

Vive la Difference

'Vive la difference!' is an expression in French which literally means "long live the difference". It seems to come from 1919 or 1920 and means that you should rejoice in what makes someone different from you, rather than blame and shame them for it. Yet all too often differences in gender, race, age, intellectual capabilities, power and wealth are the cause of conflict, rather than a stimulus for celebration.

I starting preparing these thoughts on Holocaust Memorial Day when the genocide of the Jews and other minorities by the Nazis is remembered. Sadly, it still goes on to varying degrees and there

are repeated reports of racism in sport.

Disrespecting differences between people can bring dis-ease, feel demanding, even disturbing. While not terminal, the dis-ease can be painful and deep-seated.

The good news is that this dis-ease will respond to the medicine of God's Word and the encouragement and provocation of spiritual brothers and sisters.

Today, let's take an over-view of what the Bible says about how we should respond to some God-given differences.

Moses – Racial differences

Tension is rising around Moses and overflowed in his own brother and sister. The cause is clear — it's about Moses' wife. She was black... Her race were known for their black skins. When tensions rise, it is often difficult to own up, even to recognise that race can be one of the issues.

Where is the tension in your life? Your community?

Is race an underlying factor? Racism is an invisible spiritual disease, totally unacceptable to God and completely out of place amongst his people.

In terms of race: Vive la difference.

The Marginalised – 1 Corinthians 12

Let's take another example. Paul mentions a number of spiritual gifts in 1st Corinthians 12 but why, in the midst of a discussion about spiritual gifts, does Paul make reference to 'Jews or Gentiles, slave or free'.

He's pointing to the different types of people in your church, your neighbourhood, your community.

- Who are the most respected and valued? / Who are the neglected and dishonoured?
- Who feels left out? / Who is made a fuss of?

- Who might feel inferior?

Let me suggest a few — those with disabilities, the elderly, the unemployed or on low incomes, immigrants and refugees, all of which we can find honoured in the bible - the cripple Mephibosheth and honoured by David.

Paul gives some principles which should apply beyond the church to the whole of our attitude, and perhaps especially to those not within the church. Let's show that we each value all who feel unnoticed by the rest of society.

In terms of the marginalised, Vive la difference

Cultural Differences – Acts 6

I touched on racial difference, but there can also be cultural differences. When I was with BAe, I sent two of my staff to work at another site. The way of working there was far different from our more genteel and respectful ways at Kingston. They experienced what many of us knew – they did things differently ‘up north’.

Acts 6 is an earlier example of cultural difference.

... The Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.^a

We all make mistakes. No church is perfect, not even the first church in Jerusalem. People were being accidentally overlooked.

Partly, this was the pressure of growth, but there was a definite pattern. It was the Greek-speaking, immigrant widows who were missing out. They were of the same race and faith but with a different culture. The solution came when 7 Greek people were appointed to resolve the problem.

Let's seek to understand any cultural differences, rather than to justify, or explain your own angle.

^a Acts 6:1

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Paul later wrote to the Ephesians about the healing that Christ brought to the greatest fracture in first-century society - the animosity between Jew and Gentile^b.

The Christian Church were known by some as 'The Third Race', implying that Christians were the dregs of society, the least of all peoples. They were far from that.

They were a third kind of people on the earth, neither Jew nor Gentile and we are the third race! Before we consider ourselves British, African, Indian, Scottish etc, let's think of ourselves first as Christian. Remember: Christians from other ethnicities, backgrounds and denominations are our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Vive la difference, but let me change the catchphrase to another: from The 3 Musketeers - "One for all and all for one."

Jesus is the one who came for us all, and he wants us all to be of one mind for Him. One day we will be with Him- from whatever race, colour, status, with whatever language.

All are united for one as

¹⁰ ... they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb."

Everyone praises God in their own tongue. Christian unity is rooted in the fact that our 'robes' have been cleansed in the same blood of the Lamb, but not all differences are washed away.

^b Ephesians 2:14

Vive la difference, as we are also “One for all and all for one.”

Celebrate our differences, Jesus for all, all for Jesus.

Let me end with 1 Thess 3:¹²May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.