

ViralStJames Bible Study #6: Living the Life

The Background: Living the Life

Ephesians 4:1-16

Paul, as a devout Pharisee before becoming a disciple of Christ would have been more than familiar with the words from Deuteronomy 6.4 *'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God the Lord is one'*, proclaimed by Jesus to be part of the greatest commandment (Mark 12 28-29). And yet in this oneness there is the mystery of diversity and abundance. On Trinity Sunday Richard described God as relational, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and here Paul works through how unity and diversity is a key element to living and growing together in relationship as the body of Christ.

The Passage

Eph. 4:1 I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, ² with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³ making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. ⁴ There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.

Eph. 4:7 But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift. ⁸ Therefore it is said,

"When he ascended on high he made captivity itself a captive;
he gave gifts to his people."

⁹ (When it says, "He ascended," what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower parts of the earth? ¹⁰ He who descended is the same one who ascended far above all the heavens, so that he might fill all things.) ¹¹ The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, ¹³ until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ. ¹⁴ We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ But speaking the truth in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.

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The Questions

- 1) List the number of times Paul uses the term 'one' in verses 2-7. Reflect on what he includes, why he includes it - and why he is so insistent on this 'one-ness'.
- 2) Paul urges his readers ('the saints in Ephesus' 1.1) to 'live a life worthy of the calling you have received' (v1). What is this 'calling' and how would others recognise it?
- 3) Think of the culture that the Ephesian followers of Jesus would have been living in. How close do you think this 'life worthy of the calling' would be to the lifestyle of those around them? Thinking of recent events in America and this country, how different is it today?
 - *A Roman culture, where many 'gods' were worshipped and seen as needing to be placated – only the ex-pat Jews recognised one God. The cult of the Temple of Artemis was a leading part of everyday culture, and the Ephesians were not slow to embrace the cult of worshiping the emperor. A culture where the idea was to be top of the pile, and align yourself to a household of someone who was ambitious and going places.*
- 4) Verses 8-11 are not easy to understand, but in quoting from Psalm 68:18, Paul seems to reverse the 'natural order'. In the Psalm, the image is of a victorious king receiving gifts, or tribute from those he has conquered. Here, Christ as King demonstrates how different the values of the Kingdom of God are – instead of receiving tribute, he gives gifts away to his followers. What gifts does Paul mention here and in 1 Corinthians 12 4-11?

Does the Holy Spirit still give some or all of these today?
- 5) Why does Jesus, through the Spirit, give these gifts to his followers? (V12-13)
- 6) Does Paul believe in life-long learning? (v 12-13) If so, what does he see as the purpose of it?
- 7) Individually, we may be given different gifts – but is the responsibility to serve, to grow to maturity, a calling only for certain individuals or for us all? Why is it so important?
- 8) 'Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold' is a line from the poet WB Yeats. We may feel under pressure despite our gifts and the teaching we receive, or conversely, we may be tempted to think we are in charge, and masters of the universe. To help us maintain perspective, who does Paul say is the Head who holds it all together? (v15 - 16) How does this sometimes unwieldy looking body grow? And who has a part to play in building it up?
- 9) What do you take away from this reflection?

The Space for notes
