

UNITY
Psalm 133
October 18, 2009 – Grace Covenant Baptist Church

In this psalm David is rejoicing in the blessing and privilege of Christian unity in the context of covenant people who care for each other and love each other and pray for each other. Unfortunately, as James Montgomery Boice points out, this “unity is certainly more noticeable by its absence than by its presence.”¹ He attributes this to pluralism that has produced a rugged individualism. People no longer work for unity or harmony; instead they struggle with each other, often proclaiming their rights for themselves or their group.

I would add to this the popularity of “social” web sites like Myspace, Facebook, and Twitter that can serve as a tool for our edification but often feed this beast of individualism. A person can sit behind a computer and share their thoughts with an entire world all at once. But communication is hindered, fellowship is squelched. We live in a world of people who no longer know how to carry on a conversation. And when they do, it is short text-message like bursts. English teachers have noted how many students today no longer know how to spell or communicate in writing and they attribute a great deal of it to technology.

This goes against God’s purpose for man. God created us to live in unity and in community. Christians are not born again into a vacuum. They are set part to live in fellowship in the Church. The moment one comes to faith in Christ he becomes a member of this community. We can no more be a Christian and have nothing to do with the Church than we can be a person and not part of a family. We are born into the family of the saints. Of course, just because we are a family of faith does not mean that we are one big happy family. We are a family of sinners and sometimes that causes some problems. However, sinners though we are, we are always brothers and sisters in Christ.

So then the question is not, “Am I going to be a part of this community?” but “How am I going to live in this community?” This psalm sets forth the standard, the goal, the requirement, the necessity. It is to dwell together in unity. And this unity begins and ends with Christ and His Church, a community that covenant people who care for each other and love each other and pray for each other.

I. What Unity Is (133:1)

David begins with a statement that is objective as well as subjective, foundational as well as experiential, “**Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!**” Those who are truly in covenant with one another long for this unity. However, unity is not defined by our wants. It is not founded upon our desires. True unity only happens when a group of sinners is satisfied with Christ!

That is why I want us to define unity, what it is, through the lens of Christ and His Church. In Scripture we find three metaphors that describe the Church and each shows us what unity is. If you want a formal definition, *unity* means “oneness.” But “oneness” is beautifully pictured in Christ’s relationship to His Church and in the Church’s relations with one another.

¹ James Montgomery Boice, *Psalms 107-150*, 1160.

1. Organization – Building/Foundation (1 Cor. 3:9b-17; Mt. 16:18; 1 Pet. 2:4-10; Eph. 2:19-22)

1 Peter 2:4-10 – ⁴And coming to Him as to a living stone which has been rejected by men, but is choice and precious in the sight of God, ⁵ you also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. ⁶ For *this* is contained in Scripture: “BEHOLD, I LAY IN ZION A CHOICE STONE, A PRECIOUS CORNER *stone*, AND HE WHO BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED.” ⁷ This precious value, then, is for you who believe; but for those who disbelieve, “THE STONE WHICH THE BUILDERS REJECTED, THIS BECAME THE VERY CORNER *stone*,” ⁸ and, “A STONE OF STUMBLING AND A ROCK OF OFFENSE”; for they stumble because they are disobedient to the word, and to this *doom* they were also appointed. ⁹ But you are A CHOSEN RACE, A royal PRIESTHOOD, A HOLY NATION, A PEOPLE FOR God’s OWN POSSESSION, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; ¹⁰ for you once were NOT A PEOPLE, but now you are THE PEOPLE OF GOD; you had NOT RECEIVED MERCY, but now you have RECEIVED MERCY.

Ephesians 2:19-22 – ¹⁹ So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God’s household, ²⁰ having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner *stone*, ²¹ in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, ²² in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.

2. Submission – Body/Head (1 Cor. 11:3; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18, 2:18-19)

Ephesians 1:22-23 – ²² And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, ²³ which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

Colossians 1:18 – He is also head of the body, the church

Colossians 2:18-19 – ¹⁸ Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on *visions* he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹ **and not holding fast to the head**, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

3. Love – Husband/wife Christ/Church (Eph. 5:22-33; Rev. 19:6-9)

I mentioned just the other day to one of you this analogy Paul used for the Church and what a wonderful privilege it is as a pastor to pronounce a man and a woman as husband and wife. In marriage, the two become one as I mentioned that this “oneness” is but a preview of what they will finally become. They are one in the sense that they cannot be separated but as they mature in their marriage and in their love for one another, they realize their “oneness” more and more.

The same is true of the Church. Christ loves the Church and gave Himself up for her and is this very day making her more beautiful. The Church joyfully submits to Christ and obeys His

commands. The two are one—again, in preview of what will one day be in fullness, but they are one.

In his book *Ten Questions to Diagnose Your Spiritual Health*, Don Whitney asks the question, “*Are you more loving?*” This is one of the areas by which the Christian should constantly be examining himself. Paul had heard of the Ephesians “love toward all the saints” (1:15). The Greek word for love (*agapē*) denotes caring love, love that counts no sacrifice too great for the one loved. Such was the attitude of Paul’s readers toward *all the saints* (i.e., the people of God).

I am ever amazed at how cruel Christians can be towards one another. It seems you don’t have to look very far to find hate, envy, strife and bitterness among believers. There are few churches where this is not the case. These attitudes are reflections of what is truly in the heart. Christian love is to be selfless, others-oriented. Christian love thinks of others first. This goes against the grain of our culture that tells us to “look out for #1.” Our culture is verifiably and distinctively self-centered. Advertisements on TV are by their very nature geared to make you think of *your* wants, *your* desires, *yourself*. This feeds our sin nature that seeks to be self-centered rather than Christ-centered. When we continually feed on the message of the world, we will not grow in love for Christ and others. If you truly want to be known as one who has “love toward all the saints” you must recognize the influence that the world has on our understanding of love. In reality, the world’s message is anti-love, anti-*agapē*.

In his commentary on Ephesians, John MacArthur wrote the following on Christian love. *Does this describe how you are toward other believers in the body of Christ?*

Christian love is indiscriminate; it does not pick and choose which believers it will love. Christ loves all believers, and they are precious to Him. By definition, therefore, Christian love extends to all Christians. To the extent that it does not, it is less than Christian. Paul calls for believers to be “maintaining the same love” (Phil. 2:2), which is to love all believers the same. Sometimes we hear Christians say, “I love him in the Lord,” which seems to imply that they have no personal affection for nor commitment to the needs of the individual. They extend a certain spiritualized kind of love only because the other person is a fellow believer. But that is not genuine love. To truly love a person in the Lord is to love him as the Lord loves him—genuinely and sacrificially.²

Revelation 19:6-9 – ⁶ Then I heard *something* like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.” ⁷ Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready.” ⁸ It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright *and* clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. ⁹ Then he said to me, “Write, ‘Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.’” And he said to me, “These are true words of God.”

II. What Unity Looks Like (133:2-3a)

² John MacArthur, Jr., *Ephesians*, 39.

The psalmist gives uses two images that encourage or shape the unity that is good and pleasant. The first is a theological or historical illustration, the second a geographical.

1. Theological illustration (v. 2)

“It (unity) is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes.” The picture is from Exodus 29 where instructions are given for the ordination of Aaron and other priests. After sacrifices were prepared, Aaron was dressed in the priestly garb with the following directions, “Then you shall take the anointing oil and pour it on his head and anoint him... You shall gird them with sashes, Aaron and his sons, and bind caps on them, and they shall have the priesthood by a perpetual statute. So you shall ordain Aaron and his sons” (29:7, 9).

There are a few things we glean from this illustration as it relates to the unity that should be present in Christ’s people. First, this anointing was done to set Aaron and the other priests apart, to consecrate them in holiness, and it was done at God’s direction, in His way, with His authority, and any blessing associated with it came from Him. The repetition of the words **“coming down”** pictures this as something that came from above.

Second, the oil that was used is described as **“precious”** because it was only to be used in the service of the Lord. The **“oil”** glistened, and as it flowed down from the head to the feet it would glisten in the light and there would be outward evidence that the priest had not just been clothed but anointed. The **“oil”** has a sweet fragrance that was distinct. It gave off an aroma that was pleasing to others. And the oil we see flowed from the head to the feet, from the highest to the lowest, a picture of the goodness of the oil being shared by the entire body, descending to even the lowest members of the body.

The picture of this anointing then reminds us of both Christ and His Church. As we have already noted, Christ is the Head of the Church (Col. 1:18) to which the body is to hold fast (Col. 2:19). As we saw last week in Psalm 132:10, 17 Christ was the anointed One of promise. He is the great High Priest that was anointed by God. But we must remember the reason He was anointed, that He was set apart. He came to die. You remember the story in Mark 14 of the lady with the vial of costly perfume? She broke the vial and poured it over Jesus’ head and Jesus rebuked the disciples who scolded her, telling them that by her actions she had anointed Him before His burial. He was set apart to be the sacrifice suitable to pay the penalty our sins deserved.

But the oil is also a picture of the Spirit of God poured out on His people. The Church is a royal priesthood, a holy nation (1 Pet. 2:9). He has anointed us with His Spirit and set us apart *from* the world *to* the service of Christ and one another. We are priests who speak God’s Word and share Christ’s sacrifice. So the Spirit flows from the Head to the entire body, from the highest to the lowest. The question then becomes, “Are we a sweet fragrance, a pleasing aroma to others.?” How did Paul put it in Ephesians 5:2” “Walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma.” Then in **Romans 12:1**, “Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.” You see, you have been anointed, set apart as a sacrifice of love.

2. Geographical illustration (v. 3a)

“It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion.” Hermon was the highest mountain in that part of the world, rising to over 9,000 feet several hundred miles

north of Jerusalem in the Lebanon range. At such an altitude the dew that would settle overnight is heavy. If you have ever been camping in a high altitude you know what this is like. You wake up and everything is drenched. The “**dew**” provides a picture of a refreshing, new day. And note in this illustration it again flows from above, from “**Hermon**” down to Zion, which was much smaller. The dew was for little Zion as well as great Hermon.

Eugene Petersen describes the dew as follows:

Important in any community of faith is an ever-renewed sense of expectation in what God is doing with our brothers and sisters in the faith. We refuse to label the others as one thing or another. We refuse to predict our brother’s behavior, our sister’s growth. Each person in the community is unique, each is specially loved and particularly led by the Spirit of God. How can I presume to make conclusions about anyone?...The community of faith flourishes when we view each other with this expectancy, wondering what God will do today in this one, that one. When we are in a community with those Christ loves and redeems, we are constantly finding out new things about them... It is impossible to be bored in such a community, impossible to feel alienated among such people.”³

Do you see what Petersen suggests? It’s simple: look for and expect the best in those whom the Spirit of God dwells! If they have been anointed as priests, if they have received God’s fresh mercies daily, then who are we to presume anything about a brother or sister? Presumption stifles unity because it directs us to focus on the negative rather than the positive. This doesn’t mean we don’t address a brother or sister when we know they are not living according to the Spirit. But if we have no reason to think otherwise, we are to cherish the fellowship of the entire body. We must remember that the oil and the dew flows down on those who are younger in Christ, those who are immature, those who don’t think like us in non-essentials, those who don’t have as much as we or look like we do. You get the picture? Christ’s Church embraces them all. Shouldn’t we?

III. What Unity Brings (133:3b)

For there the LORD commanded the blessing – life forever. (Trinitarian)

You notice at the end of the Psalm in verse 3 it is the Lord who commands the blessing and not us. There is nothing that you can do to guarantee the blessing of God. The blessing of God is a work of His grace, and every time we experience that blessing in our times of gathering together, it is the evidence of the grace of God.

But again notice in verse 1, it is we who do the dwelling together and not the Lord. God commands the blessing but it is us, brothers and sisters in Christ, who dwell together in unity. The Psalm is saying that without the dwelling together in unity there can be no blessing. It is, as it were, in the context of brothers dwelling together in unity that God commands blessing upon His church. You see, that raises a fearful thought that it is perfectly possible for you and I to be the obstacle to that blessing because we refuse to live together in unity and fellowship. And how may that be, and it may be in a thousand different ways, but it may be, for example, because of an uncontrolled tongue and a gossiping tongue and a spirit that refuses to treat one another as

³ Eugene H. Petersen, *A Long Journey in the Right Direction*, 176.

brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. We have an enormous responsibility in a church of this size, to work hard at Christian unity.

And lest we miss the importance, David wrote that eternity is at stake. What is the pronounced blessing David gave for unity—**“life forever.”** Spurgeon put it like this: “Dwelling together in love, we begin the enjoyments of eternity, and these will not be taken from us. Let us love forever, and we will live forever. This makes Christian brotherhood good and pleasant, Jehovah’s blessing rests on it.”⁴

Conclusion

Unity dies not come by:

1. By ignoring others in the body (intentionally or unintentionally)

2. By forsaking corporate worship

Heb. 10:24-25 – ²⁴ Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵ not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

3. By avoiding confrontation with others in the body

Ephesians 4:2 – With patience, showing tolerance for one another in love. (Not toleration of error)

Are you satisfied with Christ and His people?

⁴ Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, 1367.