

w/b 31st May 2020

the next step

stepping out and following where He leads

Jesus' summons is simple - 'Follow Me!'

As His disciples, those who have responded to His call, the church is, by definition, a people on the move.

As Ruth said to Naomi, so His church says to Jesus, 'Where you go, I will go.' We are bold, therefore, both as individuals and as a local fellowship of believers, to step out in faith and to follow where He leads. 'The next step' is always the most important one and it's what that 'next step' looks like for ourselves that this series of studies addresses.



You can find the background to this short series here.

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13. The unity of the Spirit

(Ephesians 4.1-16)

[w/b Sunday 31st May 2020]

“.. make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit ..”

At this point in his letter, Paul moves on to the practical application of the great truths which he's been underlining in the earlier chapters.

Prominent among those truths of the gospel he's been declaring was his emphasis on both the activity of the Spirit and the uniting of all things in Jesus Christ. It's no surprise, therefore, that as he moves into this more 'applicatory' section of the letter it's with these related themes that he starts.

[There are 7 questions as ever, all important - but your Community Group may well choose to concentrate on just some of them. Key questions in this study are probably 2, 3 and 6. As always try to leave good time for shared prayer!]

There should be, as usual, a video introduction to this study, available under 'Resources/Live streams and videos' on the website.

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1. **Read Eph.4.1-16.** As the old hymn puts it, the church of Jesus is 'His new creation': these verses sound out the first of the great hallmarks of the church which He has called into being.

How would you summarise the practical thrust of these verses in a sentence or two?

As you prayerfully read through this passage what stands out for you – and why does it stand out for you?

2. Read Eph.4.1-3. These first three verses provide the basis for the rest of the letter, as well as being more specifically an introduction to the vv.4-16.

What are the qualities which Paul exhorts upon his readers and why are they so necessary?

From a practical point of view, what might each of the qualities he alludes to entail for you (try and think of some practical examples)?

3. Read Eph.4.3-6. The unity to which Paul refers is created and sustained by the Spirit of God: in these verses he explains the nature of that unity.

For all our differences, what, according to Paul, do all Christians have in common?

What for you are the hardest issues in relation to which you really struggle to maintain that unity of the Spirit?

4. **Read Eph.4.7-10.** Unity clearly doesn't mean uniformity, as Paul proceeds to highlight by reference to the Lord's giving 'gifts' to His people.

What are the gifts you're conscious of the Lord having given to you?

Read **Psalm 68.18** from which Paul quotes in v.8: why do you think he changed the wording from 'received gifts' to 'gave gifts'?

5. **Read Eph.4.11-13.** The list of gifts which Paul gives here is simply illustrative of the range of gifts the Lord gives: other 'lists' of gifts are given in Rom.12.4ff and 1 Cor.12.9ff, for instance.

Why do you think Paul concentrates his attention at this point on those gifts which have to do with the ministry of the Word of God?

To what extent and in what ways has the ministry of the Word of God equipped you 'for works of service'?

6. **Read Eph.4.11-13.** The concern which Paul always had in his ministry (and which he saw underpinning all such ministry) was to present people 'mature', or 'perfect' in Christ (see Col.1.28)

Beyond equipping God's people for works of service what does Paul say is the end God has in view in the exercise of these 'Word-based' gifts?

What does the 'maturity' of which Paul speaks look like in the life of a local fellowship?

7. Read Eph.4.14-16. As there was at creation, so there always is a marked *progression* in the continuing ministry of the Spirit of God in His church.

What characterizes the 'maturity' Paul was concerned to secure and see, as opposed to mere 'infancy',?

In the life of a local fellowship what do you think the words "*.. as each part does its work*" will mean?