

# True Biblical Unity

by Mack Tomlinson

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*True biblical unity is a spiritual oneness, a gift from God given to every Christian at the point of salvation, that produces a right attitude and right conduct toward other Christians.*

**Duration:** 45:49

**Scripture:** Psalm 133:1, Ephesians 4:1

**Topics:** "Christian Unity", "Gospel Truth"

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## Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of Christians dwelling together in unity, highlighting the blessings and divine approval that come with true biblical unity. It addresses the confusion surrounding Christian unity boundaries, cautioning against both narrow exclusivity and overly broad acceptance. The sermon delves into Psalms 133, illustrating unity as sanctifying like precious oil and refreshing like dew, with God commanding His blessing where unity is present. It challenges believers to examine their attitudes towards fellow Christians and strive for genuine unity based on Gospel truth.

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## Transcript

Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity. It is like the precious oil on the head running down the beard of Aaron, running down the collar of his robes. It's like the dew of Hermon which falls on the mountains of Zion.

For there, that is, where brothers dwell together in unity, there the Lord has commanded the blessing, even life, forevermore. I want to speak in my one session on the blessedness of Christians dwelling together in unity. True biblical unity of believers.

This applies vitally to every Christian. And in our day, there's great confusion about the bounds of Christian unity. Who can you fellowship with? Who should you not fellowship with? You know, the ecumenical mess that is pushed everywhere widely, and then you're made to feel guilty if you don't participate in something, but you don't know why.

You just know in your heart that that's not something God wants me to partake in. And so, regarding unity, you know, some are too narrow. They won't have fellowship with those they should have fellowship with, because those people don't have all their I's dotted right, they don't have their T's crossed right, they don't agree with you on the law, so they won't have much to do with you.

Some are too narrow. And then some are too broad. They worship what I told you about the great rush God.

Everything's okay. No boundaries. They think there's no limit to who they have fellowship with.

They're open to unity and fellowship with those that they should not have fellowship with. So, we've got to navigate this stuff. And it can take a while to really discern what it's about to teach about this.

So, we're going to go through Psalm 133. Take a glance at the law and see some score. Those that are too narrow, they don't have a heart of unity with much of Christ's church.

Who are they? So, by way of introduction, let's just think about this. Those who are too narrow regarding unity, you might call some are isolationists. They have nothing to do with any other profession Christians because everybody is wrong except them.

I know of Christians right now down in Texas. They ultimately separate from every group they try to fellowship with because everybody in that group isn't doing things exactly according to their conscience. So, they're wrong.

And so, they're sitting at home watching a sermon on the video on Sunday. They're not meeting with any Christians. They're in isolation.

And they are committing the sin of schism. And I've said it once, schism, schism. It's the same thing.

Division. Separating from the body of Jesus Christ because of isolation. Then there's legalistic fundamentals.

Usually that's Baptist groups, but there's others who actually think their Baptist denomination is the actual bride of Christ. They are the church. So, outside of the circle, they're not open to having fellowship with anybody.

And they're neglecting the unity of the church of Jesus Christ. Then there's the starchy, strict, Sabbath-keeping, reform bunch. Now, they don't really keep the Sabbath.

They're just in church every Sunday. But as Charles said, it's impossible to keep the Sabbath. None of them really keep the Sabbath.

They might keep the name and the day, but they throw the content out. So, they're not keeping the Sabbath. Starchy, reform Calvinists who won't give you the time of day or eat a meal with you if you differ at all from them.

If you don't agree with them perfectly, ever jot and tittle, they won't even treat you really as a brother or a sister in Christ. Too narrow. So, they neglect the true unity that God has given the body of His Son, which is the church.

Then the other extreme. Those who are too broad. No boundaries, no fences, no conditions, no limits.

And they drift into... They're supposed to take part in everything. There's a rally in town. And the Catholics are coming.

And the Bible church people are coming. And the independents are coming. And there's going to be a Catholic priest that prays and a liberal United Methodist pastor that prays.

And we're all supposed to be one. We're all supposed to be united. And the Christian that has the Spirit of God discerning in their heart say, we're not one.

So, there's these people who have no boundaries and they have no problem working, say, with Roman Catholics. Well, it's not an issue to me. We're doing good work socially in the community.

Or they meet one that's Pentecostals and they're going to cooperate in an event. And you say, well, I'm not going to let that be an issue. I mean, does it matter that much if we don't agree on the Trinity? Let's just serve God together.

Or guys who preach with other evangelists places and those other guys aren't even clear on the Gospel itself. But they justify it by saying, well, I'll work with them because I can influence them by preaching with them. But what you're doing is, your participation is approving their false message in the eyes of the hearers.

So, no boundaries. One with everybody. Well, how should we view these extremes as we come in to think about this thing of Christian unity? The first extreme, the legalists, the narrow ones, treats no one except themselves as Christians as far as how they treat others, and they have unity with no one.

Really. The second extreme treats everyone who's religious as a Christian, and they're willing to try to have unity with evangelicals, liberals, Catholics, even Muslims. You know, in our day, in places, there are groups, and I won't name all the groups, but professing historic evangelical groups who are uniting in meetings with Muslims now to try to see where we can find common ground and work together.

Why is this important that we treat unity rightly toward all Christians? Why is it important that we navigate this and see what to avoid and if we want to walk in a biblical way, what we are to do in relation to all true Christians? Why is it important? Well, two reasons, I think. First of all, the way you as a Christian treat any other true Christian is how you are treating the Lord Himself. How you treat any true Christian, even if you have differences with them, how you treat them, how you relate to them is how you are treating the Lord Jesus Christ in a very real measure.

When we reject or mistreat any Christian, we dishonor Christ because they are God's child and we have a oneness with them. We have a unity with them by the fact that we're Christians. We're going to talk about that later.

Second reason is why it's important, because if we don't relate rightly to every Christian we ever come to meet, we don't view them rightly in relation to unity, then we are not walking in love. And so we're not fulfilling the new commandment of love that Charles will get to tomorrow. So here's the issue.

Ask yourself this question. Do I have true unity with every single true Christian that I know? And do I view it as important to treat them as true brothers in love and fellowship? Do I have true spiritual unity with every single true Christian? And do I view it as important to treat them as true brothers in love and fellowship? Alright, let's define things. What is true unity? Before we get into Psalm 133, let's define it.

Unity comes from the Latin word unum, which means one or oneness. What is Christian unity? It is not a feeling of chumminess. You feel close to somebody.

And so, you have unity with them. But other Christians, you just don't seem to have as much a connection. You don't feel a closeness.

You don't feel a chumminess. So you therefore ascertain, well, I don't really have unity with them. Unity is not a feeling of closeness or chumminess.

It's not a feeling of feeling close to someone because you admire them or because you agree with them on everything. Unity is not full agreement with others doctrinally or theologically. What is biblical, evangelical unity? Here it is.

It is a belief. It is a perspective that produces a right attitude and right conduct and treatment toward other Christians. Unity is a belief, a right perspective that works itself out in our having a right attitude toward every true Christian that we meet.

If we discern they're a true brother or sister, that we have a right attitude toward them and we treat them properly as children of God. It is a spiritual oneness. They used to call it a Catholic spirit, not Roman Catholic, but a universal spirit of love and union with other believers because we're all in the same family.

The body of Jesus Christ. Because we hold essentially to the same truth. We have essentially the same vertical affections, love for Christ.

And therefore, we have love for the brethren already in our hearts by fact of regeneration. And we all have the same gospel-based behavior. Christians seek God.

Christians love Christ. Christians love the Bible. Christians love to be together.

Christians are on the same path. We have oneness of doctrine. We have oneness of affection.

And we have oneness of gospel-based behavior. Now with that in our minds, let's get into Psalm 133. This psalm is probably the greatest statement of biblical unity in all the Old Testament.

It's likened to its sister passage in the New Testament, Ephesians 4. Though it's brief, it is pregnant. It is wonderful with truth. It's all about unity.

Here the psalmist really speaks maybe more than four, about at least four realities about unity. So we'll start in verse 1. Let's just see what the psalmist says to us here. Verse 1, Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity.

First we see in verse 1, it's recipients. Who is it that has unity? The recipients of unity. And who is it? It's brethren.

How good and pleasant it is for brothers and sisters, brethren, to live together, dwell together, walk together in true unity. Christian unity is exclusively limited to Christians. You have no unity, nor will you ever have true spiritual unity with anyone that is not a Christian.

That's why you can have a loving extended family and you're closer to and you're one with believers a lot more than that extended family who aren't Christians. Christian unity is exclusively limited to other Christians. Christians already have unity with all other true Christians, but they have no unity with anyone outside the family of God.

Now there may be some political unity. There might be some social unity where you view things the same way. But spiritual unity is Gospel based and the recipients of God's unity in the church are only the brethren.

Why? Because spiritual unity is a gift from God given to every Christian at the point of salvation as a grace to all believers. Ephesians 4. That's why, as Lloyd-Jones so wonderfully pointed out, we're not called to produce unity, work it up, manufacture it. We're called to recognize that we have spiritual unity with every other Christian because we are both in Jesus Christ.

When someone is truly converted, they are automatically in union spiritually with all other Christians. When I was converted when I was 19, I ran with some guys who loved to drink beer and all that stuff. The next week, they didn't want anything to do with me.

But guess what? Other Christians that I knew who wanted to be with me and we had a union, we had a oneness, we had a closeness. That does not exist anywhere except among the Lord's people. True spiritual unity.

Now you know and I know there is a fake, false ecumenical unity out there that people try to promote. And they try to pressure Christians to join in that. The modern, shallow ecumenical spirit of being one with everybody who's religious or everybody who's conservative or whatever.

Come on! Can't you just quit being so judgmental? So narrow-minded? You're such a dinosaur. Just come on. Forget your differences.

Forget your doctrine. We all believe in God. Let's work together and just be one in Jesus.

Just believe in God or whatever you call Him or Her or It. We all believe in God. Now new Christians or professing Christians are often confused by this because this pressure is on us.

Shouldn't I be loving toward them? Shouldn't I not be divisive? Am I not being divisive if I don't participate? Is it wrong for me to come out from that and be separate? Won't it seem judgmental? Why can't I join in with them? Here's why. Because that is a false unity that's built on nothing but sin. It's not based on the truth of the Gospel.

All true unity is based on the truth of the Gospel. There are professing Christians, even those who claim to be evangelical, yielding to this ecumenical magnet. And it lures us as a power to be one with Roman Catholics, liberals, even, as I said, a pull to we can be peaceful and work with peaceful Muslims.

So we need to find common ground where we agree. And it's a big, subtle lie, brethren. There is no common ground.

Because the offense of the Gospel to do that, the offense of the Gospel must be laid aside or denied to do that. J.C. Ryle in the 19th century and Spurgeon said things like this too. Ryle called for love and unity among Christians, but not at the expense of truth.

Essential truth. Ryle said, no doubt we all love unity, but we must distinctly maintain that true unity is only based on God's truth. We must not withhold our fellowship from any faithful brethren because they don't think like us, but we must understand who we have unity with and who we can have true fellowship with.

We cannot approve of or agree with those who have no real love for Christ's Gospel. We cannot make people think we are in agreement with them when in reality, we differ on the most basic truth. That is a false unity that we must turn away from.

Peace with false Christians is not purchased by sacrificing the truth. Unity must not be sought at the expense of the Gospel. John Blanchard said, when the Bible speaks of Christian unity, it's speaking of unity on the basis of Gospel truth.

Division or separation is always better than unbiblical compromise. So there's people out there professing evangelicals, professing Protestant church members and beyond that scope that are calling for unity. It will never work.

It never has worked. Philip Henry said, peace is a most precious jewel to be had at any cost except for the price of the truth. I agree.

Now regarding wrong unity, Martin Lloyd-Jones faced this big time. He was really vilified, criticized heavily in England in the mid-20th century about ecumenical unity when people were appealing for the wrong kind of unity. And Lloyd-Jones said this, ecumenically putting all the corpses into one cemetery won't produce resurrection life.

And that's true. He was a great example of this. In the 1950's, Billy Graham was coming into his popularity as a worldwide evangelist.

And Lloyd-Jones was gracious to him. And he met with Billy Graham. Graham wanted Lloyd-Jones, the leading evangelical man in Britain, to support his crusades.

So Lloyd-Jones met with him and he believed Graham was a sincere man and was a true Christian. And Lloyd-Jones says, well, I'll support you and I'll attend on two conditions. What are those? Number one, stop having liberal, unbelieving church members on your platform and participating with you in your crusades and stop sending the converts or supposed converts in your crusades back into those liberal, unbelieving churches.

If you stop that, number one, I could be involved. What's the second condition? Stop using the public evangelistic altar calls that deceive people into believing they're converted because they respond down at the altar. Graham went away very moved.

Lloyd-Jones' biography says, but he wouldn't do it. He wouldn't do it. He wouldn't give up those things.

And so Lloyd-Jones would not participate because the truth in his mind was being compromised. Now the world has a demonic unity, political unity. Well, we know there is none.

United nations. They never have been united. Patriotic conservatism based on returning America to its constitutional conservative heritage.

It's not going to happen. Religious unity. Let's all believe the same thing.

Let's all put aside our differences. We can call God Jehovah or Allah or Baha'i or whatever you want. We're all sincere.

We're all on the same mountain pursuing the same truth, so let's all love each other and be one. The problem is, there's no unity with such who deny the Trinity, deny the authority of the Bible, deny the deity and humanity of Christ, deny the meaning of the cross, and deny the basic true meaning of the Gospel itself. Our unity, Psalm 133 says, is only with brethren.

True brethren. Those are the recipients from the Holy Spirit of true unity. Secondly, notice in verse 1, the nature of true unity.

How good and pleasant it is. Here's the nature. You could call it the attraction of unity.

This unity is good, the psalmist says. That's its description. True unity is a good thing.

Now this is objective fact. This is objective goodness. It's not something felt or experienced.

Outside of us, unity is a good thing. It's a right thing. This means it's good in its character.

When Christians are in true unity, that has value objectively. It's a good thing. It's very valuable.

It's morally good. How good, how right, how valuable it is for brethren to live in unity, it's a right thing. Just like the Bible says it is good to sing praises to God, it is also good to dwell together with true believers in unity.

It's good for brethren to walk together in unity. And it's a wrong, immoral, bad thing to have disunity and not to maintain unity. The psalmist says it's also pleasant.

How good and how pleasant. Now this is the subjective side. Unity is not only good objectively outside of us, it is both good and pleasant.

While goodness is an objective thing, pleasant is a subjective experience. Pleasant is what we experientially enjoy. God enjoys and finds it pleasant when brothers dwell together in unity.

Christians experientially enjoy being together. It's what our heart experiences. It's agreeable to our spirit.

It brings enjoyment and pleasure to our hearts. Unity of the Spirit with one another reaches our heart and brings us joy. Saints enjoy and find pleasure in true unity.

Disunity is discouraging, grievous, hurtful, and unpleasant. Unity is encouraging, enjoyable, edifying, and pleasant. A year ago after this conference, Tim Conway and Mike Moore and I went on a little two and a half day church history tour of knowing just the three of us.

And it was so delightful, so enjoyable to be together, close communion, and enjoy the relationship with one another. It was pleasant unity. And now, I'm so glad I had that time.

It was so special. So pleasant. So unifying.

When a church has strong and healthy unity, it's a glorious thing. When a church has true unity and love's flowing, the church is strong and healthy. And when a church doesn't have unity, love isn't flowing, it doesn't matter how strong your doctrine is or how good your preaching is, the church is hurt and unhealthy and can be shaken.

Unity is good and pleasant. That's how Christ describes unity among His flock. There's such a glory and a beauty in the spiritual unity of God's people.

It's so glorious that our unity is connected in John 17 to the divine unity between the Father and the Son. You can turn there. You don't need to.

But just listen to this. Hear this and see this. In John 17, the Lord Jesus prayed for this.

He said, I do not ask for these only, that is the apostles, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that's you, and every Christian in history since the apostles. Those who will believe in Me through their word, here was the prayer, that they may be one. Just as you, Father, are in Me and I'm in you, that they may also be one in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.

The glory You've given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one even as We are one. Do you see that? The glory of the spiritual union and unity of believers is organically the result of the Father and the Son's unity in the Trinity joined together eternally that the world may see. We had a couple move to our church last year from West Texas.

And the man's father is a longtime policeman and high-level security guy with famous people. And then this man's brother in our church, his brother, is a longtime police officer. And they're real macho guys.

They're just guards up and not close to anybody. This couple moved to our church and about eight or ten of the guys in our church met them and unloaded their moving truck and took care of everything for them. And the father and the brother were blown away.

They had never, ever observed love of Christians in a church toward others. They were deeply moved. And after that, the father came to church and we were able to sit at lunch with him and try to express kindness to him.

That unity was seen. Behold how they love one another. That the world may behold.

That the world may know that you have sent me. This spiritual unity seen. Now in verse 2, the psalmist shows us this unity illustrated.

What's it like? 2 and 3, really. Verses 2 and 3, unity illustrated. What's it like? What does true unity produce? You could say this is the effects of unity or the results of unity.

When it's there, what's it like? Well, it's like oil, first of all. Verse 2 says, the psalmist says, it's like oil. The precious oil on the head running down on the beard, even the beard of Aaron.

He says it's like the anointing oil on the Aaronic priesthood. Symbolic, of course, of setting the priesthood apart. Aaron was set apart.

It represented consecration, separation unto God, wholly dedicated. And that oil produced a fragrance. There was a fragrance about it.

Remember, in the Gospels when the woman broke the alabaster box of ointment and the fragrance filled the house. These anointing oils, these precious ointments, had a fragrance about them. The Aaronic oil separated him and his priests from all that was common and ordinary.

And the psalmist is saying unity anoints the church and the people of God with a separation, with a sanctification. It lubricates the life of the church with the fragrance of God and Christ. That's what that policeman smelled.

He couldn't define it or understand it, but he got a whiff of it. Unity is like oil on a church life. There's nothing on the earth more spiritually fragrant and sanctifying than a unified, loving church.

It's like holy oil that comes down on the head. They didn't dab him with a little bit on the forehead. They poured it on him and ran down even on his priestly garments.

Now there's a lot we could go into on that, what that means. But it has to do with holiness. Unity brings the presence of the holiness of God.

It brings a fragrance. It brings an anointing. And the psalmist says when brothers dwell together in unity, that's what is really there.

The second picture is dew. Mountain dew. Now, I don't like your moxie up here.

I've never liked root beer and it's too much like root beer. So, I tasted it once and God willing, that's the last time. Jeff A. Bear, if he comes to my funeral, he may put a bottle of moxie in my casket.

I don't know. But I do like mountain dew. Well, guess what? So does the Lord.

The dew of Hermon. Unity is like the dew of Hermon. It comes down and settles on the mountains of Zion.

Now that dew in Israel, parts dry areas, the dew would descend down. You know what it's like when fresh dew is on the grass? It refreshes it. This heavenly dew watered those mountains, refreshed them, bringing life, bringing renewal, bringing fresh health.

The oil was sanctifying, but the dew is refreshing and renewing. You know, you can be with Christians. I can see brothers.

Philip Neely and Michael Durham hadn't seen each other in seven years? Eight years? When they saw each other, they hugged, took up where they left off. Because there's unity where love flows and brings freshness. And there's unity together.

Here, bless both of them. Like the dew coming down from the mountains. So, that's what unity is like.

It sanctifies Christians' lives. It sanctifies churches. And it refreshes the brethren.

Well, then we see in verse 3 this divine approval of unity. For there the Lord has commanded the blessing. You could call that the ordination of unity.

There, where brothers dwell together in unity, God commands the blessing. He gives His approval where there's unity. God commands blessing.

This means He's serious about it. He loves unity among His children. Now, those of us who have children or grandchildren, and they're old enough to argue and fight and bicker, when grandchildren are children, we've had times where our children got mad at each other, wouldn't talk to one another.

And parents are caught in the middle. Sometimes my 13-year-old granddaughter and my 10-year-old granddaughter, and even my 6-year-old grandson, their brother and sisters, they'll get into it. And I'll hear it.

How do I feel? I don't like that. And I'll say, time out. Stop it.

Just stop it. You're not doing anymore. God, how much more does our Heavenly Father grieve at and dislike bickering and nitpicking and carnal judging and not getting along because you have a difference of opinion.

If we, as being evil, are grieved at and don't like our children not getting along, and we are caught in the middle to be peacemakers, and all that's in our heart toward them is we want you all to act civil and decent and love one another. Come on, life's too short for this. How much more is our Father in Heaven like that? He takes this seriously.

There, He approves of unity. Ephesians 4. Quickly, let's take a look there. Ephesians 4. We're not going to read it, but you can glance at it as I refer to it.

Verses 1-8. Paul is showing the Ephesian Christians the importance of this unity. In verse 1, he tells them, I urge you, brethren, same language as Romans 12, I beseech you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present yourselves in living sacrifice.

Here, he's urging them to do what? To walk in a manner worthy of what a Christian is. How's that? Humility. Gentleness.

Patience. Bearing with one another. Are you easily offended? Bearing with one another.

Love. Eager. Eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit and the gospel bonds of peace.

Eager to maintain the unity the Spirit of God has already given. It's here. You've got it with every Christian.

You have no right to willfully be alienated from another true Christian if peace is at all possible. It takes two to tango, but as much as it depends on you, you live peaceably and have unity with true brethren. Our responsibility is that so we're urged.

Paul says to maintain this unity. Why? Because all believers have true unity for one reason. Because each one are united to Jesus Christ Himself.

Every one of us are in Him. And if we're in Him, He's the head, and so the body has to have unity. When your physical body doesn't have unity, guess what? You're weak or you're sick or you're dying.

Henry Law said those who walk together must first have met in Christ. Oneness with Him is the only bond of union. When two believers meet and they're true Christians, they may be a Calvinist, they may be an Arminian, one may be brand new, doesn't know where the Gospel of John is.

Another one may have taught the Bible for years. But when true Christians in whom the Holy Spirit resides, they find the oneness already exists on the common ground of salvation. I want to close by giving you a test.

You answer these questions about yourself. Do I have a charitable, loving spirit toward Christians that I don't agree with? Do I have a loving, charitable attitude toward Christians that I know that I don't agree with? Can I hear a sermon from someone I differ with and benefit from it and appreciate what's true in it? Do I read good authors who are not in my theological camp? Do I have a heart that can brace and care about any true Christian? Am I wrongly narrow and judgmental and I have a condescending, critical attitude toward those who are not in agreement with me? Do I ever have fellowship with or show appreciation for those believers outside of my own communion, my own denomination, or my theological camp? These questions show us if we have an attitude to maintain true unity or not. Or if we're not interested in it.

Because if we're not serious about true unity with all believers whenever we meet them, then we're guilty of the sin of schism or schism. That is, we're choosing by separation to be divisive toward them, and we're rejecting a part of the body of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 12 The eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of you.

Nor the head to the feet, I have no need of you. And there are many believers in our day who are doing just that because they treat other believers who don't agree with them coldly. And they won't have fellowship with them.

Let's continue that test. That questionnaire. If I'm a Calvinist, can I benefit from a godly Arminian? If I'm an Arminian, can I benefit from a godly Calvinist? Do I, as George Whitefield said, genuinely love and embrace all true Christians I ever meet and I won't let my differences hinder our fellowship in Christ? Do others know you have a heart when you're with them that cares about them? That's true evangelical unity.

Do others see you loving people? Do others feel loved by you when you're with them? Do we show it? Do we communicate it? Let brotherly love continue and increase. And we, brethren, have to lead the way in preserving the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. This is why Paul says be eager to maintain true unity.

It's vitally important to know the boundaries. You've got to know who you are to truly maintain unity with, brethren. You've got to know who you can't have true fellowship with because you don't have unity with them and it will never be there.

We need to understand this reality and be able to be an example of it. May God help us and give us grace. Let's pray.

Father, this is an important part of Your Word, so help us to go away from this week understanding this, seeing its value, seeing its importance, and applying it to our lives. Teach us how to walk in unity with, brethren. Teach us how to navigate this in every way.

Bless Your Word to our hearts and may it bring forth fruit. In Christ's name, Amen.

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