

SECTION 3: Implications of following Christ

Colossians 1:24-29

1: 24. Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.

25: I have become its servant by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in its fullness - the mystery that has been kept hidden for ages and generations, but is now disclosed to the saints.

27: To them God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

28: We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ.

29: To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

This passage leads us to consider the implications of being a Christian, one who believes, and appreciates all that God has given in Christ. That privilege brings responsibility. Here we look at four aspects:

1. Suffering physically
2. Serving as a faithful steward
3. Sharing the secret
4. Striving for the goal

There are a number of TV programmes and films about at this time dealing with the idea of heroes, sometimes *super* heroes.

A hero is someone who fulfils a difficult mission, requiring great courage, and overcoming great danger in order to benefit others.

Here is your chance today to be a hero for the faith!

Paul is reflecting on what he has been called to do as a servant of Christ. Before we go on to think of that let's think for a minute on this question of a call.

There is a great deal of confusion about this whole idea of the call of God in our lives. Many people feel that it has to be a dramatic thing, just like the story of the burning bush, where Moses hears the voice of God speaking very clearly and directly, and for a very specific purpose.

There is also the notion sometimes that you can only be called by God by being called into full-time ministry of some sort; and if not that, then you are merely an ordinary member of the church.

There is confusion, too, about the whole idea of ministry, that ministers are somehow or another better or more important than anyone else. That cannot be so, for they are servants of the church (or at least should be).

We are all called to be Christians and, as such, have to face up to the

implications of that vocation.

There are certain features that stand out when we consider what is entailed in being called to be Christians in this way. These are:

1. **Suffering** -

Paul's calling to proclaim the gospel is something that is common to us all, in that we are all to share Jesus Christ with this lost and dying world. That may be at a cost.

In his work for the gospel, there can be no doubt that Paul suffered. We read in the New Testament that he was beaten, shipwrecked and even imprisoned, all for his faith in Jesus, (not for being stupid nor because of his own faults).

- He rejoices in that suffering because it comes about as he serves and it is all purposeful.
- He is unselfish: his ministry is done for the believers' sake, for the wellbeing of the church, not that Paul may glory in his suffering.
- He operates in fellowship with Christ. The ministry is an application of what Jesus did: He paid the price for us; it is sacrificial love and giving.

We should count it a privilege to suffer for the sake of the gospel. (Christ suffered on the Cross for our sin and also for our righteousness through identification with the Father).

2. **Steward** -

Paul is a minister of the gospel. We tend to lose sight of the idea that ministry is service. There are those who are government ministers and yet their behaviour is so coloured by political interests and in preserving status and position that they can hardly be described as servants. Those who 'minister' (i.e. who serve, not merely 'position-holders') are the true servants of the church.

Paul, himself, sought to serve. This shows itself in:

- Stewardship - his acceptance of it and his being called and gifted for that particular work to which God had called him.
- Responsibility - his assumption of responsibility as his work and his duty. There are those who feel that if they are called then they are happy to sit back and have an easy life. The calling is to work, to serve. We have a part to play.
- Being focused on that to which he was called - the proclamation of the word, the spreading of the good news and the building up

of the church.

3. **Sharing the secret.**

The 'mystery' (v27) isn't something that we can try to figure out; nor is it something that is somehow beyond our understanding. The mystery is something that was kept by God for those to whom He would reveal it. That was in and through Jesus Christ.

- The mystery is that we can know God and be known by Him; that we can be brought into the family of God; that we can know Jesus Christ living in our hearts; that we can be that close to God.
- It is something that is revealed, not learned or discovered; something that is given to us.
- It is something that is motivating, giving reason for activity and endeavour.

4. **Striving for the goal**

The goal is to proclaim Him; not a philosophy or a system, but to proclaim Christ.

- By admonition - warning people of the dangers of ignoring Jesus and the consequences of sin.
- By teaching every man - ensuring that people have a knowledge and understanding of the gospel that they might put their faith in Jesus.
- By nurturing, that we may *'present everyone perfect in Christ'* with all wisdom, with maximum effort; and with maximum strength from God

It is a privilege where the nature of the serving is such that requires industry and faithfulness; enduring any hardship in the knowledge of the greater purpose.

Service not only brings the risk of suffering: it has other dangers also.

We now go on and look at some of these.