

Unity

Wholeness for the Church

By

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Behold, how good and how pleasant it is
for brothers to dwell together in unity

Foreword

A man was shipwrecked on a desert island and survived alone for more than five years. He had no human company and befriended many birds and a few wild animals became his companions.

At last a passing ship saw the pillar of smoke rising from his cooking fire and sent a small craft to investigate. Landing on the island they found the man fit, in good health and with a long straggly beard. Overjoyed to have human company after such a long time, the man invited the men from the ship to see his home. There were three well-constructed one-room buildings made from wood, mud and leaves.

“This middle one is my home,” the man declared proudly. It looked fairly comfortable in the circumstances and was solid enough to keep out the monsoon rains when they came.

Back outside he took them to the building on the left. Sitting majestically on the top of the roof was a beautiful wooden cross that he had carved from a piece of driftwood.

“This is where I go to church,” he told them.

A little puzzled, the men looked toward the third hut. Compared to the other two it looked a little neglected. They asked, “So what is the third building for?”

The islander looked a little sad and perhaps even a little hurt.

“Oh,” he said, “That is where I used to go to church!”

Another amusing church story? Well, yes! But it is more than just a story. The sad thing is that anyone who has been in and around the churches for some time will recognise a ring of truth in the situation of this island man.

Introduction

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing - life forevermore. (Psalm 133)

Many years ago, when my Christianity was dead and the church I was attending did more to bury than to restore my spiritual life we had just finished chanting Psalm 133. The man sitting next to me turned to me and said somewhat cynically, "What relevance has singing about oil running down beards got to do with modern life?" To my shame I confess that I nodded an agreement before settling down to what seemed like another uninspiring service. (Although in hindsight it was probably me who was uninspired.)

Thankfully, my spiritual life has been somewhat resurrected and I have discovered the power of this Psalm. I have come to see that in the twenty-first century church this is one of the most relevant passages in the Bible the whole church, leadership and laity alike. As I began to see the power of these words, I also saw that God wants to draw our attention to the blessings of unity. This first word is His cry to the church for her attention:

"Behold!"

I believe that every word in the Bible is written for a purpose. This was not David looking for a way to start the Psalm. He understood the importance and power of the Psalm and cried for the readers' attention. "Look at this! Give it your full attention! It is something of great importance to which I wish to draw your attention."

John the Baptist used this same word one day as he was baptizing people in the River Jordan. He looked and saw Jesus walking down the valley to the river. He knew that from this day his own task was completed. Jesus was ready to begin the work that He came to do. "*Behold!* The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" He wanted to turn their attention away from himself. "Behold!" As people turned to see Jesus, they would not know His importance or relevance as He walked towards them, but John diverted their attention to Him. As Jesus was baptised every eye saw the Holy Spirit descend upon Him in the form of a dove and heard the voice of the Father commend Him from heaven. This was something they would never forget. It was a life-changing experience.

As I listened to the choir singing Psalm 133 those many years ago I did not know the importance and relevance of what I was hearing. Then, one day as I read, the Psalm became life to me. The revelation was unforgettable. "Behold!"

How good and how pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.” As I began to meditate on these words the direction of my life and teaching was changed. I have, since then, been teaching a message of unity for over ten years and seen transformation in churches and communities alike as the people of God embrace the teaching and ‘live’ it.

I was shocked when I was first told that, in Kenya, the government had stopped issuing registrations to new ministries and churches. ‘Surely,’ I thought, ‘this is a Christian nation. I know it has its’ problems but suppression of the church is not yet one of them.’

What I did not know was the government had seen what the church had not seen.

Division!

There have been so many people wanting to start their own ministries instead of working to build the thousands that already exist. Too many are dissatisfied with their leadership! Many are simply looking for ways of supporting themselves and their families financially! Some want to be the ‘big boss’! Others leave their church because they disagree over a small point of doctrine, which, incidentally, usually has no relevance to salvation and holy living.

This is surely a serious situation. I was once told by the founder of another new ministry that he was unable to obtain registration. He told me he was praying for a certain ministry, which he said was heretical, to fail, so that he might take over their registration! The body of Christ, the church, has become fragmented and divided. Jesus prayed “That they may be one.” (John 17:11, 21, 22, 23). That prayer is not yet answered.

Attempts at unity are made at every level but there is no true unity. I have attended many pastors’ fraternals and leadership meetings and at best I have seen ‘togetherness’ – and this ‘best’ is not always found. Competition, jealousy, envy and gossip if not openly evident are usually bubbling under the surface. It does not take many conversations before and after such meetings to determine which churches and leaders are ‘in’ and which are ‘out’. Together is not unity.

In Africa, I have been holding ‘Unity Seminars’ for over ten years and established many pastor’s fellowships. While none are perfect, I have found that when church leaders catch the vision for true unity, and begin to practice these principles, the blessings of unity begin to overflow, not just in their churches, but into their communities also.