

# When Brothers Dwell in Unity

*Psalm 133:1 A Song of Ascents. Of David.*

Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!

<sup>2</sup> 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!

<sup>3</sup> It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion! For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forevermore."

*Neh 12:27* And at the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem they sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem to celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres.

<sup>28</sup> And the sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem and from the villages of the Netophathites;

<sup>29</sup> also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem.

<sup>30</sup> And the priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall.

<sup>31</sup> Then I brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks. One went to the

south on the wall to the Dung Gate.

<sup>32</sup> And after them went Hoshaiah and half of the leaders of Judah,  
<sup>33</sup> and Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam,  
<sup>34</sup> Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, and Jeremiah,  
<sup>35</sup> and certain of the priests' sons with trumpets: Zechariah the son of Jonathan, son of Shemaiah, son of Mattaniah, son of Micaiah, son of Zaccur, son of Asaph;

<sup>36</sup> and his relatives, Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah, and Hanani, with the musical instruments of David the man of God. And Ezra the scribe went before them.

<sup>37</sup> At the Fountain Gate they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east.

<sup>38</sup> The other choir of those who gave thanks went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall,

<sup>39</sup> and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Gate of

**Psalm 134:1** *A Song of Ascents.*

Come, bless the LORD, all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!

<sup>2</sup> Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!

<sup>3</sup> May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth!"

Yeshanah, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard.

<sup>40</sup> So both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me;

<sup>41</sup> and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with trumpets;

<sup>42</sup> and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer. And the singers sang with Jezrahiah as their leader.

<sup>43</sup> And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away."

## **PSALM 133; NEHEMIAH 12:27-43; Psalm 134**

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# A Great Eighth Day Procession

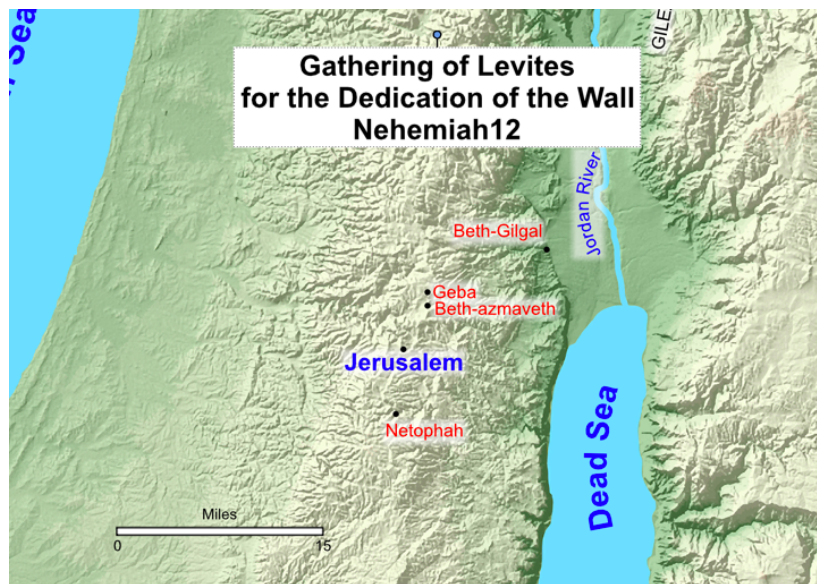
SEVEN DAYS HAVE come and gone, and it is just about time for you to take your leave and return home with your family, back to the regular cycle of life that is post-Exilic Israel, with all of its many difficulties and dangers in a land ruled by a foreign power. But at least you are here now. And there is still one more morning and evening that you get to celebrate the Feast that so long ago was commanded by God through Moses to give thanks for the year-end harvest, and to remember how you ancestors were delivered out of hard slavery in Egypt. What do they have planned for today to cap off this renewed [Feast of Tabernacles](#)?

We, these many centuries later, are not left to guess. On this day, “[At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem](#)” they would “[celebrate the dedication with gladness, with thanksgivings, and with singing, with cymbals, harps, and lyres](#)” ([Neh 12:27](#)). Nehemiah has [restored](#) order to the Holy City. He has [protected](#) it from intruders by a magnificent wall. The newly built second temple is standing proud in the center, [purified](#) from the defilement of its enemies and its own unclean people. Now, it is time to

**dedicate** all the work and its completion to the LORD God who has restored the fortunes of Zion.

First, a gathering had to take place. “**They sought the Levites in all their places, to bring them to Jerusalem**” (1). The Levites were the priestly class of Israelites who were not given an inheritance with the other tribes. They are either descended from **Aaron** or are his cousins, depending upon their genealogy. The Levitical priests would take care of the sacrifices of Israel, while the Levites were the attendants of the priests, those who took care of the furnishings, and who were responsible for the worship and especially singing of Israel.

They didn’t have to come far, 15 or 20 miles at most. “**The sons of the singers gathered together from the district surrounding Jerusalem, and from the villages of the Netophathites; also from Beth-gilgal and from the region of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built for themselves villages around Jerusalem**” (28-29).



When they arrived, probably earlier that week, “The priests and the Levites purified themselves, and they purified the people and the gates and the wall” (30). It was like a wonderful, fresh anointing for everyone.

Now, on the morning of that last sunrise of the Feast, Nehemiah “brought the leaders of Judah up onto the wall and appointed two great choirs that gave thanks” (31). Not one choir. Two. Why?

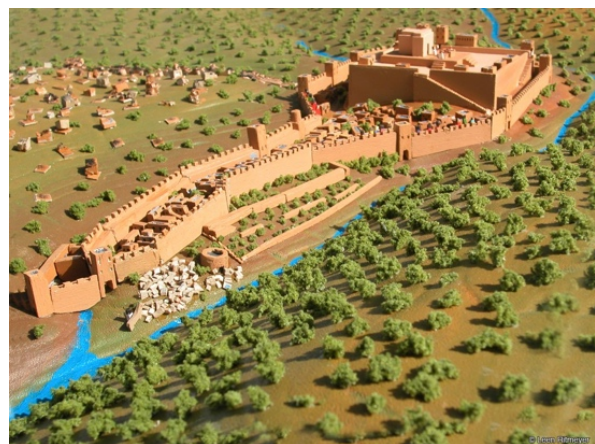
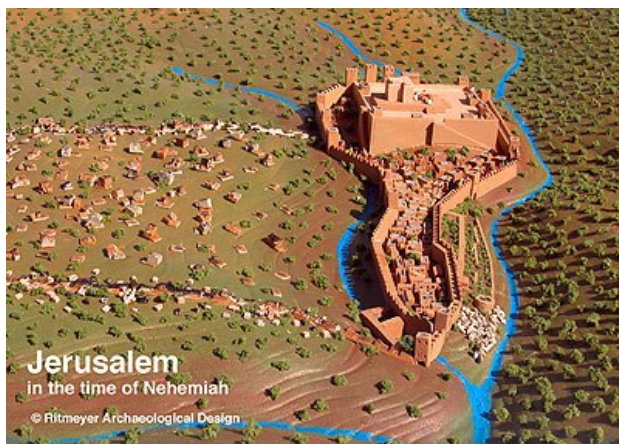
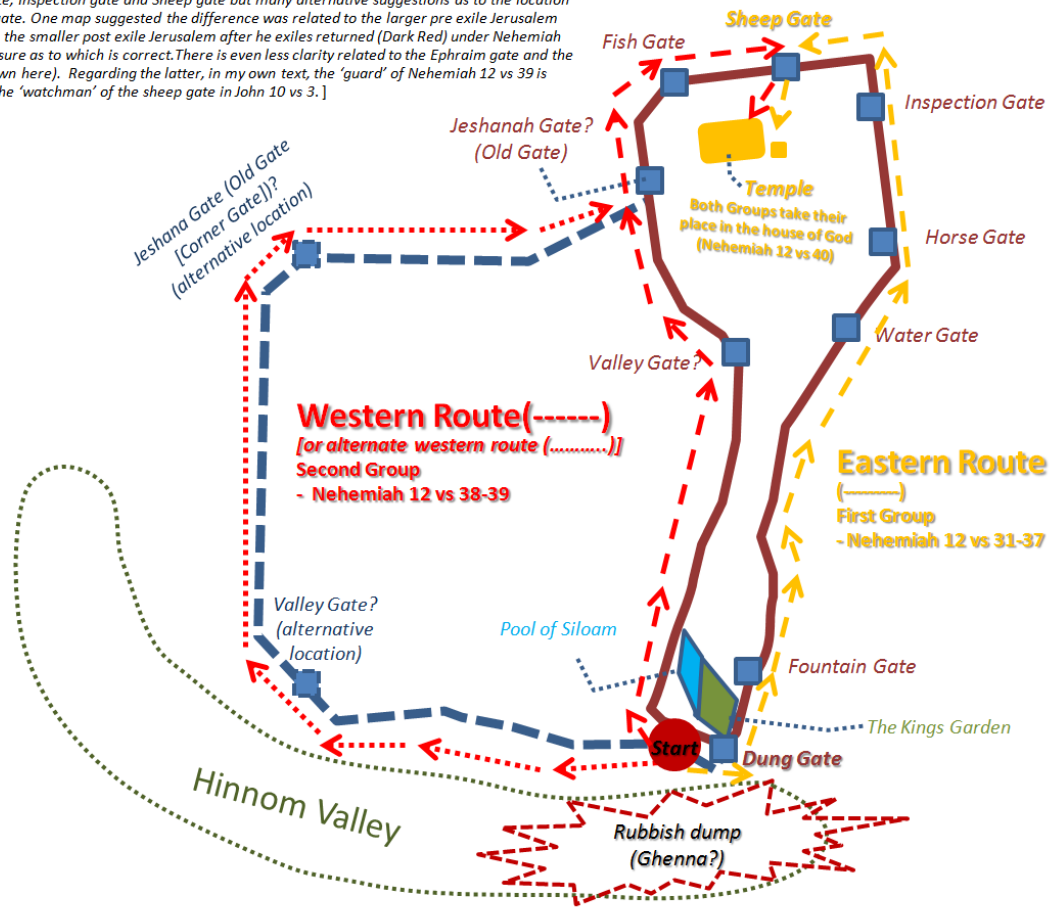
“One went to the south on the wall to the Dung Gate” (31). These were followed by a slew of leaders and priests (32-36), with “musical instruments.” And “Ezra the scribe went before them” (36). What were they going to do? Obviously, music was a big part of the procession, with its choirs, trumpets, and other instruments in hand.

As it next describes, it is clear that they are moving in a line with some destination in view. “At the Fountain Gate [in other words, they have moved from the Dung Gate to the Fountain Gate] they went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David, at the ascent of the wall, above the house of David, to the Water Gate on the east” (37). Basically, Nehemiah had them all go to the very southern part of the city wall, and this procession moved northward along the eastern side, making their way to the temple at the far north end in a counter-clockwise motion.

What about the other choir of those who were giving thanks? They “went to the north, and I followed them with half of the people, on the wall, above the Tower of the Ovens, to the Broad Wall, and above the Gate of Ephraim, and by the Gate of Yeshanah, and by the Fish Gate and the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, to the Sheep Gate; and they came to a halt at the Gate of the Guard” (38-39). This group started at the same place, but took the western wall, moving clockwise as they made their way north to the temple.

**The Route of the Nehemiah 12 Choirs (including some alternative locations of the placement of the gates of Jerusalem).**

[Browsing internet maps available there is general agreement related to the locations of the Dung gate, Fountain gate, Water gate, Horse gate, Inspection gate and Sheep gate but many alternative suggestions as to the location of the Old gate and Valley gate. One map suggested the difference was related to the larger pre exile Jerusalem (Dotted blue) as opposed to the smaller post exile Jerusalem after he exiles returned (Dark Red) under Nehemiah etc. Either way I remain unsure as to which is correct. There is even less clarity related to the Ephraim gate and the Gate of the Guard (not shown here). Regarding the latter, in my own text, the 'guard' of Nehemiah 12 vs 39 is presumed to be related to the 'watchman' of the sheep gate in John 10 vs 3.]



Replica of Nehemiah's Walled City (with town to the west, Mt. Olives to the east)

Ritmeyer Archaeological Design



So what he has them doing is **circumnavigating the city on opposite sides** with two huge choirs and large processions following, until they meet somewhere at the northern side by the temple. And make no mistake, this entire thing would be seen and heard by one and all, as especially at the south end of the city, the eastern and western walls were very close together. This was not the massive Jerusalem that we know today. Those in the middle watching would have been absolutely blown away.

When the two groups met, “**Both choirs of those who gave thanks stood in the house of God, and I and half of the officials with me; and the priests Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah, and Hananiah, with the trumpets; and Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malchijah, Elam, and Ezer**” (40-42). Incredibly, he has broken the **15 priests** into groups of **7** and **8**, exactly fitting the fifteen psalms that they had been singing night and day as they now arrive at the seventh and eighth days<sup>1</sup> which had now arrived on the Feast of Tabernacles.

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 133 corresponds to the morning of the seventh day (the evening was Psalm 132 the night before), which corresponds to this last portion of Nehemiah. All that is left is the final Psalm 134 to be sung that evening at the start of the eighth day.

When they came to the temple it concludes, “And they offered great sacrifices that day and rejoiced, for God had made them rejoice with great joy; the women and children also rejoiced. And the joy of Jerusalem was heard far away” (43). Thus ends our study of Nehemiah. But not our look at the Psalms of Ascent. Of these, we still have two short psalms to go.

## Psalm 133: A Song of Brotherly Unity

This event in Nehemiah corresponds to Psalm 133. But how might the two passages fit together? The answer is found by asking what **the symbolism** Nehemiah gave was meant to produce in the minds of the people watching? Goulder explains,

Nehemiah’s procession is symbolic. It compasses the city, like processions in Psalms 48 and 87 in earlier times; but it does so on the walls, now rebuilt, whereas they went round outside ... The two companies meet at the Temple, and so symbolize the unity of the people. Israel needs to be drawn together: the Governor and the princes, who have so often been at loggerheads; the Levites who have supported

Nehemiah and the priests, whose leaders have been connected with Tobiah and Sanballat; the newly inducted citizens from the villages and those who had lived in Jerusalem before. For the moment at least all can join in the 'thanksgiving and gladness' at what has been achieved.

This is exactly the point of Psalm 133. “*A Song of Ascents.*” This particular Nehemiah passage fits this as they “went up straight before them by the stairs of the city of David” (Neh 12:37). Then song begins, “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity!” (Ps 133:1). The correspondence between this last story in Nehemiah and the Psalm is obvious. The unity of God’s people! What does God think of such things?

Even as the event in Nehemiah dealt much with the Priests and Levites, the Psalm continues the parallel by giving us a simile that fits that story perfectly. “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!” (2). The simile is about the great priest of OT Israel: Aaron. It pictures the unity of God’s people through the eyes of the High Priest as he is dedicated for his task, the very thing

Nehemiah is now doing with the Levites for the people of Jerusalem at the dedication of the wall.

I'm going to have much more to say about this unity later, but let's finish the psalm, as it has only one more verse. "It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion!" (3). A second simile is brought to bear now. It is related to the first by the idea of something coming "down" (*yored*, see below). The oil runs "down" the beard. It then runs "down" the collar of his robes. Now, dew from Mt. Hermon "falls" down on the mountains of Zion. Down, down, down. Something from on high is coming down. The similes poetically say the same thing.

But the poetry helps to connect other things through the near rhyming of "head" (ʿal-hārōʿš), Aaron (ʿahārōn), and "mountain" (ʿal-harērê) as well as "beard" (hazzāqān and zəqaṅ) with "Hermon" (ḥermôn).

2)	kaššémen haṭṭôḇ ʿal-hārōʿš	3
	yōrēḏ ʿal-hazzāqān	2
	zəqaṅ-ʿahārōn	2
	šeyyōrēḏ ʿal-pî middôṭāyw	3
3a)	kəṭal-ḥermôn	2
	šeyyōrēḏ ʿal-harērê šiyyôn	3 <sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> See David T. Tsumura, "Sorites in Psalm 133, 2–3a," *Bib* 61 (1980) 416–17.

But there's something deeper going on, I believe, than mere poetry. Both Aaron and Hermon can be considered **types of intersections between heaven and earth**. Aaron, as the **High Priest**, is the **conduit** by which man offers sacrifices to God. The people cannot do this by themselves. They need a priest to **mediate** between them and the Most High. In this way, the priest stands between heaven and earth.

The same is true of **Mt. Hermon** (as well as “the mountains of Zion”). It is strange to some that Hermon would be mentioned here, as it is over 100 miles from Zion and it makes little sense that its dew would come close to Jerusalem. We've seen Hermon before in the Psalms, particularly in **Psalm 68**. Hermon is the great physical Mt. of Israel, the source of the waters of the Jordan, and the place in tradition where the Watchers (the heavenly sons of God) came down to earth. Jesus was transfigured on it, established his church on its slopes, and there said the gates of hell would not prevail. The entire Ancient Near East thought of Mt. Hermon much the same way that the Greeks thought of Mt. Olympus. It was a cosmic mountain, an **intersection between the divine and human realms**, a place between

heaven and earth where the two touch. Of course, as God chose Zion for his abode, how much more that mountain? But this is the idea that connects them together.

The images of oil and dew convey even more. The flowing down of both is an image of [prosperity](#), [favor](#), and [blessing](#) from God.<sup>3</sup> Oil was used for anointing the prophet ([Is 61:1](#)), priest ([Lev 8:30](#)), or King ([1 Sam 10:1](#)). The Anointed One, better known, as the Messiah came as all three, as he was anointed with the Holy Spirit who descended upon him like a dove. When oil was poured upon the OT saint, it symbolized refreshment and the favor of God coming down from on high.

Dew is water, and as such is a symbol of life, blessing, and favor as well. The picture here is that it comes on the highest mountain of Israel, like the snows of winter, which then feed the only life-giving river in the entire country—the Jordan. This is, of course, where Messiah found himself being anointed by that same Spirit.

In the song, both pictures symbolize [the dwelling of brothers together in unity](#), which is said to be “[precious](#),” a “[blessing](#),” and “[life](#).” It is with this blessing that the song

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<sup>3</sup> Leland Ryken et al., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 207; 603-04.

concludes. “For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, life forever.” I want to spend some time therefore considering the idea of unity, how we get it, and the blessing that comes from it.

## The Vital Doctrine of Unity

Unity is a thing longed for by most, but difficult to attain in this crazy world. It is frequently on the lips of people, but at the same time, they often only want it if everyone else becomes like them or does what they say. On the level of politics and cultural influence, our world is a sick, twisted parody of unity. They say they want a “United Nations” or a “One World Government.” They say they want “peace” in the Middle East or all Americans to come together. But it’s nonsense. Everything they actually do about these things is the opposite of pursuing unity.

The problem is their solutions. The rhetoric is “unity,” but the politic is conformity and assimilation. *Conformity* is something you impose from the outside, with a strong arm and a heavy hand. You force conformity upon others, to make them become what you want them to become. Sure,

when everyone conforms, it may look united, but this is only the outward appearance. Unless conforming comes from an inward disposition, it is actually **the opposite of unity**. It creates a volcano of resentment and fury and then tries to plug it with tape and glue, hoping to stave off an eruption of disorder, unrest, confusion, nihilism, anarchy, and revolution that results from it.

*Assimilation* is something very close to conformity. One of my favorite shows, *Star Trek*, played around with the idea of assimilation with the great enemy of the Federation—**the Borg**, a metaphor for so many things in our culture today that are just like them. The Borg's motto was, "**We will assimilate you. Resistance is futile.**" When Captain Picard was assimilated and became Locutus, he became **the mediator between Borg and man**. He told them, "**From this time forward, you will service us.**" Is that unity? Well, in the Borg, there is only "us." Everyone works in perfect tandem on all things. Their thoughts, their actions are as one. You might think this is the definition of unity, like the Soviet Union living in a giant cube-ship.

Yet, when Picard (and others later on) was unplugged from the hive, though he had many difficulties retraining his



mind and finding his individual identity again, he didn't want to go back. The Borg talked a good talk of unity, but those with freedom wanted nothing to do with them. **Assimilation was the opposite of the unity that was had on board their own ship.**

John Lennon got to the heart of this world impulse when he asked us to, “*Imagine all the people living life in peace ... I hope some day you'll join us and the world will be as one.*” That's **the definition of unity: Oneness**. Our word “unity” means “**the state or property of being one.**” It is related to the Latin *unitatem*, “**oneness, sameness, agreement**” (from *unus* ‘one’), and an old French word *unite* meaning “**uniqueness, oneness.**” The Hebrew word is (אָחַד) *yachad*. The Hebrew word for “one” is (אֶחָד) *'echad*. The LXX has only a verb here, “ **dwell together**” (*katoikeo*), which gives you a little more insight into what this unity is supposed to create— **the ability to live together peacefully.**

Returning to Lennon, how did he imagine bringing unity? “*Imagine there's no heaven ... no hell below us ... and no religion too.*” You have to get rid of God, at least, the Christian God, and with him, any sense of right and wrong and telling others what to do.

But you see, all of this gets to the heart of what many people think of when they think of Christianity. From cult-like assimilation and mind-control, to top down forced conformity, from things they have heard (or usually misheard) about this in the Bible, to the way they see many churches behave which reinforce the stereotypes, unity is not what they think of first when they think of Christianity.

You've heard this from those outside and even those inside when they speak of "**Denominations.**" "*How terrible those denominations are,*" as they demonstrate to the whole world that we are the very opposite of united in Christ. Perhaps you've even thought it yourselves.

Without question, some denominationalism does in fact reflect this. The quirky, odd comedian **Emo Philips** writes for *The Guardian* about how he received news that a joke he had written some 20 years earlier had been voted the funniest religious joke of all time by the website Ship of Fools.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Emo Philips, "The Best God Joke Ever – And It's Mine!" *The Guardian* (Sept 29, 2005), <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/sep/29/comedy.religion>.

Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?"

He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I said, "Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?" He said, "Protestant." I said, "Me, too! What franchise?" He said, "Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?" He said, "Northern Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?"

He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist." I said, "Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region." I said, "Me, too!"

Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?" He said, "Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912." I said, "Die, heretic!" And I pushed him over.

For that many people to rate this as the greatest religious joke of all time, it has to have hit a nerve. Undoubtedly, it is partially deserved.

But is denominationalism a *necessary* evil? No more than having different rooms in a house necessitates division within the household. At its best, denominationalism has helped Christians retain their personal convictions without killing each other, especially when an issue is very personal and important to both sides. It is still possible to fellowship with other denominations, just like it is possible to fellowship with other local churches. Is there a better way? This side of heaven, I'm not sure. You could force conformity or you could assimilate everyone to your view, and this has been done too (think Rome, Mormons, etc.). But is that better?

One of the incredibly difficult things about unity is that **it presupposes diversity**. Christians are certainly a diverse lot. It is often our differences of opinions that form the root of a lack of unity (though, one could equally think of the way we sin against each other). But if there was no diversity, no one would talk about unity, because it would simply just exist. The key is recognizing the importance of both **unity**

and diversity simultaneously. It is not to pit one against the other. It is not always the time for unity, nor is it always the time to raise your differences. “There is a time for everything under heaven ... a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up ... a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing ... a time for war and a time for peace” (Ecc 3:1-7).

So how are we to think about unity from a biblical perspective? Perhaps taking Jesus High Priestly Prayer, appropriate given the images in the Psalm and dedication of the walls, as a starting point is a smart choice. Our Lord was heading to his impending doom, his death at the hands of wicked men and abandonment of all his friends, one of whom even betrayed him. Of all the things he could have prayed for, (that we would probably pray for), he was most concerned with the unity of his people. I wonder, is that what would have been foremost on your own mind? It was his. “Holy Father, keep them in your name, which you have given me, that they may be one, even as we are one ... that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (John 17:11, 21).

In this prayer we have *the only possibility of unity, the only grounds for unity*, and *a main reason given why it is so important* to have unity. Let's begin with the grounds of unity, given that this is the foundation for it all. Here is where **theology** becomes extremely important for its practicality.

*The only ground* for the unity of brothers comes from the fact that Christ and the Father are one. “**One.**” Notice the idea of unity there, for that's what we said unity means. Now, the Son is not the Father and the Father is not the Son. Nevertheless, though they are distinct persons (*subsistences*), they are completely one in unity. This means that both diversity (the Three) and unity (the One) are foundational to eternal reality. When we do not have unity, it actually proves that we are not conforming to the way God himself exists. This ought to shame us and cause us to want to figure out why this would be the case. But the point is, **unity is possible** because Unity is foundational to reality, because this is how the Persons of the Godhead exist together.

What might we say is *the jell that binds this unity together*? It is the **all the divine attributes** of God working in one accord. *The Shorter Catechism* sums up these many attributes with a perfect **seven**: His **being, wisdom, power,**

holiness, justice, goodness, and truth (*Shorter Catechism Q.4.*). Of course, there are others as well such as righteousness, graciousness, sovereignty, and love. But the point is, in each of these things, the Godhead is in full unity of agreement, purpose, and action. They are never out of sync, never out of sorts, never out of step with each other. Because God is like this, he is capable of bringing his creation to the same thing if he so chooses.

Indeed, this is exactly what Christ's prayer does choose. It is not merely a happy wish. It is the prayer of the Great High Priest to his Heavenly Father with whom he is in perfect unity. This leads to *the only possibility for unity*, and it is terribly important. "Keep them in your Name that they may be one." The possibility for unity occurs only when they are kept in the Name.

At the heart of this are two things. First, that we identify first and foremost, not with an idea, a doctrine, a movement, or a great historical figure in church history, but with a person. For the Name is a Person (as we have seen so many times in the Psalms, and will begin to see again as quickly as Psalm 135). That Person is Jesus Christ. Our identity must be in him and him alone.

Obviously, this is easier said than done, especially when so many people have so many different opinions about what this Jesus is like. Some have exceedingly perverted opinions of this, based upon nothing but their own careless imaginations, as **they make up a Jesus** in their minds who never existed. Then they go around calling themselves Christians as they take the Name in vain. Given that many Jesus' don't actually exist, it isn't possible to have unity with those not rooted in him. When this happens, the grounding of unity is taken away. It simply isn't there. All you are left with is conform or be assimilated, and this is always the impulse of those who have a false Christ. "Believe what I tell you, do what I say, or else."

But True Christians also have different conceptions of Jesus, often pitting one attribute that is biblical over another than is equally biblical. And, of course, they do the same thing with the God of the Bible more broadly speaking. But if we take for granted that all true Christians actually believe in the true Christ, then (and listen carefully) those differences of opinion **are not destroying** the objective reality of who this Jesus is. None of us conceive of Jesus



Christ perfectly. But we can conceive of him truly, and that's why we have his word.

The point here is that it isn't our understanding of Jesus that keeps us in the Name. It is Jesus' understanding of us that keeps us in the Name. In other words, it is his holding us firm through the will of his Father and by the power of his Holy Spirit that becomes the possibility of our unity with one another.

Beloved, let's say that you have been **badly hurt** by a brother or a church. It has created in your heart a sense of disunity, disintegration, disassociation towards them or it. It has made you profoundly not trust God's people. It has made you angry. The question becomes, are they Christians? Be slow to answer that question, especially in such a state. If they are Christians, then whether you like it or not, you do have unity with them, and so you must retrain your mind to think biblically so that you can behave in a way that lines up with reality. What do I mean?

I'm speaking about the doctrine of **union with Christ**. Union. Unity. These are very similar concepts. All those in Christ are in union with Christ. If they are in union with Christ and you are in union with Christ, then you are in

union with one another. Therefore, I am necessarily already in union with them, and they with me. This is the **objective** reality, and unless God lets them or you go, that can't change. And God won't let true Christians ever go! Nothing in heaven or earth or hell itself can change this. Therefore, that will never change. This is God's goodness to his people.

**Subjectively** (that is, your feelings and actions towards others), **we may enjoy** union together another because I am in union with Christ and Christ is in union with you. Our job is to behave like that which is true really ... is ... true. Our acting in unity with one another flows necessarily from the fact that we already are.

Near the end of his prayer our Lord adds, “**I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one**” (**John 17:23**). Union with Christ (the doctrine of “Mystical Union”) is summed up in the NT in two little words: In Christ. Knowing what is yours because of union with Christ can be helpful to understanding what is also your brother or sister's, and therefore in changing your attitude about them. “In Christ” we have **redemption** through his blood (**Rom 3:24**). In Christ we are **dead to sin and alive to God**” (**6:11**). In Christ we have **eternal life** (**6:23**). In Christ you are **set**

free from the law (8:2). In Christ we are one body (12:5). In Christ you are sanctified (1Co 1:2). In Christ you have hope in the world to come (15:19). In Christ you are a new creation (2Co 5:17). In Christ you are justified (Gal 2:16). In Christ you have the blessing of Abraham (3:14). In Christ you are sons of God (3:26). In Christ there is no male or female, slave or free, Jew or Greek, but you are all one (28). (This has already happened!). In Christ you have every spiritual blessing (Eph 1:3). In Christ you are seated in heavenly places (2:6). In Christ you have the grace and kindness of God (2:7). In Christ you were created for good works (2:10). In Christ God forgave you of your sins (4:32). In Christ you have encouragement and comfort from love and participation in the Spirit (Php 2:1). In Christ you have the peace of God which guards your hearts and minds (Php 4:7). In Christ you were given the purposes of God in grace which were in store for you before time began (2Ti 1:9). In Christ you desire to live godly lives (2Tim 3:12). This is but the tip of the iceberg, and there are too many others to mention now.

If you can understand these things as true for yourself and true for the Christian beside you, then how can you

think of having anything other than unity with them? The only way you can't is if you refuse to internalize the truths we are talking about as being true for one or both of you.

Now, **why should you care** about doing this? Well, I could say because Jesus greatly desires it. I could also say because when you don't, you are the one who is hurt, and when you do, you are greatly blessed. **Jonathan Edwards**, who had much to say about unity wrote that it “**is one of the most amiable things that pertains to human society; yea, it is one of the most beautiful and happy things on earth, which indeed makes earth most like heaven.**”<sup>5</sup>

But Jesus gave one more reason. “*So that the world might believe that you have sent me.*” Now, it would be easy to put this entire burden on you, but that isn't what Jesus does. He places this burden **on the Father!** “*Father, you do this, so that the world might believe...*” I've already told you that the Father has in fact done this. He has not left Jesus' prayer unheard. This is the main point of him sending the Holy Spirit. Your job then is to, again, **behave in a way that is true of who you are**, so that you do not contradict the message that the Father has already given.

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<sup>5</sup> Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2 (Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), 295.

To state the obvious, the point of the “*in Christ*” is that it is those who are in Christ who have this unity. This means it is therefore a unity the world knows nothing about. It is utterly foreign to them, they cannot understand a word of it. Their unity is not based on it, and this is why their unity is so fragile, if it even exists at all. You cannot and do not have biblical unity with those who are not in Christ. Sure, you may have *common interests, likes, or circumstances*. You may be united by your favorite team or your political affiliation, or your ethnic origins, or your love of knitting. And while those can be very good and beneficial, they are not what biblical unity is all about. For these are not spiritual, eternal realities, and the God who brings true unity is not the object of its affections.

So what do I mean by this now? Think about what they are doing in both Nehemiah 12 and Psalm 133. **They are worshiping God!** They are celebrating him, confessing him, enjoying all the benefits that he gives together through the means of grace. Their unity exists so that they can worship God together. Many people do not take worship seriously, and many people who think they are worshiping God at the end of the day come dangerously close to worshiping

themselves or their feelings. But true worship actually ends up uniting our hearts together as one, because we have been confronted with the Living God. He has convicted us of sin and forgiven us in grace. He has shown us what life is and how to live meaningfully in it. This in turn gives purpose to everything that we do. Why? Because we have come into contact with the very Author of all things and have not perished.

This idea was tremendously important to Nehemiah who went to all this trouble to have this formal dedication of the walls built not with brick and mortar, but with worship and praise of his Triune God. This actually happens to be the focus of [the last Song of Ascent](#), which is equally as short as Psalm 133. So let us turn to it now as we conclude our thoughts on unity.

## **Psalm 134: The Point of It All**

This was the benedictory song sung later that evening, after the sun had gone down, thus bringing an end to the eight-day festival of renewal and thanks for God's provision and redemption. "*A Song of Ascents. Come, bless the LORD,*

all you servants of the LORD, who stand by night in the house of the LORD!” (Ps 134:1). When you have heard and internalized the things we have said today, how can you not want to do this? If you were there for those eight days and seen what God had done to restore the fortunes of his people, to set things right again, you would understand. But Jesus Christ has done infinitely more for each one of you than them!

Do you hear the “night” theme—they “*stand by night in the house of the LORD?*” To stand at night before the temple means that you are longing to be there, just to get the tiniest glimpse of the glory of the LORD. This made it a fitting closing chorus for such a feast. Yahweh appears three times in this verse, perfect for the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who root them in their unity and worship.

“Lift up your hands to the holy place and bless the LORD!” (2). This is an acknowledgement that God is in that place and that you want to be part of it. It is also the heart of worship, praising God, giving him glory with body and soul, together with his people. For this is not worship in your bedroom, but with God’s people. The unity that comes from doing this is indescribable and it penetrates deep into

the heart of anyone engaging in it in Christ. And this takes place whether you feel it or not, because it doesn't depend upon your emotions, but God's work. This explains why Christians, true Christians, have been able to do such great things together throughout history. God has changed them through worship.

Finally, “**May the LORD bless you from Zion, he who made heaven and earth**” (3). This teaches you who this LORD Yahweh is. He is the Creator of all things, infinitely powerful, who can do all his holy will. Yet, he has come down to Zion to bless his people.

In the NT, he came down in a person. His name is Jesus of Nazareth, God in human flesh. This Jesus is the conduit between heaven and earth. He is the Great High Priest who offers the final sacrifice for all sin, so that any who call upon him may be forgiven. He is the link between heaven and earth who gave us God's law from the Mt. of Beatitudes, told us about the future on the Mt. of Olives, was transfigured on Mt. Hermon, and died on Mt. Calvary, each place significant, for it was the blessing of God coming down to mankind through he who is the only mediator between God and man. He is the Anointed One, whose oil flows



down from heaven generously upon all who confess his Name and seek refuge in him alone. He is the Dew of God who gives the Water of Life freely to any who thirst. He is the one who brings true unity to God's people, and when they understand this rightly and have a true change of heart rather than being stuck in outward conformity or assimilation, there is no greater place to be than in their presence, for where they are, God is in the midst of them.

Therefore, the psalmist was surely right. How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. God has done this for you. If you know of someone with whom you are in union through Christ and are not acting like it, go forth from this place and make it right with them. God will change your heart by the truths of his word, that you may know the joys and blessings of life evermore here on earth, a foretaste of the glory to come.