

## **HOW PLEASANT TO DWELL IN UNITY**

Psalm 133: 1-3 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

What's at the top flows down! Unity is a supernatural gift from God in answer to our prayers. You may wonder—what is unity? How do we measure if we have it in our church family? Is unity the absence of unnoticed suffering? The apostle Paul wrote in I Corinthians 12: 25-26, “But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.” Is this picture of unity in our church? Sometimes believers resemble Pooh Bear with Eeyore, the stuffed donkey, whom he found floating downstream on his back. Pooh says, “Did you fall into the river, Eeyore?” E-“Silly of me, wasn't it?” P-“Is the river uncomfortable this morning?” E-“Well, yes, the dampness, you know.” P-“You really ought to be more careful!” E-“Thanks for the advice.” P-“I think you are sinking.” E-“Pooh, if it's not too much trouble, would you mind rescuing me?” Eeyore spoke when pulled out, “I'm sorry to be such a bother.” P-“Don't be silly, Eeyore. You should have said something sooner.”

Beloved, is it a mark of unity to offer suffering people freedom to call if they ever need help?” Just how often do people ever call us for help? Is it a mark of unity if we never respond to the signals suffering people give, until they start screaming desperately—and then we, Pooh style, reprove them by saying, “Why didn't you say something sooner?” Unity can best be measured by God alone as He observes the conversations we have around our tables at home. Wouldn't it be wonderful to see from God's perspective and notice with Him that in each of our homes there is never the presence of a critical, destructive spirit toward others? Paul wrote in Romans 14: 12-13, (Moffat's Translation) “Each of us then will have to answer for himself to God. So let us stop criticizing one another.” The absence of a critical spirit at one of our gathered meetings of the church is not a foolproof indication of the lack of a critical spirit in our private homes or private gatherings? Only God knows how much our gathered unity shared here is felt at home in private. Would to God we all could learn the lesson Augustine learned many centuries ago from his mother. In order to prevent dinner table conversation from degenerating to criticism and gossip, she taught Augustine a couplet he carved on his own table as an adult. Whenever gossip or criticism began at his table, Augustine only pointed to the couplet carved on his table—to the deep embarrassment of his guests. It read, “Who loves another's name to stain, He must not dine with me again.”

Let's consider a few more criteria for measuring unity. (1) How many of us avoid meeting eyes and smiling when we greet each other? Let's consider a few more

criteria for measuring unity. (1) How many of us avoid meeting eyes and smiling when we greet each other? (2) How enthusiastic is our worship together? (3) How many of us are faithfully praying for our pastors and other church leaders? (4) How many new visitors in our church consistently remark about the spirit of love they feel when they enter our sanctuary? (5) How many visible cliques do we have that make others feel like they are on the outside looking in? (6) How many smiling faces with joyful hearts are in our congregation? (7) How sincere are we as people in listening to one another when we speak or when we listen to testimonies? (8) How many of us feel open to be vulnerable in the body of Christ without fear of being judged? (9) How many of us sit attentively taking in our Sunday School lesson or the Pastor's message? (10) How many of us have a heart offense with anyone in our church family? One thing is certain. Even if we have trouble identifying when unity is present for sure, we all know when disunity is alive and well. A spirit pervades the church body which reminds us of a cold wet blanket placed on top of a roaring fire. Folk are not free to share. There is a spirit of intimidation. Even the presence of only one disgruntled, grumbling, mumbling, muttering, critical person can sorely test and try the unity of the body of Christ.

The actual word unity is only found once in the entire 39 books of the Old Testament—only here in Psalm 133: 1. The word unity only appears twice in the New Testament—in Ephesians 4: 3 and 13. Today, we are looking at the OT only. Yet the concept of unity is often repeated in Scripture under other words such as one, oneness, likeminded, being of one accord, altogether, alike, a unit, all at once or being of the same mind. This Old Testament Hebrew word is **yachad**. It means a unit that is alike and altogether. Psalm 133 is the next to last of the fifteen psalms of Ascent—written for pilgrims traveling up to Jerusalem and David wrote it. No one knows the occasion for the writing of this psalm that praises the wondrous joy of brotherly love and unity. I feel after much study of this psalm for many hours, that God desires us to look at unity as a gift from God. James 1: 17 states, “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.” Today, I invite your attention to search with me in these three short verses—37 Hebrew words and 63 words in the ESV English. Here I find five major descriptions of this wonderful gift of God called unity. What are David's five descriptions of this precious gift?

**UNITY IS A GIFT OF GOD THAT BINDS BELIEVERS TOGETHER WITH HIM AND EACH OTHER.** (I.)

Notice verse 1—Notice the two words “when brothers” (we may add sisters). David is speaking of his Israelites brothers. In Ephesians, Paul is speaking of Christians. True biblical unity is unknown among the lost. To be biblical unity, there must be a common faith in God, a common life of love, a common hope of eternal life, a common covenant between God and men,

and a common Lord and Master. That commonality we have in Jesus is the source of true spiritual brotherhood and true unity. Sadly, not all believers exemplify unity but unity is always possible for believers. Christian brothers and sisters were ordained by God to love one another. Yet, unity is often missing in churches all over the world because we as believers are in a war. It is a war with the enemy of our souls. We are trained in scripture for combat against him. It is sad when brothers and sisters choose to look at other brothers and sisters as their foe. History records that the English and the French were fighting when two war vessels met in a fearful encounter with a great loss of lives in both vessels. Each of the war vessels supposed they were engaged in a life and death struggle against their common enemy. When the ships met in combat, it was too dark to see clearly. When dawn came, both ships noticed they were both flying an English flag. The captains saluted each other, but both ships grieved sadly over their disastrous mistake. No true believer is ever your enemy. A believer may fight temporarily for Satan's side due to sin in his life, but that believer is still not the enemy, but a brother that needs to repent or be disciplined and then reclaimed. Unbelievers are not even the enemy. They need to be loved too as Jesus loved sinners, reached out to—they need to be saved. Paul tells us in Ephesians 6: 12, "For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." The prince of the power of the air, the devil and his angels are our enemy. Our Holy Spirit bond of unity will show and glow and grow and flow only when we remember that brothers and sisters are never enemies. Secondly,

### **UNITY IS A GIFT OF GOD THAT IS BEST EVIDENCED WHEN**

**BELIEVERS ARE GATHERED.** (II.) Notice in v. 1 the words, "when brothers dwell together in unity." It is true that the unity of the brothers can be seen when they are apart from each other. The unity of scattered brothers is precious as they pray for each other, think of each other, talk to each other, speak the best of each other outside their presence, and by how they weep when they hear of the distress of the other. Nevertheless, David is not speaking of the scattered brothers, but the gathered brothers, the brothers and sisters assembled together worshipping the Lord under one roof. This aspect of unity is observable by those bound to each other by Holy Spirit unity and those who come to visit that place as visitors will find it noticeable. Beloved, what do visitors see when they come here? Is our unity evidenced best by our gathering together? The Book of Acts speaks often of this aspect of unity, under the words, "of one accord in one place." That was the condition necessary for Pentecost to come in Acts 2: 1. We read, "When the Day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place." It is ever the result of Pentecost in our body. Believe it or not, the greatest result of the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost was not tongues of fire above the disciple's heads, or the

ability to speak in other tongues and languages never studied by them before. The greatest result of the Holy Spirit's coming at Pentecost was that God gave power in that unified gathering of 120 believers to witness as 3,000 souls were saved. This was Jesus high priestly prayer in John 17 being fulfilled. If this one day had been the only Christian gathering where souls were saved, it would still be example enough for us to know that people are saved when they attend a gathering of unified saints. Perhaps the part of this that should hit us hardest is that gathered or scattered, God is still today looking for unified saints and this unity is best evidenced when local churches are gathered in worship. Thirdly,

### **UNITY IS A GIFT OF GOD THAT IS PLEASANT AND ATTRACTIVE TO**

**ANY OBSERVER.** (III.) Notice the words in verse 1, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is..." The Hebrew word for good is **towb**. Towb means beautiful, bountiful, cheerful, fine, kindly, gracious, joyful, glad, merry, commendable and loving. It is so good—this goodness is seen here from the widest possible angle. The Hebrew word for pleasant is **naiym**. Naiym means delightful and sweet. To this list of adjectives other meanings are charming and lovely. There is no mistaking unity for mumbling or arguing or criticizing or undermining. The psalmist here says, "Look, behold! How good and how pleasant it is! Dr. E. W. Bullinger in his exhaustive volume, "Figures of Speech in the Bible," says that "Behold" is the word of the Holy Spirit. Whenever we see "yea or yes" used with God, it speaks of the Father. If verily or truly is used, it is the word of the Son. Thus he concludes wisely saying, "Thus the Holy Spirit is here in Psalm 133 pictured and He is calling attention to something that is vitally important. He says the word "how" repeatedly points to a full measure of unity—How good and how pleasant." The Holy Spirit is telling you and me today that we cannot encounter this Holy Spirit gift of unity without being overcome with superlatives as we try to describe how good and how pleasant it is. Fourthly,

### **UNITY IS A GIFT OF GOD THAT ACTS AND WORKS LIKE PRIESTLY ANOINTING OIL.**

(IV.) Verse 2 reads, "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!" David's readers knew the figure he used well. They remembered the holy ritual when the high priest was anointed for office—Aaron being the first. The anointing oil is described in detail in Exodus 29-30. In this figure, David brings to the mind of his readers many related descriptions. There are seven I want to mention briefly. (1) **Unity is a hallowed holy gift.** The Lord told Moses in Exodus 30: 22-25 that from the finest of spices he was to make a holy, anointing oil. Over and over these words are then repeated—holy anointing oil used to consecrate the priests—Aaron and his sons that they may be most holy. That tells me that our church is never closer to God's holiness or to revival than when we are unified. (2)

**Unity is precious.** David calls this oil precious in v. 2. The word here for precious is also towb, the same word used in v. 1 for good. Unity is to be valued as incomparable, it is the best. Sometimes in church, we glory in our freedom to do or say what we wish. Listen. If what we say or wish to say is ever at the expense of what is best, what is most precious, unity, we dare not say it, or we must repent of saying it. We must realize unity is never peace at any price. The Word of God must always be upheld, but unity does mean peace at the price of relinquishing our own selfish way. (3) **Unity is fragrant.** No wonder! Exodus 30: 23-24 tells us what anointing oil is made from—myrrh, cinnamon, sugarcane known as aromatic cane, or sweet calamus, cassia, and olive oil. What an agreeable aroma unity brings. (4) **Unity flows down abundantly.** That is God’s order as I began the message. What’s at the top flows down.

Notice v. 2 –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.” This anointing oil flowed from the top of Aaron’s head saturating him all the way down to the skirt or the bottom edges of his priestly robe. Because this unity flows, it had to be poured on abundantly. Beloved, unity affects every part and person in the body of Christ. Unity is not unity until every part is affected. Partial unity is really disunity because some people are blocking the work of God’s Spirit. Even one person can do this in the body of Christ. Even as anointing oil consecrated the whole man, so unity flows when it is present until the whole body of local believers is consecrated by its abundant flow. (5) **Unity binds the body together.** Notice that the anointing oil began to flow from Aaron’s head on down to his beard. This beard of the priest could not be trimmed—Lev. 21:5, so as the oil traveled down Aaron’s beard, the next place it flowed to was down to the collar of his robes. Ultimately, Aaron was bathed in anointing oil—it affected his whole person. Unity does not just affect the leaders in the body of Christ. It affects every last member of the local body. Then it is unity to the fullest. When the oil covered Aaron’s collar, it had to bathe the twelve precious stones that he wore on his breastplate over his heart. This bathing is a picture of spiritual unity. When God’s people walk in the Spirit, Warren Wiersbe says, “they forget about the externals and major on the eternal things of the Spirit. Externals divide us—gender, wealth, appearance, ethnic prejudices, social or political standing—while the Spirit brings us together and we glorify Christ. (6) **Unity brings joy and gladness.** Anointing with oil was common in Israel on feast days. Isaiah 61: 3 calls this anointing oil the oil of joy. David wrote of the Lord as his shepherd, Psalm 23. In Psalm 23: 5, he says, “He anointeth my head with oil, my cup runneth over. A church that knows unity cannot suppress its joy. (7) **Unity is unstoppable.** The oil never quit running until it ran out of the edge or skirt of Aaron’s garment. This is not to say that unity cannot be quenched, squelched or shut down by sin. It can. But when open hearts to the Holy Spirit

come together, there is no person or place where unity cannot come if hearts are open and receptive to the Holy Spirit's gift that He wishes to impart. Bless God for the anointing oil of His unity. Fifthly and lastly,

**UNITY IS A GIFT OF GOD THAT ACTS AND WORKS AS A HEAVY DEW.** (V.) Notice verse 3. “It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the

mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.” Mt. Hermon is high for it rises from sea level to 9,200 feet tall, high above the Mediterranean Sea in a dome-like summit that is covered with snow until late summer. This high Israeli mountain near Caesarea Philippi, even in the driest weather has a dew so heavy that those who camp there often testify that their tents are as wet the next morning as if it had rained all night. How is unity like this heavy dew? There are five ways. (1) **Unity is calm and gentle.** Unity doesn't come in a storm. (2) **Unity makes growth abundant and fruitful.** The dew of Hermon is the only reason vineyards cover the mountain. What a future we have if unity is allowed to keep falling on us as the dew of Hermon? (3) **Unity is refreshing.** Not even dry weather can keep Mt. Hermon from being refreshed every morning as by the mercies of God which are new every morning—so great is God's faithfulness. Unity can overcome the hardest times a church or a family can ever go through. Unity keeps overcoming every problem a church or family will ever face. (4) **Unity is a miracle of fellowship.** How else could heavy dew from Mt. Hermon fall on Mt. Zion, in Jerusalem 200 miles to the south? The linking of the dew of Hermon with Mt. Zion indicates that God give His gift to His people when they are in fellowship with Him and with one another. For Mt. Hermon's dew to fall on Mt. Zion would be a miracle. And truly that picture of miraculous unity that God has in the Godhead of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit can miraculously fall on us in this high desert—as a miracle of God's divine grace, when we as God's people are all focused on Jesus.

**Unity (5) opens the door to God's everlasting blessings.** Why does unity open the door to the blessing of God everlasting? It is simply because where unity is, man has no erected obstacles to the flowing of God's dew of unity from heaven. We can't cause unity to flow. We can plead with God for it to flow. Yet notice in v. 3 that God has to command unity to flow when and where His people are in close fellowship with Him. The Holy Spirit is grieved by the sins that bring division. Read slowly Ephesians 5: 25-32. Both the image of the anointing oil and the image of the dew remind us that unity is not something we can work up, but that only God can send it down. Verse 3 says, “For there the Lord has commanded the blessing—life forevermore. I smell by faith the oil that ran down Aaron's beard. I love it. I am sensing the refreshing dew of Mt. Hermon. It is precious. My heart is full of joy. It is God's gift to us. Bless the Lord! Bless the Lord! Amen!