

## 2. Radical Union

In the previous chapter, I touched upon the Reformation and the revolution that happened within the Roman Catholic Church. At the time, this was the state religion of the Holy Roman Empire (Roman Catholic Europe). The Reformation was a tremendous earthquake that shook the foundations of Europe. The Reformers were kicked out of the church, persecuted and many were martyred. On coming out of the state church, the Reformers could easily have opted for a more individualistic way of church. They had been disillusioned with the state church and could have argued that union and submission to authority is no good.

However, contrary to our kind of modern individualism that tells us that it's all about our own personal experience of God, the Reformers weren't radical individualists who couldn't conform to church authority. Martin Luther actually did not want to leave the church, he wanted to reform it from the inside, but was pushed out because of the threat he posed to the Pope and the business of the church. The business of the

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church was to keep people in darkness and slavery, and to keep extracting money from the people who didn't know any better. So, a revolution was called for, for the sake of the church. Luther was a prophet sent by God to reform His church, calling her back to the faith of the gospel.

Our personal revolution calls each of us to be collectively one in Christ to fight for Him. It means to turn away from worldly individualistic self-gratification to a gathered vibrant community of believers, sacrificially working to lift up its head, who is Jesus! Here's where we, as the Lord's gathered, called-out people, come together in union with Jesus, but now against the world that doesn't know Him who made it. We are a revolutionary army, at war with the Devil, and he with us. Looking to strike at any moment, he is constantly attacking the church around the world through his powers and principalities. But, like an army that has a mission and organisation, so the Church of Christ moves as one to carry out its great objective. Our weapon is the Word of God. Our spiritual armour shields us from the fiery missiles of the evil one, who is set on killing us. Our warfare is a spiritual one. And we are most effective when we fight together, in unity through Jesus our head who is our awesome power and stronghold. If we become isolated and alone, we can be easily overcome. Union is essential to survive and grow as a Christian.

### A BIBLICAL PICTURE OF UNION

A useful image from the Old Testament to help us understand biblical union is found in Psalm 133. Israel's High Priest is anointed with oil, and this is a wonderful picture of the love and union of the Trinity – the Father pouring out the Holy Spirit on the Son who is the anointed one. In the Psalm, the

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precious oil represents the Spirit and Jesus having the name of Christ (anointed) is called our Great High Priest. If not so, then this is a very confusing Psalm. Why would pouring oil on to the head of the priest be like unity for the church unless there was a deeper meaning?

Thousands of years ago the High Priest was the person from the tribe of priests in the nation of Israel who mediated between God and His people. He had special ceremonial clothes to wear and various cleansing and sacrificial rituals to perform in the temple. As the priest carried the ephod (a breastplate) over his shoulders and chest, this represented the twelve tribes, and so Jesus our High Priest carries the church on His body. He carries the church on His heart and shoulders, and with the oil of anointing poured down on the head, flowing on to His body, so people of God truly are part of the High Priest. The love of God flows down from the Father to His Son and on to His church by the Spirit of God.

Psalm 133 illustrates how God's people would sing this amazing truth. See that there's true blessing in unity – because they are united in Christ the blessing comes through Him, down from our head:

*Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity!  
It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down on the collar of his  
robes!*



*A Painting of the High Priest*