek to grasp it by drawing closer to Him in his or her daily life. Paul wanted every believer to be "rooted and grounded" in Christ's love. "Rooted" gives the image of a plant with a good root system to give it health and strength. "Grounded" refers to the firm foundation of a building. The believer that is rooted and grounded in Christ's love will be spiritually healthy, strong and well established to overcome every kind of attack. This is why we should seek to grasp and know the love of Christ.

How can we be filled with the fullness of God? 3:19b

The climax of Paul's prayer for the believers is reached by his request that they might be filled up to the brim with the fullness of God. In other words Paul wanted them to be no less than fully mature in their Christian life. First, to experience the fullness of God, we must fill our minds with the Word of God to know who He is. It tells us the truth about Him and will help us to think like He thinks. It should be the goal of every Christian to read through the Bible every year or two. Second, we must fill our hearts with the Word of God. We do that by worshipping Him for His love and greatness, by obeying His commands with joy, by confessing our sins when we fail Him, by thanking Him for His blessings and gifts, by telling others about Him and His salvation through His Son and by praying for the needs of others. When we are filled more and more with the likeness of His Son, we will experience the fullness of God.

What are the two claims of God that Paul said at the close of his prayer? 3:20-21

Paul concluded his prayer by making two great claims for God. First, he claimed that God had great power (3:20). Paul said God is able to do whatever we ask; and even more, He is able to do whatever we think. Yes, He is able to do exceeding...abundantly...above...all...that we ask or think. How? God will do it by the power that works in us - the Holy Spirit. With that kind of power available, Paul was confident that his prayer was well within the power of God to answer it. Second, he claimed that God deserves all the glory for whatever is done in the church by Christ Jesus. We need to see that our church brings glory to God by the way we live and serve Him.

We need to appreciate what God has done in building His church. He has taken spiritually dead people and given them life. He has taken hostile enemies and made peace between them. He has taken immature believers and fashioned them more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ. He has called His marvelous work the Body of Christ, the Temple of God, and the Bride of Christ. We need to glorify God in our spiritual lives. We must be strong in the Spirit; know the love of Christ personally; and be filled with the fullness of God.