

Dwelling Together in Unity as Brethren
Psalm 133

What does it mean to be brethren?

What does the Bible teach are the obligations that we have to brethren?

How do we dwell together in unity in the midst of a world full of division?

We are in a spiritual family belonging to God. The first two brothers that ever lived on the earth had trouble dwelling together and Cain ended up killing Abel over a foolish attitude and jealous spirit. Since that time God has laid out a plan for those who are brothers, especially spiritual brethren to dwell together in unity, loving one another.

There is a certain blessed relationship that we share and a love that we show to one another (John 13:34-35). The attitudes and actions that we portray should be patterned after the Lord's love for the world which led to our unity with Him and His people in the church. Jesus gave the greatest love and then made a plea for unity in prayer for all believers (John 17).

All throughout the Bible we see that brotherly love and the spiritual fellowship between God's people must be something that is held in the highest regard. In Psalm 133:1-3 (write it on your heart) we read,

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It 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. It is like the dew of Hermon coming down upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing-- life forever.”

It is good (same word used to describe God's creation) for us to be unified as one. It is clearly bad for there to be division. It is pleasant to be together and working toward a common goal, while it is unpleasant to have to deal with the unrest of strife toward each other. Just like an abundant ointment that offers a perfectly blended fragrance that anoints the whole body for holy consecration (Exodus 30:23-25; Lev. 8:12) or the refreshing dew of Mount Hermon when its snowy peaks melt and offers a blessing to the parched land below; when brethren dwell together in unity it leads to eternal life. Behold! It is good and pleasant. We don't dwell alone, we dwell together. We don't just dwell together, but we dwell together in unity. All of these blessing start from above and flow into our lives from God. So how do we make real application of this unity?

The psalmist is using some poetic license that I believe fits well with NT theology. We are all priests in a holy priesthood, the church. When we dwell together in unity, we become holy, sanctified and prepared for the service of worship to God. We prove to be God's chosen people with our pure service of love. In addition, it should be noted that the dew of Hermon never ran down to the mountains of Zion. The psalmist is suggesting that when we are one as brethren, it is as if the frozen waters of Hermon released streams of blessings to prepare the barren hills of Zion to bring forth life.

The Lord's church is referred to as Mount Zion (Heb. 12:22) and the Lord's kingdom was said to start in Jerusalem with the word of the Lord coming out of Zion (Isaiah 2:1-2). When we dwell together in unity, the Lord outpours His blessings from above and we are richly anointed and our lives are full of abundance. The problem is that some brethren won't stop fighting long enough to do the unified labor of love that we have been asked to do. The wolf has to learn to lay down with the lamb without devouring one another (Isaiah 2:4; 11:6).

In Genesis 13:8, there is an important phrase used by Abram that we can apply to spiritual unity,

"So Abram said to Lot, 'Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers.'"

We care for our physical family and we should also care for our spiritual family. Brotherly love and the unity that we enjoy is something that should never cease. The Hebrew writer said in Hebrews 13:1, "Let love of the brethren continue", while the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:3 that we should be "diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." The love and unity that we have in the Spirit leads to the peace of God that passes all understanding. This should be our aim in all things.

Unfortunately, instead of striving together for the faith of the gospel (Phil 1:27), we often find ourselves striving over words and having vain disputes and arguments that are unprofitable. Many Christians are often found fighting amongst brethren instead of fighting the good fight of faith together against the real enemy; Satan himself. The devil wants us to forget how blessed we are by God as a congregation. He wants to pin us against each other. It is time to wake up and gear up for the battle at hand. We must stand firm together and not be moved by the onslaught of the deceiver of our brethren.

In a more detailed passage in Philippians 2:2-4 Paul elaborates when he writes, "make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

Selfishness is a plague in the church today. Not having more regard for others than for yourself is destructive. When you are so focused on your own interests that you do not consider others, you are certain to cause problems that lead to disunity. In this passage in verse 5, Paul tells us to have the mind of Christ. Imagine what the Lord's body would be like if we all came down from our own pedestals and humbled ourselves like Jesus did. He left the presence of His Father in heaven to give up glory for the cross. He wasn't focused on what He wanted but on what the Father wanted for His life. He lived for the glory of God.

Paul continued in Philippians 2:12 "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for {His} good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing; so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in

the world, holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, {I urge you} rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me.”

Paul told the saints not to complain, grumble and whine, but to share in the service of the Lord with joy. It is discouraging to see people murmuring about this and that rather than living with the peace and contentment that comes even in the midst of adversity. Paul said he was giving his life for the faith of others. In this he had great joy! We need to work for the Lord’s pleasure and not our own. We need to stop focusing on what we are getting from being a part of His church and look at what we are giving.

When we get to the point where we will lay down our lives for each other, petty issues, picky complaints and selfish desires will go by the wayside. John wrote in I John 3:14-16, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

WARNING: Don’t commit spiritual murder by mistreating one of your brothers or sisters in Christ. Be sure that instead of taking life you would be willing to give your own. How can you tell someone in the kingdom you will die for them when you won’t even live for them? With this perspective we are willing to give rather than always being demanding of having our own way.

There are many reasons why unity and love among brethren are compromised. Most of the reasons are related to things that the Lord despises.

The wise man wrote in Proverbs 6:16-19, “There are six things which the LORD hates, yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, A heart that devises wicked plans, feet that run rapidly to evil, A false witness {who} utters lies, and one who spreads strife among brothers.” Don’t be found as the cause of division in the church!

The church in Corinth had a terrible problem with strife and division among themselves to which the apostle Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10 “Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment.”

Paul reminds them that they are brethren and then states that division is not to exist among them. When Paul speaks of being made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment, he is not saying that when a selfish desire arises that everyone is to concede to your personal whims, but rather when the Lord desires a thing to be done according to His will we agree to see that it is done to His glory. Too many problems occur when we lose focus between something that is tradition or opinion as opposed to truth.

For example, when someone makes it a point to complain about a posture that someone has in prayer when there is clearly NO scripture violated, why do we think we have grounds for such a complaint?

Someone might say, "Well I don't understand why that brother lifts his hands during prayer." That is because he read 1 Timothy 2:8, where it is written, "Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension." So we would invite wrath and dissension into a situation over something that is taught in scripture when we are told to lift up holy hands in prayer without such division. At this point, someone wants to argue that this "holy hands" bit is symbolic of having a pure spirit when approaching God in prayer. Regardless, if you closed your eyes, assumed your own prayerful position and prayed like you should with your focus on the Lord, you wouldn't be so bothered by the guy lifting his hands to heaven. How did you notice your brother anyways, when you yourself were supposed to be praying before God? If you want to lay flat on your face, kneel, sit, stand etc., the focus should be on talking with our heavenly Father and making sure that inwardly we are humbled before Him.

Countless examples could be given like this where we get all up in arms over something that causes us to forget that our entire aim is to glorify God together while being mutually edified. When we keep the main thing the main thing, we serve the purposes of God. When we lose sight of the goal, we end up serving our own selfish desires or become angry and cause division because something didn't go the way we wanted it to go.

Peter wrote in 1 Peter 3:8-9, "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; not returning evil for evil or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."

Even when we feel wronged, think of the example that Jesus left for us. Don't retaliate and do wrong in the midst of being wronged. Two wrongs don't make a right. We are not under the "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth" law. Give a blessing and inherit the blessings of God. Receive the anointing of the oil of unity that flows from head to toe; be refreshed by the cool dew of Mount Hermon that will water the parched ground in your life.

From the early days of the church, the brethren were together and were unified in love. In Acts 2:41-47, the Bible states, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they {began} selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."

Later in Acts 4:32 we learn that, "...the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul..." This is the true intimacy of love and unity.

The Lord warned in Matthew 12:25, "Any kingdom divided against itself is laid waste; and any city or house divided against itself will not stand."

If we lose our love for one another and the unified spirit that should prevail in all that we do, the outcome is spelled out for us. Many of us here have experienced the pain of a church split that was caused by division within the body of Christ. It hurts and is completely unnecessary. These issues can be avoided with love and unity among saints.

Most of the animosity that arises in the churches today is not related to what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are concerned with, but is usually related to other matters that have no eternal value. Let us be sure that we are working together to make and keep peace, to love and promote unity among us.

I want to close with 2 Corinthians 13:11, "Finally, brethren, rejoice, be made complete, be comforted, be like-minded, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be with you."

God be with us in the days, weeks, months and years ahead of us in Chillicothe. Let each of us examine our ways and verify if indeed we are promoting love and unity or if we have a divisive spirit that needs to be changed by the Spirit of unity.

Perhaps you can use an anointing of oil from head to toe; some dew from Hermon to water your soul. Restore your relationship with God and be a faithful part of His people, the church.

If you have never been a part of the Lord's church, but you want to be added to a spiritual family that will strive for the love and unity we have spoken of today, let your needs be known.

We are not perfect, just forgiven. If we want the Lord's presence with us, His continued blessings and to share in fellowship with other believers we need to show forth his love and maintain a spirit of unity in this place.

Don't listen to the lies of Satan as he is working harder than ever to pull us away from God, each other and the work that God has commissioned us to do in Chillicothe.

PRAYER