

I remember visiting a country area doing promotion and having the rather sad experience of visiting three churches experiencing splits. It sent me spiralling into discouragement as I found it hard to understand why church divisions seem so commonplace.

In **PSALM 133** David is declaring the blessing of the Lord's people coming together in unity. Now I'm not talking about a unity that is not biblically based or a unity that is not in any way shape or form on the basis of being one in Christ. There are all forms of unity that the church tries to artificially bring about but in fact really are nothing more than a sham. It is interesting that David declares that unity is something that is good and pleasant. I guess it's fair to say that it's great to come together as the Lord's people without animosity, without our own agenda, without trying to have our own way, without trying to enforce our own will on other people, but simply just to come together to worship the Lord and serve Him in Spirit and in Truth. Unity we need to see then is something that the church needs to revere because it is a critical part of enabling the church to be an effective witness into the community.

A number of key things in this Psalm about unity :

First, we need to see that unity is a gift from God. We need to recognise that when we talk about this whole anointing with oil it was something that was done at the direction of God. It was something that was done to highlight the importance, symbolically speaking at least for us today of the fullness of the Holy Spirit. I love reading about the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts because you will read again and again where the Lord's people came together for prayer and they were described as being of one mind, one heart and one spirit. Now this can only happen where the church walks in the anointing oil of the Spirit of God; when it walks in the authority and direction and will of God. We need to see that in this gift from God unity comes as God is pleased to bless the church. The oil running down infers that the blessing to the church comes

from above, from God alone. What is critical to see here is that sin is something that separates us from God and also from each other. Sin is something that needs to be constantly, in fact daily overcome both as an individual Christian and as the church. As we do this we can experience what David said in v1 that unity is both good and pleasant.

We need to also see that unity brings renewal within the church. When we come with a desire to see that only God's will is accomplished then we find the church comes together and works with a unity of mind, heart and spirit. When we abandon our own agenda for God's agenda the blessing flows, not only in our own life but in the church at large. Unity also brings a wonderful joy into the church. Isn't it wonderful when we have a common vision, heart and passion to honour and glorify God? Because when we do we find ourselves focused on being effective witnesses for God in our communities. When God is pleased to bless then we can rejoice in the fact that He is at work in and through us

PRAISE the Lord for:

- For the various opportunities to (i) share Christ (ii) outreach and evangelism around Johannesburg (iii) ministry in various prisons (iv) working with children
- Safe return home of the Impact Africa team and for the wonderful experiences had as they ministered in the various areas whilst in South Africa
- For the seed sown through the paper while in South Africa

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OVER**

which brings great joy into the church not only from a personal experience, but also from the joy of seeing people coming into a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. What we need to see in all of this is that Holy Spirit unity is a rare thing. What the psalmist is saying to us here is that it is precious and he is indicating or implying that it is something that should be pursued vigorously for the right reasons. It is also precious because it is so lacking in our churches.

Again and again Jesus tells us that we are to love one another. If we cannot love one another then how on earth are we going to love the non-Christian? Then we need to see also that unity is precious because it is essential for a growing church. Again and again in the book of Acts we read how God was daily adding to the church those who were being saved. But as a precursor to this invariably you found the church in prayer. You found the church going door to door, breaking bread and so on. This helped to really bring about a unity of vision and passion for the church which had an explosive effect on the non-Christian community. It would be a rare thing today to see three thousand people saved at one meeting. And we need to see also that unity is precious because it is the first thing that Satan wants to undermine. I remember reading in Jesse Pen-Lewis's writings that we should never forget that the forces of evil are absolutely united in their desire to destroy the church. Even the forces of evil recognise how important unity is to bring about a certain end, if you will. So we need to recognise that the forces of evil will do whatever it takes to bring about the demise of the Christian church. And of course this is why we are seeing what is happening in many churches today with division and disharmony.

Second, we need to see that if unity is to come into our churches that it primarily comes through prayer. You see prayer gets to the heart of the issue at hand because it does a number of key things. First of all prayer impacts our motives in our Christian lives and in our churches. It has to be said that often our motives are far from pure even in the Christian church, yes even in our marriages and our family lives. Then we need to see that genuine prayer impacts our desires. It has been said that when we pray for something often the first person that God works in is the person who prays. So as we pray God begins to direct and yes even change our desires

in terms of moving from the things of the world to the things of God. And then we need to see that genuine prayer impacts our vision. Again and again we see the church in the book of Acts praying and God is impacting their vision to reach their Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria and the outer parts of the world. Paul was a classic example of this as he went from place to place led of the Spirit of God as the result of prayer.

Third, we see that genuine prayer impacts our service. That is it impacts the nature of our service, the quality, the fruit that comes from our service. So you can see that unity is a critical aspect of any Christian church, any Christian ministry, and any Christian family. So that's why it is so good and pleasant when brethren dwell together in unity.

{ CARL CARMODY
EDITOR CHALLENGE }

PRAYER needed for:

- The many people who came to Christ while in South Africa. Many came to Jesus from within prison, squatter camps, street and childrens' ministries.
- The ministries we work with while in South Africa with Impact Africa. Pray for these ministries as they continue to follow up on all the commitments received
- The team as they step back into their normal day to day lives
- The ongoing discipleship of new believers around the world

Challenge Direct Deposit details :

BSB: 066162 (Commbank)
Account: 00900455

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Contact us by phone (08) 9453 3311
Email: info@challengenews.org