

FITLY JOINED TOGETHER



The Lord Jesus prayed

to the Father for all who were to believe in Him (John 17)

He prayed that we would be one as He and the Father were one, so that all the world might believe and know that the Father had sent Him. In recent years, God has begun to open my eyes to the way in which we can effectively and practically become one—not in some distant future age, but in our generation. I believe it is a practical possibility now.

In fact, I believe that's what God is working towards through the Holy Spirit.



Let's look at some basic scriptural and practical thoughts on "the way into unity" taken from Psalms.

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 133:1–3

The word 'dwell' here does not refer to living in a commune with everyone or where several families live in the same home. What I'm referring to is brothers and sisters in Christ sharing their lives together on a permanent, continuing basis. This is the purpose of God; it is what He longs to see.

Scripture says it's good and pleasant, but it does not tell us how very hard it is. We come to church on Sunday, enjoy worship and preaching, feel warm and fuzzy, shake a few hands and say, "God bless you; see you next week." That's easy—it doesn't cost much. However, that is as far as we come. But God is talking about brethren dwelling together in unity.

The other two verses of Psalm 133 describe the results that will follow: **"It is like the precious oil."** The anointing oil was placed on the head of Aaron, the High Priest; oil always flows downward, never upward. This also applies to unity: it comes from the top downward, not from the bottom upward.

For years I tried to bring God's people together by holding conferences. Most of these had two things in common: about 75% were women, and most were church members—very few were church leaders. This did two things: it made wives more spiritual than their husbands, and it made sheep more spiritual than their shepherds. In a sense, we were not solving problems, we were increasing them!

I saw it was in vain to talk about uniting sheep. Sheep are not disunited—the only persons who are disunited are shepherds.

Unity goes with authority. To illustrate: If parents are united, there is unity in the home and they have authority. But if parents are disunited, there is no unity, no harmony and no authority because the children will always play one parent against the other. Many times that is also true in the Body of Christ. If the leaders are not united, there can be no unity or authority in the Body, and the members of the Body will play leaders one against another.

Continuing to verse 3 of Psalm 133, we find unity compared to the dew. There are many pictures in Scripture of the Holy Spirit. Many of them are dramatic, such as fire, wind and rain. But dew is different. It is usually invisible; silent and very gentle; yet it is singularly refreshing. As God brings His people together, an atmosphere will be created that is not based on dramatic manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Instead there will be gentleness, softness and tenderness over God's people that will be very refreshing.

The end of Psalm 133 says, **"For there the LORD commanded the blessing."** Often we strive for the blessing;

we pray and fast for it. And we should. But how nice to be in the place where the Lord has commanded the blessing. That place is where God's people come together; where brethren dwell together in unity.

Getting there will involve many discouragements and many sacrifices. It will require us to give up some of our prejudices, swallow our pride, and lay down our lives one for another. But if we get a vision of where we are headed, we'll be willing to make the sacrifice.

THE HOUSE OF THE LORD

The second passage is from Psalm 122:

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD." Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem! Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together, where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD. For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem: "May they prosper who love you. Peace be within your walls, prosperity within your palaces." For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, "Peace be within you." Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good.

Notice the psalm begins and ends with focus on the house of the Lord. In my understanding of Scripture, everything that is promised to Jerusalem, to Zion, and to Israel will be given to Jerusalem, Zion, and Israel. God hasn't withdrawn any of His commitments to the land of Israel or to the Jewish people or to the city of Jerusalem. But at the same time, this Scripture also applies to God's new covenant people—the Church of Jesus Christ.

I will give you just one Scripture from the New Testament to justify this and then apply these words to us in the Church of Jesus Christ today. Paul writes:

I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. 1 TIM 3:15

On the basis of Paul's authority as an apostle and what the New Testament says, we are justified in saying that "the house of God" is **"the church of the living God."** With that in mind, let's go back to Psalm 122.

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD." Our feet have been standing within your gates, O Jerusalem!

In other words, we are going to come into the place where God's people are gathered as His Church.

It is a remarkable fact that when Israel dwelt in their land under the old covenant, God required every male Israelite to leave his home three times a year and journey up to Jerusalem. It was required. Psalm 122 is one of the psalms that refers to that journey of the male Israelites.

"Jerusalem is built as a city that is compact together" (verse 3). Compact means that you bring a lot of different components together and unite them very strongly. This is what God is seeking to do—to bring many different groups together and compact them—fasten them together so that they cannot be shaken and cannot be loosed one from another.

Unity comes from the top downward...

There is a beautiful parallel in Ephesians 4:15–16 which speaks of Christ as the head and the Church as the Body of Christ. It says:

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love. VERSE 16, KJV

What I like in this version is the use of the word *compacted*. Again, the thought is of a lot of different members with different functions and different abilities. All are brought together, joined and united in such a powerful and effective way that they become one. Again, this is the purpose of God in our day—to compact together the various members to make one single functioning Body—all united with the Head.

GOING UP BY TRIBES

Going back to Psalm 122:4: **“Where the tribes go up, the tribes of the LORD, to the Testimony of Israel, to give thanks to the name of the LORD.”** This speaks of Jerusalem as the gathering point of God's people. God spoke to me once and said, “That's the testimony—that all My people come together to one place to give Me thanks. That's what reveals Me to the nations around about. The sight of all My people leaving their homes and coming together in that one place I have appointed, to give thanks to My name—that is the testimony of Israel. That is how Israel as a nation testifies that the Lord is their God.”

Notice, the Israelites did not go up as individuals but as tribes—each one in his particular tribal group under his tribal leader. This, I believe, is the real key to effective unity of God's people. We will not be united as individuals, but we can be united as tribes. If our leaders will go up together, each tribe will follow: the Baptist tribe, the Lutheran tribe, the Mennonite tribe, the non-denominational tribe.

I believe the final move of God is not going to be a move upon individuals, but a move upon bodies. I take that from Ezekiel 37 where we find the vision of the valley of dry bones. In that vision there are two sovereign moves of God through two acts of the prophet Ezekiel. Firstly, Ezekiel prophesies to the bones and secondly, he prophesies to the breath (the wind or the Spirit).

Prophesying to the bones is preaching; prophesying to the breath is intercession. When Ezekiel prophesied to the bones, God moved the bones supernaturally and they came together in complete bodies. But when Ezekiel spoke to the breath (the wind or the Spirit), God didn't move individual bones, but He only moved completed bodies. Those completed bodies stood up on their feet, an exceeding great army.

That is God's objective: an exceeding great army! If you are just a bone on your own, and you don't find your place in a body, there is going to come a time when God will move and you won't know it, because His final move will be on bodies, not on bones.

Turning back to Psalm 122, we have the same truth stated another way. Israel went up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord not as individuals, but as members of tribes, each tribe under its headship. God is really working to bring that about.

THE PLACE OF RULING AND JUDGING

The fifth verse of Psalm 122 says, **“For thrones are set there for judgment, the thrones of the house of David.”** That verse speaks of two things: ruling and judging. It speaks of God's people coming back into their divine authority.

We are God's appointed agents to rule the world for now, and the Bible says that in the future we shall judge angels. But I do not believe a divided Church at variance with itself will be entrusted by God with the authority to rule or to judge. God says, “When you come together—under authority—then you will find the place of the throne—the place of judgment and the place of ruling.” God longs to see His people exercise sovereign authority in the world's affairs, to rule the nations with the outstretched rod of prayer that goes out of Zion (see Psalm 110), but we must meet the conditions.

If we go through the whole Bible, we will find that judging is a function of ruling. At one point in Israel's history, the judges were the rulers. Then God raised up kings and the kings became the judges. We have to understand that under the monarchy there was no Supreme Court. The Supreme Court was the king, and the king was the judge. In other words, ruling and judging go together; they cannot be separated.

If we see that, we can understand where we are expected to judge and where we are not expected to judge. Wherever one is required to rule, one is required to judge. As the head of his house, a father must rule his house for God. Therefore, he is the judge of his house. He settles disputes between his children. He determines what kind of television programs the family will and will not watch. He determines the kind of entertainment they have. He chooses the reading materials. He is responsible to judge his house because he is responsible to rule his house. But if he starts to judge his brother's house, then that father is no longer a judge but a busybody. It's his brother's responsibility to judge his own family.

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We could change society if we would love something other than ourselves.

If someone is given authority in the church as an elder, one of the primary functions is to rule. So an elder must judge the congregation of the Lord: to settle disputes, to determine what is right or appropriate, to determine the general course and policy of God's people in that congregation. But if that elder starts to judge another congregation, then

he is no longer a judge but a busybody.

You know the great problem with God's people—many of us have been busybodies. We have been busy judging those who are not under our authority. The result is we fail to judge in the areas where we should be judging. The man or the woman who is always busy criticizing the neighbor's children usually does not do much of a job bringing up his or her own.

Each of us is given a definite area of authority, and in that area we judge. Outside that area, we have no right to judge. As we come together in order under our leader, we come to the place of judging and ruling. Each group leader is responsible for his own tribe—not other tribes.

THE ATTITUDE OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS

Let's look at 2 Timothy 3:1–5:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

This is a list of eighteen moral blemishes or defects which are to characterize the last days. The Word of God places the responsibility right where it belongs. What is the cause when, as Scripture says, "**Perilous times shall come**"? It is the deterioration of human character—that is the source of the danger.

Looking at that list, we see that it begins and ends with the things people love. "**Men will be lovers of themselves,**" "**lovers of money,**" and finally, "**lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.**" The three evil kinds of love that corrupt human nature are: love of self, love of money, and love of pleasure.

Now we find a culture which has an unbridled yielding to love of self, love of money and love of pleasure. The source of our problem is self-love.

"**Having a form of godliness but denying its power.**" In other words, these people are not pagans but churchgoers, yet deny the power of God by refusing Him the right to change their lifestyle. They go to church, are religious, sing hymns, but they are the object of their affection.

GOD'S REMEDY

Turning back to Psalm 122 we see God's remedy for this self-centeredness and self-love. "**For the sake of my brethren and companions, I will now say, 'Peace be within you.' Because of the house of the LORD our God I will seek your good**" (verses 8–9). In other words, there is something in life more important than "me." It is God's people; God's house. The issue is: Am I going to live to please myself, seek my own good and pursue my own ambition? Or am I going to live for the glory of God, the house of God, and the people of God? I suggest that the latter is the pathway to true happiness.

In Matthew 3:10, John the Baptist, said, "**And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.**" If we want unity we must ax the root of self-love.

I pray God will give us the grace to take the ax and cut the root of self-love, that He will give us a vision of His people and His house. God said to the returning exiles in Haggai 1:4, "**Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins?**" What was their problem? Self-love. They were putting themselves, their interests and their concerns before God's house, God's people and God's glory.

We could change society if we would love something other than ourselves. For instance, if we would enjoy caring for the weak and sacrificing for those who cannot help themselves. In the days of the birth of Christianity it was said, "The Jews love and help one another; but the Christians help those that aren't Christians." That is what amazed the pagan world, and that is what God is asking of us today.

When the Body of Christ comes together in unity, with the unselfish motive of putting God's house and His glory above our own interests and concerns, then the world will truly know and believe in Jesus, the One whom God has sent. ■

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

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OVERVIEW

The Lord Jesus prayed to the Father for all who were to believe in Him (John 17). He prayed that we would be one as He and the Father were one, so that all the world might believe and know that the Father had sent Him.

LEADER'S GUIDE

This study is designed to let God begin to open our eyes to the way in which we can effectively and practically become one—not in some distant future age, but in our generation. This is a practical possibility now. In fact, that's what God is working towards through the Holy Spirit.

In this study we will:

- Discuss what unity is. How is it experienced?
- Determine if we walk in unity or not.
- Discuss some practical ways we can become more unifying, as God desires us to be.
- Discover the eternal principles. What are the advantages and disadvantages for being in unity?

RELEVANT SCRIPTURES

Psalm 133:1-3; Ephesians 4.15-16; Matthew 3:10; 1 Timothy 3.15; Haggai 1:4; 2 Timothy 3:1-5; Psalm 122.

1 UNITY COMES FROM THE TOP DOWNWARD

- Who are you in unity with? (i.e. Boss, Employees, Leader, Pastor, Spouse, Parents, Teacher, Children, Friends)
- Do you ever feel out of unity?
- If so, whose fault do you normally feel it is and what do you do about it? Is this helpful, is it biblical?
- In what ways could you bring about even more unity in a deeper way in any of these instances?

2 THE HOUSE OF THE LORD, A CHURCH IN UNITY

There are things that each of us are good at, and others aren't. Also, God has appointed each of us a certain job to do. Without everyone doing their thing, there would be no 'body' to do anything. After all, we are the Body of Christ.

- How are you cooperating in the functions of the church in your gifting etc. to bring unity?

3 MOVING AS A GROUP OR MOVING AS INDIVIDUALS?

- Do you know how to be part of your church or group?
- In which direction is your church or group going, and are you contributing?
- Is there something that you can do to help make things go smoother, or are you constantly bickering about how you think things should be done?

Remember, God wants us to be ONE body, and this begins with each of us doing our best to be in unity.

4 CENTRED ON YOURSELF OR ON OTHER PEOPLE?

We could change society if we would love something other than ourselves. In the days of the birth of Christianity it was said, "The Jews love and help one another; but the Christians help those that aren't Christians." That is what amazed the pagan world, and that is what God is asking of us today.

- How can we make sure we are not following the culture of self-love, money and pleasure and how can we help those in need?

PRAY Together that God will give us the grace to "take the axe and cut the root of self-love"; that He will give us a vision of His people and His house. **Consider John 17 and pray as the Holy Spirit leads you.**

GOD BLESS!