

LESSON 9

UNITY AND THE LATTER RAIN

By Tim Saxton, Associate Speaker

The story is told that during World War II, the people of Burma were divided, some siding with the Allies and some with the Japanese. One indigenous group, the Karen people, along with certain other minorities, sided with the Allies, while the Burmese sided with Japan.

After the war was over, Burma obtained its independence from Britain, leaving the Burmese in charge of their own government. However, the Burmese did not like the Karens and wanted to rid the country of them. As the Burmese outnumbered the Karens, they soon began making war on them.

Now, among the Karens was an army general, who was also a Christian, and he led many of the Karen soldiers and people up into the mountains, far away from the Burmese Army. Here seemed to be a safe place to live.

In time, the Burmese Army determined to wipe out the Karens, so they

marched their soldiers up those mountains. Strangely enough, that small group of Karens, led by their Christian general, defeated the Burmese and wiped out their army. For decades after that, the Karens lived in comparative peace in the mountains.

But the Burmese would not give up, so they hired a witch doctor to call up the spirits and tell them what they could do to defeat the Karens.

Given a plan, they followed it. A Karen Buddhist monk was hired and sent to live up in the mountains with the other Karen people. As this monk would travel from village to village, he would say to the people, "Oh look, you are so poor over here, why, I just came from the village nearby, and they have many new supplies. I guess they don't want to share them with you. They must not like you."

Then he would go to the next village and say, "I just came from the last village, and they have so many new things, but I see they didn't share

them with you." Thus, he sowed seeds of distrust among the people, and soon, one by one, the villagers stopped trusting each other. In time, their unanimity gave way and soon their defense was gone. The Burmese Army then came and slaughtered them.

What can we learn from this story? As long as the people pressed together, they were virtually invincible, but when they became suspicious and accusatory toward one another, when they stopped trusting one another and became divided, the enemy easily overcame them.

As God's people at the end of time, have we been counseled to "press together"? Is there an enemy, perhaps even evil spirits, who are actively working to divide and destroy us? How can God's people resist this type of subversive division?

In the Bible, the subject of unity is linked inseparably to the body of Christ. If we wish to be made completely into the image of Christ, that image is one of unity. The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 12:27:

"Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."

We also find in 1 Corinthians 12:12:

"For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ."

As the human body has many working parts, yet all parts work together as a united whole to form the body; this then illustrates the case of the church. We are many members, each with an assigned duty or responsibility for the united whole of the body of Christ.

Today, we will briefly consider seven important aspects of Christian unity and how this subject connects with the Latter Rain.

1. CHRISTIAN UNITY IS EXEMPLIFIED IN ITS MEMBERS AS THEY CONSIDER THE NEEDS OF THE BODY GREATER THAN THEIR OWN.

When such unity is manifested, it represents the very character of God, for it is the result of true love. This is why in I Corinthians 13 (known as the “love chapter”), we read that “love seeks not her own.”

Yet, there are many counterfeits to Christian unity. The forces of evil may appear unified, but their unity is not based on the foundation of self-sacrificing love. If the

forces of evil could be left to themselves, they would eventually fight and destroy each other. No, apart from the love of God, one can never find true unity in its purest form.

As unity represents the character of God, then its foundational love will always seek what is best for others over what is best for self. A good example of this is found during the time of the outpouring of the Spirit or “early rain” in the Book of Acts. Reading from Acts 4:32, we find:

“And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.”

What were the results of this incredible unity of the Spirit? The Bible says in the next verse:

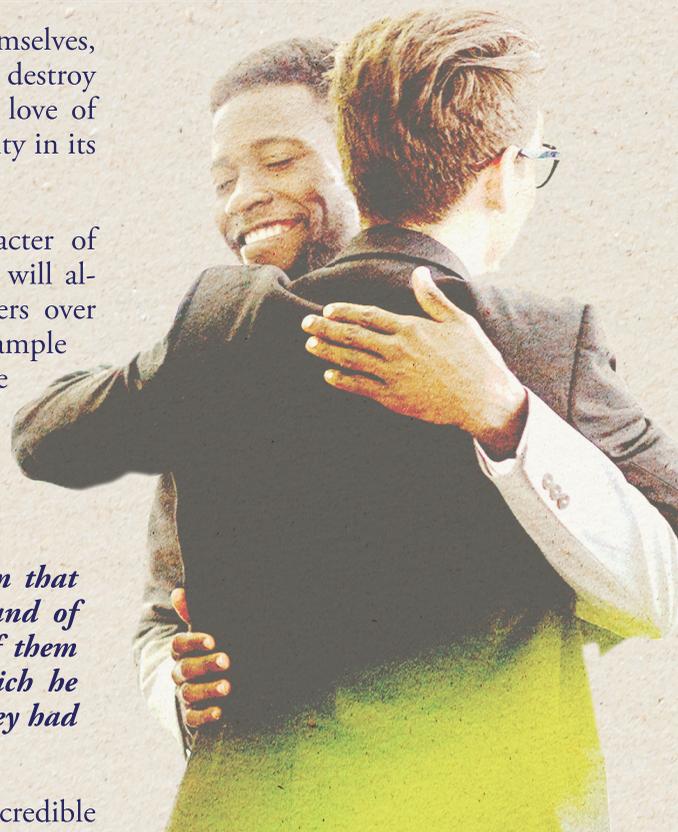
“And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.” —Acts 4:33

In the early church, through the power of the Spirit, the body of Christ worked much like our human body. That is, every member looking after the needs of another. As the power of Christ rested upon them and as the church presented a truly united front, great was the work they could accomplish.

Another excellent example of unity in the Bible is the case of Jonathan and David. In 1 Samuel 18, we find:

“And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking unto Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” (Verse 1)

“And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was upon him, and gave it to David, and his garments, even to his sword, and to his bow, and to his girdle.” (Verse 4)



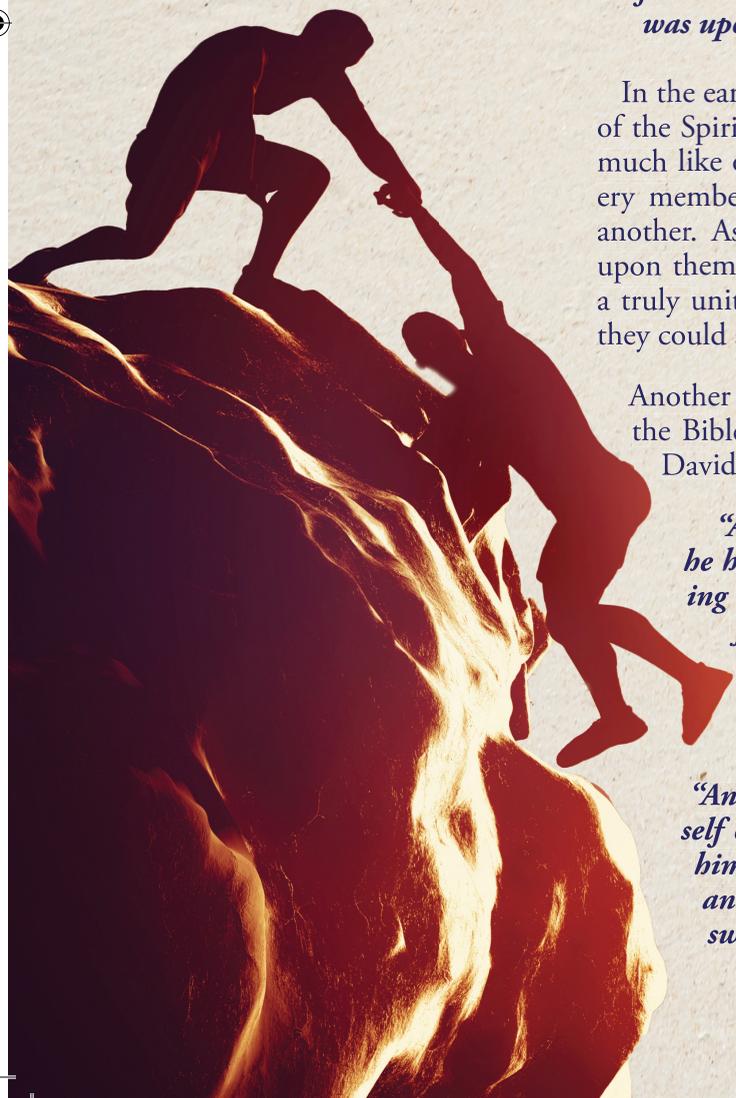
In David, Jonathan saw a brother whom Christ was shining through. For so great was Jonathan’s love for God, that he immediately recognized God’s character in David and desired to help David be successful in his work. Thus, he gave David all he could.

Here, we see an important principle in true unity, in that each part of the body works to strengthen weaker members. This is true not only of individuals within the church but with church institutions themselves, all working in harmony as one body.

Consider this interesting quote:

“When one of God’s instrumentalities, which is engaged in doing His work, shall through some lack of judgment fall into decay, let those institutions which are in a more prosperous condition do to the uttermost of their ability to lift the crippled institution to its feet, that the name of God be not dishonored.” —Manuscript 65a 1900

Thus, as the individuals are in unity with Christ and each other, so likewise are the institutions of the church to represent that same unity.



2. CHRISTIAN UNITY NEVER COMPROMISES WITH SIN.

You see, unity always starts with our individual unity in Christ, first. As we are one with God, so we are to be one with others, but never at the sacrifice of principle, which would involve sin against God and thus separation from God. The Bible explains the hierarchy of our relationships in Mark 12:29-31:

“And Jesus answered him, The first of all the commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: This is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.”

Here we see unity with God, which means putting God first in all relationships, and always excludes compromising with sin. When God is truly put first, then all other human relationships take their proper place.

3. UNITY IS WHAT GOD DESIRES FOR HIS PEOPLE, FOR IT REFLECTS THE ONENESS OF HEAVEN.

Everything about heaven denotes perfect unity. In the book of Ezekiel, chapters 1 and 10, we find a description of the throne of God. The throne is described as having “wheels” and that four living creatures accompany it. Now, look at how Scripture describes their movements:

“Their wings were joined one to another; they turned not when they went; they went every one straight forward.”—Ezekiel 1:9

Notice how they moved, much like a marching band with no movements from side to side, only perfect unity in moving forward. This provides a brief glimpse of the importance God places on order and harmony in His creation. Unity is such a part of God’s character, that its results are clearly seen around His throne. However, we find the greatest example of unity in Scripture, in the close bond shared be-



tween the Father and His Son. Jesus said of this:

“I and my Father are One.”
—John 10:30

The perfect oneness between Christ and his Father seems inconceivable to the human mind, yet it is this same oneness that Christ desires for His church. Notice His prayer to the Father:

“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one.”
—John 17:22

What an incredible testimony, that the unity of God’s people on earth is to represent the perfect unity of Heaven. What depth of meaning is found here? We are to have the same unity with each other that Christ has with His Father.

What was that unity like?

Though two distinct Individuals, Christ and His Father were one in purpose, one in character and always working in perfect harmony. So close were they, that when you saw one, you were seeing the

other. Thus, when Philip asked Jesus to show the Father to the disciples, Christ answered him, saying:

“Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father?”
—John 14:9

Now Christ’s relationship with His Father revealed not only perfect harmony and purpose, but also perfect joy. Christ rejoiced in His Father’s presence, He rejoiced in doing His Father’s will, in fact, it was His greatest joy to be in communion with His Father and this same spiritually intimate joy is available for us as well. As we are united with Christ and each other, we will experience it.

From the book, *Desire of Ages*, Page 680, we find:

“Christ designs that heaven’s order, heaven’s plan of government, heaven’s divine harmony, shall be represented in His church on earth. Thus in His people He is glorified.”

4. UNITY IS A RESULT OF THE GIFTS OF GOD'S SPIRIT AND IS A PREREQUISITE FOR THE LATTER RAIN.

Scripture tells us that the spiritual gifts the Holy Spirit bestows are for the ultimate purpose of bringing God's people into perfect unity. These are gifts that unite, not divide. They humble, not exalt us. When we truly reflect on the goodness of God, we realize how unworthy we are to receive these gifts.

When one accepts Christ, he then receives of the Spirit certain blessings for the benefit of the body.

The Apostle Paul states:

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:"—Ephesians 4:11-13

The gifts of the Spirit, rightly used, produce unity among God's people, even the perfection of the saints, "to the stature of the fullness of Christ."

However, a lack of unity suggests a lack of the Spirit's presence and the need to seek Him more. Thus, the measure of our unity is directly proportional to the measure of the Spirit we have received.

As a body, how can we receive the Latter Rain of the Spirit? Here is the answer:

"The promise is made on condition that the united prayers of the church are offered, and in answer to these prayers there may be expected a power greater than that which comes in answer to private prayer. The power given will be proportionate to the unity of the members and their love of God and for one another."—*Manuscript Release, Vol. 9, 303.*



5. THE POWER OF UNITY EXPANDS WITH ORGANIZATION.

Consider what happened in the days of the disciples:

"And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration."—Acts 6:1

Here in the early Christian church, a problem arose that could have threatened the unity of the body. Notice in Acts 6:2-4 how it was dealt with:

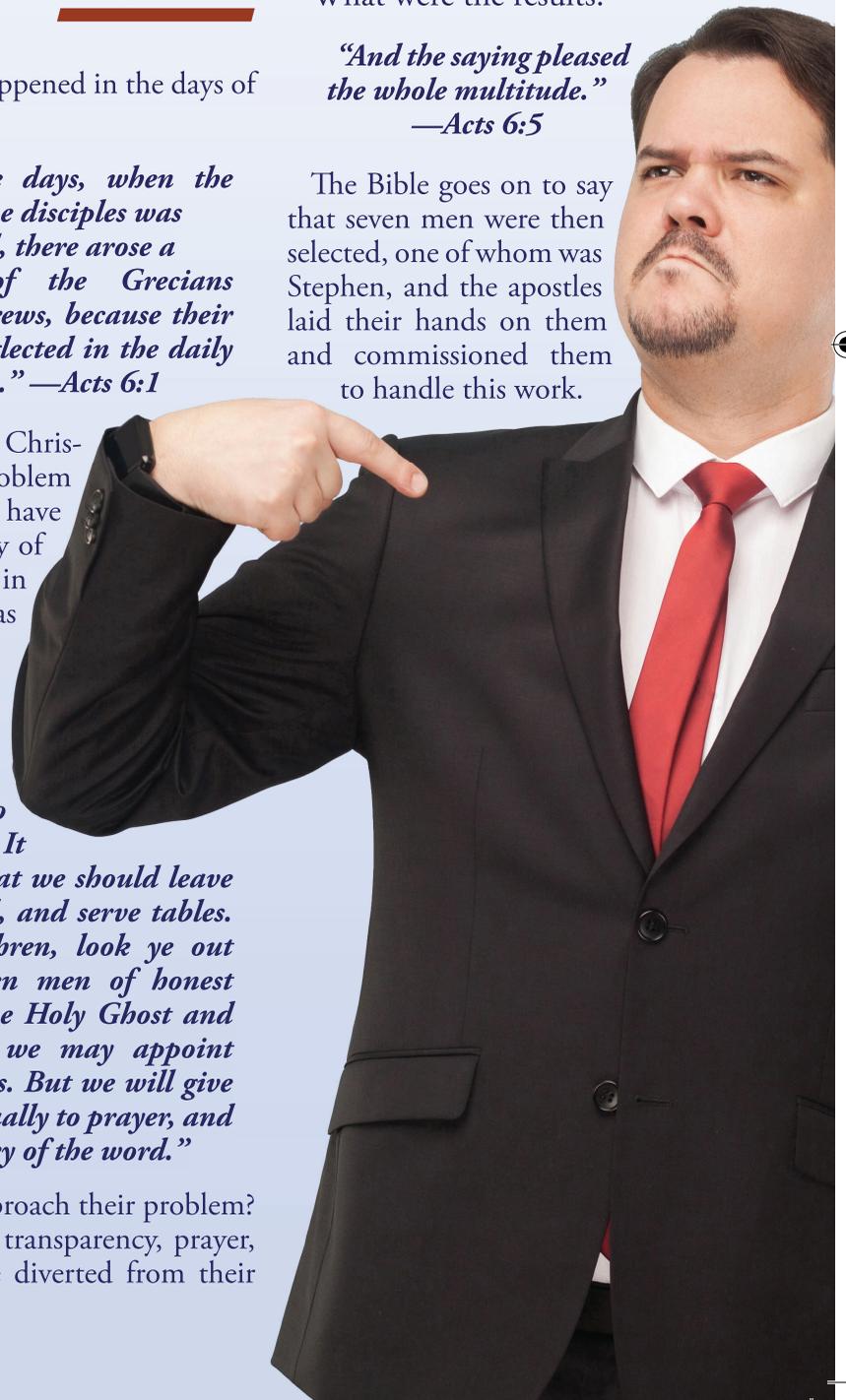
"Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word."

How did they approach their problem? With organization, transparency, prayer, and a refusal to be diverted from their mission.

What were the results?

"And the saying pleased the whole multitude."—Acts 6:5

The Bible goes on to say that seven men were then selected, one of whom was Stephen, and the apostles laid their hands on them and commissioned them to handle this work.



“And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.”

—Acts 6:7

When organization was combined with prayer, faith, and unity of purpose, great were the results, as the Spirit blessed the efforts of God’s people. These chose not to be diverted from their mission, but to solve their problems, marching forward unitedly.

6. PRIDE THREATENS THE UNITY OF GOD’S PEOPLE.

Do you remember what it was that brought the first dis-unity among God’s creation? It was the indulgence of pride among Lucifer and his angels, and it is this same tactic the devil continues to use, attempting to divide the church.

Many years ago, I was driving home from a church board meeting. At the meeting that night, I had been terribly embarrassed by the local pastor, whom I considered a friend.

The pastor had called me out (in front of the board) for how I was handling a certain responsibility within the church and my pride had been wounded. The truth

was that the pastor was probably right, but that wasn’t the point now.

While driving, a temptation came to indulge anger and resentment towards the pastor and to seek retribution. “If he’s going to say that, I will simply withdraw my support from the church,” was the tempting suggestion.

There in the car a struggle ensued, for I was right at the tipping point, so easy it would have been to indulge the spirit of pride and anger, but something seemed to hold me back; I knew it wasn’t right. By God’s grace I recognized Satan’s voice, and though it was hard, I swallowed my pride and determined to forget the experience ever happened and fully support the pastor and the church anyway.

Proverbs 13:10 says:

“Only by pride, cometh contention...”

God is calling us, by His power, to lay our pride in the dust and return to the unity of Heaven.

7. UNITY WILL BE ONE OF THE LAST-DAY SIGNS THAT WE ARE GOD’S PEOPLE.

John 17:21 tells us:

“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”

When will this perfect unity of God’s people be most evident? At the time of the Latter Rain, its fullest extent will be known. For a closer look at the importance of this time and subject, let’s go to an Old Testament passage in the Book of Psalms, chapter 133 and starting with verse 1:

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Verse 1)

“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.” (Verse 2)

Who was Aaron? Aaron was the high priest of Israel. The story referenced here was his anointing. At the anointing, the oil was poured upon his head and ran down the full length of his garments.



Now in the Bible, what does oil represent? The Holy Spirit. Who does the high priest represent? Christ. For Christ is our High Priest.

Notice that the anointing oil was poured upon the head of the high priest first, and then it ran down the length of his body. Who is the body of Christ? The church.

So, the outpouring of the Spirit starts with Christ (Acts 10:38) and extends to His entire church, and this the Bible likens to the unity of the brethren or the unity of the church.

Let's continue ...

“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 133:3

Here we find a reference to Mount Hermon, the grand and loftiest peak in the area surrounding the promised land. Mount Hermon was located due north of Israel; we might say it lay to the sides of the north. It was also that mountain which Moses specifically asked the Lord that he could stand upon.

Mount Hermon was a type of that great mount of the Lord in Heaven. The word dew refers to a water covering ... similar to rain and at times, used almost synonymously with it.

Remember our context is the unity of God's people being like the anointing oil upon the head and body of Christ, and it is now likened to the dew or rain upon the mountain of God that then descends to the lesser mountains surrounding it. The lesser mountains being referred to are the mountains of Zion.

When will the body of Christ be seen

perfectly as one, that is, in this life? It will be during the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit or the anointing, also known as the Latter Rain.

Notice, the next verse goes on to say, “for there the Lord commanded the blessing.” What blessing is that? The blessing of life ... even forevermore.

Is there a special blessing that the Lord bestows upon the righteous at the time of the Latter Rain?

In Zechariah chapter 3, we find the story of Joshua and the angel. Joshua, as we have seen in a previous study, represents God's people at the end of time, still clothed with filthy garments. Satan is standing there accusing him, when the command goes forth ...

“Take away the filthy garments from him. And unto him he said, Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment.”
—Zechariah 3:4

Here at the time of the anointing of the Latter Rain, the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness is placed upon the tried and tested people of God. Notice what we are told that pure white garment and the removal of iniquity symbolizes:

“When the times of refreshing (latter rain) shall come...then the sins of the repentant soul who received the grace of Christ...will be removed from the records of heaven...and be remembered no more...” —Signs of the Times, May 16, 1895

That robe of righteousness is evidence of the final sealing of God's people, and the results of that sealing are that they will have life forevermore. Now they

go forth with great power to make Him known, and the world sees as never before the love and unity of God's people — who are as one with their Lord.

Notice this beautiful description referring to the unified work of the church:

“Those who are truly the followers of Christ love as brethren, and are the salt of the earth, the light of the world. Every true believer catches the beams from the Morning Star, and transmits the light to those who sit in darkness. Not only do they shine amid the darkness in their own neighborhoods, but as a church they go forth to regions beyond. Every one who unites with the church is to be one with Christ, diffusing the beams of the Morning Star, and becoming the light of the world. Christ and his people are to be copartners in the great work of saving the world.”
—Home Missionary, August 1, 1896

The 133rd Psalm is the story of God's church at the end of time and the glorious high calling the Lord is giving them. Yet, we do not have to wait until the time of the Latter Rain for the outpouring of God's Spirit. We can ask Him for it now, that we might reflect His image more fully to our brethren and to the world.

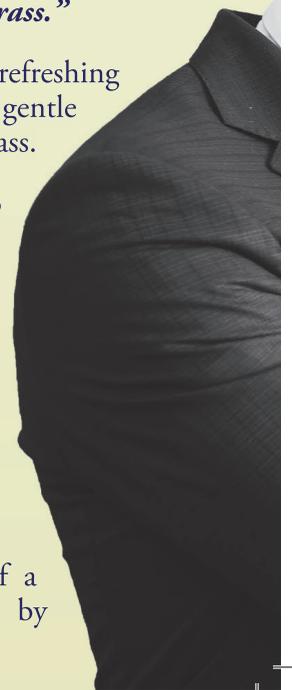
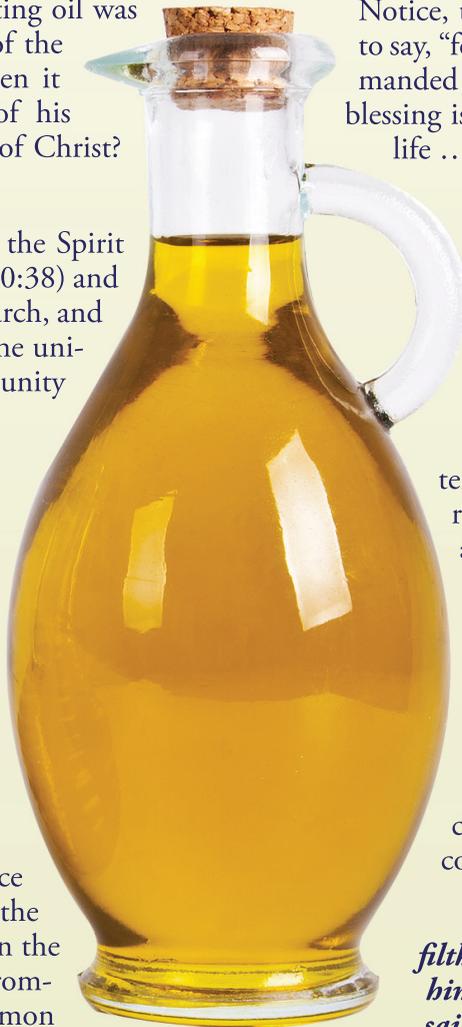
In Micah 5:7, we read:

“And the remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the LORD, as the showers upon the grass.”

There is nothing so refreshing to nature as the soft, gentle rain upon the green grass.

God is waiting to make His people a refreshing blessing to the world, to see the character of God reflected in the perfect love and unity of His people. Is it your desire to experience that love and unity today?

The story is told of a church, characterized by



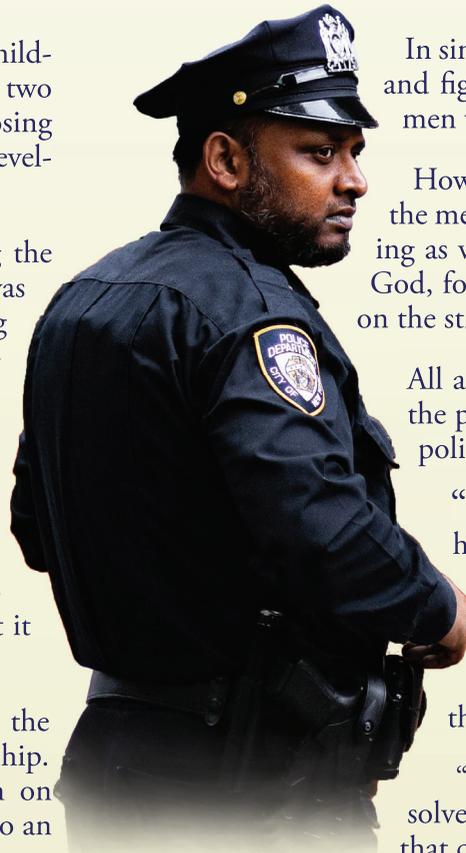
its disunity. Now that is putting it mildly, for the church was divided into two opposing camps and under two opposing families with frequent arguments developing among members.

In the neighborhood surrounding the church, the people knew that this was a divided church that fought among itself. So bad was the church's reputation, that they were unsuccessful in reaching out to their neighborhood, nor did their neighbors want anything to do with them.

It is so sad to think that one of God's last-day churches could be so filled with fighting and variance that it was unable to fulfill its mission.

Well, on one particular week, the church had come together for worship. During the service, two men, each on opposing sides of the church, got into an argument.

One of the men said, "Do you care to take this outside?"



In simple English, that means, "Do you want to go outside and fight this out?" So the second man said yes, and both men walked out of the church.

However, other church members followed them, and as the men began to fight, all the church members began fighting as well. Soon, on the beautiful day set aside to worship God, found His church members involved in a public brawl on the streets outside their church.

All around, the neighbors were watching, and then came the police. Pulling the people apart and lining them up, a police officer began lecturing the church members.

"What is the meaning of this fighting?" he asked, as he walked up and down the line of disheveled people. "You should be ashamed of yourselves. After all, you are a church, you are supposed to be following God and revealing His love, but you are not revealing love. In fact, you're looking more like the devil.

"I could arrest all of you, but I don't think that would solve the problem. Instead, I want you all to go back into that church and work out your differences."

The church members went inside, and one of the men on one side of the argument went to one of the men on the other side and said, "The policeman was right, we have not been acting like God's children. I am sorry for how I have treated you. Will you forgive me?"

"Yes," said the other man, "and I too am sorry for how I have treated you and fought with you. Will you forgive me as well?" Pretty soon, the whole church was crying out to each other for forgiveness and restoration.

The following week when the church came together, the neighbors noticed something different. The church that always fought was unusually quiet; there were no loud voices, arguments, or even street brawls taking place. Instead, they heard singing and praying.

"This is strange," the neighbors said. "I wonder what could have happened to that church? They are not fighting like they always do."

The following week, the same thing took place, and the neighbors were even more concerned, for now it had been two weeks in a row and there was no fighting, only singing and praying.

After a number of weeks went by, one neighbor's curiosity could no longer wait, and he said, "I'm going to go to that church and check on them. Something must be wrong."





So, he went to the church and said, “What’s wrong with you people? You used to always fight like cats and dogs, everyone knew it, and now all we hear is singing and praying here.”

“Yes,” said the church members, “we have given ourselves to God and He is changing us.”

“This is unbelievable,” said the neighbor. “This is a miracle!” And he went and told the other neighbors. As future weeks went by, the other neighbors began showing up at the little church, for they wanted to see the miracle as well. Then someone said, “If God can do that for this little church, maybe he could do it for my family. I’m going to start attending this church.”

And before you knew it, the church that was the worst witness in the area became the greatest witness in the area, as the power of Christ was seen in changing their lives and bringing them into a unity of purpose and self-sacrificing love, one for another.

In the end, many in that neighborhood were won to the Lord because they saw the change that Christ had made in His church.

John 13:35 tells us:

“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”

Christ is calling today, “Let Me make that change in you, that you might forget about self in love for others and especially your brothers and sisters in the faith.” He says, “Let Me so change you that others will see My perfect reflection in the love you reveal toward others.” Are you willing to let Him do that for you today? If so, why not ask Him now?

Heavenly Father, thank You for Your incredible love to us! So often, we take it for granted when we are surrounded by Your many blessings. Yet, it is this same love we need, to reveal You to those around us.

Father, please remove our proud, selfish, and often bitter hearts and replace them with a self-sacrificing love that looks past the faults and offenses of others. Please allow us to see them as You see them, Father, which is not how they look now, but how they will look when transformed into Your perfect image.

Please bring us as a church, as a people, as families, as institutions, and as communities, to be the people You want us to be in these last days, to have the depth of Your love, one for another, that all might know we are Your disciples.

Father, we thank You for hearing this prayer and commit it to You with all our hearts, in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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