



# Behold the Beauty and Blessing of Unity

## Psalm 133

This is a brief but beautiful psalm extolling the value and virtues of Christian fellowship. It's a charming and challenging psalm. It's a psalm of David. Perhaps it was written when he became king over all Israel; or when he brought the ark to Jerusalem — thus linking it with Psalm 132. Prior to David being king, the tribes under Saul were fractured and dislocated. But David was able to unite them and bring cohesion (2 Sam. 5:1-10). Though later in his life that unity was lost — both in the nation and in his own family — yet he never had reason to withdraw or rewrite this psalm. The words of this psalm are always true irrespective of our circumstances.

It was a very appropriate psalm for the ancient pilgrims to sing as they met in assembly with other worshippers in Jerusalem. It's still a very appropriate psalm to sing when believers gather together in fellowship. Notice first:

### 1. The Beauty of Unity (1)

*'Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell indeed together'.*

It's a pity the NIV omits *'Behold'* (Hebrew, *'hinneh'*). It's more than a filler. It's telling us at the outset to stop, look, observe, admire and take time to savour the unity of believers. Two adjectives are used to describe unity: it is *'good and pleasant'*. An older writer reminds us there are some things that are good but not pleasant — e.g. medicine and cod liver oil! And there are some things that are pleasant but not good — e.g. too much chocolate and soft drink! But dwelling together in unity is both good and pleasant. Unity is a good thing because it bears witness to the truth of the gospel. Jesus prayed, *'I pray also for those who will believe in me ... that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you'* (John 17:21). Unity gives credibility to the gospel. What kind of message is conveyed when believers dwell together in conflict? The unity of believers is designed to reflect the unity and love that dwells in the triune God: His unity is the pattern of our love and unity. We are redeemed to live together as He lives in heaven. Such unity brings glory to God.

Jesus died that we might be united in peace with God and one another. *'Whoever loves God must also love his brother'* (1 John 4: 21).

Dwelling together in unity is also a pleasant thing. It is delightful and agreeable. Who wants to be in a church where there's rivalry, factions, frictions and tension? We know how unpleasant and undesirable that is. Who wants to have to put up with a controlling Diotrophes or a contentious Euodia and Syntyche? When we come to church we want to avoid all that and sample a little slice of heaven. Of course, no church is perfect. But our church should be a place where every member values the fellowship of the saints and seeks the peace and wellbeing of others. The unity is a precious thing. *'United we stand, divided we fall'*. Jesus said, *'A new commandment I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another'* (Jn. 13:34). The apostle Paul wrote, *'Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves'* (Romans 12:9-10). And, *'Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves'* (Phil. 2:3-5). The apostle Peter wrote, *'Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins'* (1 Peter 4:8).

## **2. The Bestowal of Unity (2-3a)**

What is unity like? David used two illustrations. It's like the precious and abundant oil that was poured over Aaron's head (the High Priest) and ran down his beard and onto the border of his robe when he was consecrated (2). The oil is described in Ex. 30: 22-33. It was a costly mixture — consisting of myrrh, cinnamon, cane, cassia and olive oil. It was an extraordinary amount that was used — weighing about 46 pounds. It was a fragrant mixture — skillfully made by a perfumer. When poured the aroma filled the room. My little granddaughter discovered a bottle of eucalyptus oil under the sink.

The screw top came off easily and the contents spilled on the floor. She slipped on the tiles and cried in shock — but the house was filled with a pungent smell of eucalyptus. Unity is like that — when 'spilled' it smells like eucalyptus, or Chanel No. 5, or Old Spice; it's a sweet aroma of life. Unity, like Aaron's oil, is a precious thing. It's isn't cheap; it doesn't just happen; it's the result ultimately of the precious blood of Christ. Unity, like the consecration oil, is the result of the Lord's work — He is the Divine perfumer. He, and only He, could create harmony between such diverse personalities and temperaments that we find in the church where, *'there is neither Jew nor Greek, neither slave nor free, no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus'* (Gal. 3:28).

That ancient ceremony performed on Aaron was a foreshadowing of what took place at the River Jordan when Jesus was baptised (Matt. 3:16-17). Jesus was anointed and set apart as our Great High Priest when the Holy Spirit — symbolised by a dove — descended upon Him. He would thus carry out His ministry by the power of the Holy Spirit. Hence Jesus quoted Isaiah at the outset of His ministry, *'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, for He has anointed me'* (Luke 4: 18). Before Jesus left this world, He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit to His disciples. He said, *'I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counsellor to be with you forever — the Spirit of truth'* (Jn. 14:16). Every believer in Christ has now the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). Paul says, *'He has anointed us, set His seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit'* (2 Cor. 1:21-22). So, when we come together we should recognise that our fellow believers are those whom God has chosen, whom Christ has died for, and in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

David also says that unity *'is like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion'* (3a). The illustration emphasises that unity provides the best environment in which believers can grow in their faith and be fruitful. Mount Hermon, 100 miles north of Zion, was the highest mountain in the land and was proverbial for its heavy dew. The dew was life giving; it freshened and invigorated the plants and vegetation. David tells us that 'little' Zion will be drenched by the dew that 'big' Hermon receives. It's the promise of (abundant and miraculous) moisture and refreshment. When the people of God dwell together in unity, it provides the perfect environment to encourage and stimulate Christian growth. When the church meets it should encourage us to keep on going and growing.

Notice that David uses the verb 'running down' or 'falling on' three times (verses 2 and 3). He points us to the source of unity. It's something that comes down — it descends — from heaven. It's a gift from God. *'It's bestowed rather than contrived, a blessing far more than an achievement'* (Kidner). The pilgrims may go up, but unity comes down from heaven. Unity is not something we can create — but we must be eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3). Like most maintenance duties we have — it's ongoing.

## **3. The Blessing of Unity (3b)**

*'For there the Lord commands His blessing, even life forevermore.'*

Where is 'there'? It's Zion — the church of the living God — where His people gather and where God meets with His people in a special way to bestow His blessings — abiding life — *'even life forevermore'* (See Heb. 12:22-24 and 13:14-16). The unity we know now

among the saints should give us a foretaste of the perfect unity there will be in the heavenly Jerusalem.

**Prayer:**

*Gracious God, join our hearts and affections in such a way that we may live as brothers and sisters and as members of the body of Christ. Let the oil of sanctification, that is, your Holy Spirit, inflame us, and the dew of your blessing continually fall upon us, that we may obtain eternal life through Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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