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CHAPTER 1



UNITY BRINGS BLESSINGS

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

(PSALM 133, KJV)

Unity and harmony was non-existent in my childhood home. Neither my parents nor my siblings dwelt “together in unity.” Not until I later began to study the Word of God did I realize just how important these words are. In this Psalm, the writer paints a beautiful picture of unity in the anointing of Aaron, the high priest, brother of Moses. He pictures it being poured over Aaron’s head, flowing sweetly and smoothly, fragrantly down his face, through his beard, all the way to the hem of his priestly garments. Why is that picture important? Unity is the glue that holds a family, a Church, a nation together.

In Psalm 133 David extols the value of unity. The result of such harmony is a place where God’s people are refreshed and strengthened by His Spirit—just as the dew nourishes the dry ground! It is the place where God *commands* blessing and where His anointing flows! *Vine’s Expository Dictionary*

records that the word *together* in Psalm 133:1 “emphasizes a plurality in unity. In some contexts the connotation is on community in action.”¹ And it is the place where *zoe*—Hebrew for life, the eternal, God-kind of life—flows freely!

The Hebrew word *Yâchadh* in verse one means “oneness, concord”; it denotes a people drawn together for one purpose—to follow Jehovah, fulfill His plan and purpose, and to dwell together under the umbrella of His blessings.

Aaron wasn’t anointed with just any old oil, with whatever was handy. No; it was the holy anointing oil used only in Temple ceremonies. It consisted of four spices: myrrh, cinnamon, sweet cane (or sweet calamus), and cassia. They were mingled together with olive oil—which to the ancient Hebrews was enormously symbolic and useful. It was a balm, a soothing healing oil poured into wounds; it was fuel to keep lamps burning and provide light; it was a food—blended with grains and other foods to fill the hungry. Jeremiah asked, “Is there no balm in Gilead?” (Jeremiah 8:22, KJV.)

As the spices enfolded Aaron, it became a picture of *Yâchadh*—oneness—of a group of very different people united in service to Jehovah. As the oil was infused with the spices, it became holy. None of the ingredients alone could make the anointing oil, but together they become a wonderful example of unity.

When God gave Moses the list of ingredients in Exodus 30, He was very specific. He did not ask for oil and myrrh or oil and frankincense. His recipe called for four different spices—a great reminder that His Kingdom, His Church consists of “every tribe and language and people and nation” (Revelation 5:9, NIV.) These He anointed the “Body of Christ”—Christians—because we bear His name, His fragrance, His commanded blessing.

In I Peter 2:9, NKJV, Peter writes that we are a family with a purpose:

But you *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;

As children of God, we can rejoice for *Yĕhovah tsavah Bĕrakah*—**Jehovah commanded the blessing.**

Only when Self is subjugated to Christ will we be one with God—and each other—and have this kind of unity. We are to be one as Jesus and His Father are one. Only when Jesus is on the throne in each of our lives can we be in tune with His purpose. Only then can we be one Body on earth able to work corporately to bring true and lasting unity among the brethren. When Self is subjugated to Jesus, then His Church will flourish and grow into His fullness and carry forth His kingdom on Earth.

David paints a word picture of the refreshing this kind of harmony can bring. He likens it to the dew that nourishes Mount Hermon, a unique spot in northeastern Israel located in the Golan Heights. Once claimed by Syria, the land was reclaimed by Israel during the 1967 Six Day War. It was here on this mountain that God promised the land of Canaan to Abraham for his descendants. Long before its ownership was contested, Mount Hermon was mentioned at least a dozen times in the Old Testament—in Deuteronomy, Joshua, Psalms, and other books. It is also thought by some to be the place Matthew and Mark refer to in the New Testament as the Mount of Transfiguration.²

English clergyman Henry Baker Tristram wrote of the uniqueness of Mount Hermon in 1867:

“Unlike most other mountains which gradually rise from lofty table lands and often at a distance from the sea, Hermon starts at once to the height of nearly ten thousand feet, from a platform scarcely above the sea level. This platform, to ‘the upper Jordan valley, and marshes of Merom’ is for the most part an impenetrable swamp of unknown depth, whence the seething vapour, under the rays of an almost tropical sun, is constantly ascending into the upper atmosphere during the day. The vapour, coming in contact with the snowy sides of the mountain, is rapidly congealed, and is precipitated in the evening in the form of a dew, the most copious we ever experienced. It penetrated everywhere, and saturated everything. The floor of our tent was soaked, our

bed was covered with it, our guns were dripping, and dew-drops hung about everywhere. No wonder that the foot of Hermon is clad with orchards and gardens of such marvelous fertility in this land of droughts.”³

The *New Living Translation* of Psalm 133:3 says:

Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion. And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.”

The commanded blessing comes through unity—in the place where peace is fostered and nurtured. David says this in his psalm; Paul admonished the Church in II Corinthians 13:11(NKJV) to “be of one mind, live in peace.”

Abram (later Abraham) recognized the value and the blessings of living peacefully with others. In Genesis 13:7 (NLT) the Bible records, “So disputes broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot.” So great had God’s blessings been upon Abram that the land could no longer contain his herds and followers together with those of Lot, his nephew, who had been blessed with an overflow of Abram’s favor. The end result? Strife, confusion and chaos! It is a major arrow in our Enemy’s quiver. James 3:16 (NIV) tells us: “For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”

God commands that His blessings rest on the place where there is unity and harmony. If God commands a thing, it is guaranteed; when we, as individuals or as part of the Body of Christ, “Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace,” (Ephesians 4:3, NIV.)

Abram must have been aware of God’s requirements concerning unity, and in his desire for fellowship with the Creator, he said to Lot, “Let’s not allow this conflict to come between us or our herdsmen. After all, we are close relatives!” (Genesis 13:8, NLT.) Because of the loving relationship between uncle and nephew, Abram allowed Lot to choose where he wanted

to settle his family. This loving father-figure was more concerned with ending strife and less that he was in a land-grab.

The choices made that day were a revelation about character. Lot chose the land nearest Sodom—in the shadow of the worst possible earthly degradation and sinfulness. Abram turned from the place of strife into a God-ordained “Commanded Blessing.” Upon Lot’s departure, God spoke to Abram: “Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you,” (Genesis 13:17, NIV.) Everywhere his sandal struck the ground the land was to be his.

Strife and conflict can halt the flow of God’s blessings. He wants, yes, He yearns for His children to leave dissension at the altar in order to pour out His benefits. Psalm 133:1 (KJV) records, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” As one writer penned:

Even if it means we have to agree to disagree, or even defer to another, we must declare our lives, our homes and our business to be “STRIFE FREE ZONES,” and as we do, we will see and experience the “Commanded Blessings.”⁴

Strife ruled in my childhood home. From the age of four, my father abused me. He broke both my arms, locked me in the canning cellar beneath our house, and once nearly succeeded in strangling me to death. I had no self-esteem—not low self-esteem, but *no* self-esteem. One Saturday my mother caught me watching Billy Graham after the morning cartoons. She walked over, snapped off the set, and warned, “Michael, Christians kill Jews, Christians hate Jews. Jesus died; don’t dig Him up!” Then she sat down and told me about her grandfather, a rabbi in Minsk, Russia. On a Shabbat, he and his congregation were boarded up inside their synagogue and the building set afire. Russian Orthodox Christians on the outside screamed, “Christ killers,” as the smoke spiraled heavenward. She also related that many of our relatives fled Russia to Poland and died in Auschwitz during the Holocaust.

While my mother hated Christians, my father, a professing Christian, hated Jews. “Brother Bob,” as he was called, went to church regularly on Sunday morning. That was after a drinking binge on Saturday night that

generally ended with him beating my mother for what he thought was her adultery. He often took his rage out on me, the end result of her suspected infidelity.

As a scared, battered eleven-year-old boy, I had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. I tried one night to intervene when my father had found yet another excuse to beat my mother. He then turned his anger on me. By the time he was done using his fists on my scrawny frame, I had been dumped unconscious on the floor of my bedroom. Sometime later I awoke; every bone and joint ached. I tried to push myself up from the floor of that dark room but fell back, the room spinning.

I saw no purpose for my life. My father hated me, and my mother suffered because of me. All I knew was my father's warped version of Christianity: Booze on Friday, beatings on Saturday, and church on Sunday. My dad's favorite Bible verse must have been Proverbs 23:14: "You shall beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from hell." He paraphrased that as "Spare the rod, spoil the child." There were no spoiled children in his home—only abused ones. He had never given me one word of affirmation. Not once had I heard "I love you" from his lips that so tenderly and lovingly caressed a glass of amber whiskey. Jack Daniels was his "friend"; I was "moron."

That night in my room, I had a life-changing encounter with Jesus Christ. As quickly as I had whispered those words, the room was flooded with a light so bright it blinded me. I thought Dad had come back to finish the job—to beat me to death, and this time I could not escape. My first thought was to crawl under the bed to protect myself. I covered my face with my hands and closed my eyes as tightly as I could squeeze them. After what seemed like an eon, I realized there was no other sound in the room. Now there was only a brilliant light. I slowly spread my fingers and eased my eyes open as imperceptibly as possible.

Instead of seeing my dad's anger-deformed face, I saw two hands reaching toward me. In the center of each wrist was an ugly scar. I had seen those scars in Sunday school literature. They were supposed to represent the nail scars of Jesus. Someone was playing a trick on me, but who? Did I dare look

beyond the wrists to the face? Was I having a nervous breakdown? Was I going crazy?

Rather than the cold, stark fear that had filled the room earlier, I now actually felt warmth. I felt a Presence that brought both power and peace. I was being immersed in an invisible liquid love that poured over me and lodged deep within my soul. I slowly raised my head, and as my eyes followed the arms upward, I saw standing there in my bedroom the Lord Jesus Christ. He was either clothed in light or in the most brilliant white imaginable—whiter than fresh snow; whiter than the clouds that float in the sky; whiter than anything I had ever seen. Draped from His shoulder to His waist was a deep purple cloth—more purple than the heavens at sunset.

As I lifted my head to take in His face, I was instantly drawn to His loving eyes. They were happy eyes filled with every color of the rainbow. It was like looking into an illuminated bowl of the world's most highly prized jewels. I felt as if I could see through them and beyond to heaven and the promise of eternal peace. They were like magnets drawing me into their depths. Keeping His arms outstretched, He looked at me with an all-encompassing expression of love. He smiled and then said three things I had never heard before. They were like a healing salve to my wounded soul and spirit.

He said, "Son." It was the first time anyone had ever called me "Son." It was said so gently, with such love and respect for me—for me!—that I felt my heart melt. The word *son* echoed in my spirit again and again.

"I love you." Someone really did love me. What joy! I felt as if I'd just escaped a death sentence and was free. That statement alone was enough to sustain me for the rest of my life. But He continued, "I have a great plan for your life." The power and presence of Jesus were like a holy fire igniting my soul. I had a purpose! God had something for me to do. Then there was silence. I am sure only a few seconds had passed, but it felt like an eternity.

I closed my eyes, and tears slid slowly down my face. I was consumed with an inexplicable happiness. Eventually I realized that the light had departed but the overwhelming warmth remained. He was gone from my room but not from my spirit, not from my heart. I never wanted to lose that feeling of love and peace and warmth.

Despite my treatment by my father, as an adult and a Christian I knew I had to overcome my inner battles and make peace with him. He still exercised some power over me, and for a reason I failed to understand, his acceptance was important. No matter what I did, Dad withheld his approval. I could not get a word of affirmation from him to save my life, although I desperately wanted it. I didn't try to impress him with the people I had met or the places I had traveled. I knew that no matter what successes I might have in the ministry, he would never encourage me, never say, "I'm proud of you," never call me "son." What he did call me was "bastard" because he thought I was the result of adultery on my mother's part.

For five and a half years I sent half and more of my paycheck to help with Dad's house and car payments, yet I never heard "thank you" from him. Later in life, I continued to help with his bills and endeavored to care for him until he died.

After my father's estate was settled and I was named sole heir to his earthly possessions, I wrote a letter to my siblings in an attempt to restore family unity. It simply said:

To my beloved brothers and sisters:

The probate hearing is over and the judge has ruled. This is to inform you I have instructed the attorney that I will not accept the will and have withdrawn my name from it. Therefore, Dad's estate in its entirety will be divided between the six of you.

I will absorb personal expenses incurred while assisting Dad the last few months of his life and for the funeral service. You will not be billed for anything. For years, Dad attempted to give me the estate and I refused. I wish you God's richest blessings.

Your loving brother,

Michael

Before my father died, I was able to forgive him. None of my siblings were able to do that. They were united by a single thread—hatred for our

father. It has all but destroyed them. They have been cruel to others, violent, drug users, and more. All was blamed on their abusive childhood. Hearts and lives have been made bitter and become broken because of a refusal to seek God—because of the lack of desire to forgive. The lack of unity and harmony has all but wrecked their earthly bonds, and has certainly hindered spiritual relationships with God, the Father.

Just as this is true for families, it is true for the Church of Jesus Christ. The cry of the Father's heart is for His children to live in unity. In I Corinthians 1:10 (NIV), the apostle Paul pleads with the Church in Corinth:

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our LORD Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

Unity in prayer results in the commanded blessing of God. "Agreement" in Hebrew is the word *echad*; the words "*Sh'ma Yis'ra'eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad.*" mean "Hear, O Israel, the Lord thy God, the Lord is One." This is the first prayer every Jew learns. A united Body of Christ is like the anointing that came down from the head of Aaron to the hem of his garment. Every Believer who walks in unity receives a commanded blessing through agreement with God, and that's no small gift. The word "bless, blessed, or blessing" is mentioned in the Bible 496 times.

Everyone who has been with Christ receives God's commanded blessing. God is waiting. The angels are waiting. The kingdom is waiting. All heaven is waiting for you to be united with Jesus and to release Him in all His fullness and glory, to bless you and fulfill His destiny in you.