

Challenge

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Psalm 133

I remember visiting South Australia on one occasion to do some promotion predominantly in the country areas and having the rather unpleasant experience of going to three churches in a row that had recently experienced a split. I have to say that it sent me spiralling into discouragement as I found it hard to understand why church divisions seem so commonplace. I guess it goes without saying that 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 its 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 reverse because it is a critical part of enabling the church to be an effective witness into the community.

We need to see a number of key things in this Psalm about unity.

Firstly, 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 through the book of the Acts of the Holy Spirit 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, not only that, it separates us from each other. What we need to see here is that 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 then we know that we can experience what David said in the first verse 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 together with a unity of mind and 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. When we do this unity also brings a wonderful joy into the church. Isn't it wonderful when we have a common vision and heart and passion to honour and glorify God? Because when we do we find ourselves focused on being effective witnesses for God into our communities. When God is pleased to bless this then we can rejoice in the fact that He is at work in us and through us which brings great joy into the church not only from a personal experience of our own walk 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 in saying that 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.

I've lost track over the years of the number of churches I've visited where I've stayed with someone who has taken the opportunity as it were, to unload all of the church's dirty laundry on my lap as some sort of means of gaining a resolution to their problems. It just highlights to me again and again that we as the Lord's people need to recognise that genuine Holy Spirit unity is something that is lacking in our churches and therefore should be something that is vigorously pursued. And then we need to see that it is precious because of what it is and what it achieves. Just recently here in Western Australia we've had the Liberal Party bickering amongst themselves about particular issues. It's not long before you see in the polls the rather cancerous effect that disunity has within a political party and you can only imagine how damaging it is within the Christian church. Again and again Jesus tells us that we are to love one another. The problem is that 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 of how God was daily adding to the church those who were being saved or some such expression. But as a precursor to this invariably you found the church in prayer. You found the church going door to door, breaking up 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 a number of years ago reading in Jesse Pen-Lewis's writings

(Please turn over)

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.

Then secondly, 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 as they pray 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.

Then last, but not least 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 of Challenge

Praise

1. Let's praise God for the recent Impact Africa mission trip to Johannesburg in South Africa. Much prayer and organisation went into the trip for the 26 who went. Ministry included 2 children's Vacation Bible Schools, schools ministry, orphanages, prisons, squatter camps, teaching for indigenous pastors, street evangelism, hospital visitation.
2. Praise God for His faithfulness and provision for the work both here and overseas. We have some wonderfully faithful and incredibly generous folk who give to the work of Challenge for which we are enormously grateful.
3. Praise God for "open doors" into the countries of southern Africa.
4. For recent purchase of publishing software which will be integrated over the coming months to further improve the newspaper. So pray for staff in the learning curve they need to schedule in.

Prayer

1. Pray for the Challenge Board, who on August 12th will hold one of its regular planning meetings for the ministry.
2. Pray for unity among staff who consist of volunteers, part-timers and full-time paid people.
3. Pray for Carl Carmody in his leadership of the team ... particularly with his absence from headquarters on a regular basis.
4. Carl will continue promotion to the United States this month and will be away for several weeks. He will be accompanied by a good friend of Challenge, Michael Hunt.
5. Pray for a second edition of Challenge in Spanish to go into Argentina in September. Pray for our partner there, Will Herndon in the city of Cordoba, and he seeks to encourage churches to use the paper.
6. Pray that the Lord of the Harvest will continue to provide resources for the task at hand ... distribution networks, personnel with writing skills, finance for print bills, visionary and praying people on our Board, a new Treasurer.

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