

By Your Love

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Joel Greenwood

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Over the years as I have had the privilege of getting to know multiple people with different kinds of jobs. I've recognized that every job has a unique and strange element to it. I know some doctors and it's interesting that doctors sometimes know things about their patients, that even their own family members don't know. Some lawyers, which I haven't met a lot of lawyers, but sometimes they have to defend people. They don't even like. Have you ever thought about that? They may not even like the individual, but they are supposed to defend them.

Teachers sometimes have to have the awkward conversations with parents and with children who have hygiene issues and they need help at home to take care of that. I think about mothers who sometimes have to discipline their children and cause temporary pain, even though they love them deeply, and that is a very difficult thing to do. As a pastor, one of the unique parts of my job is that I often find myself in awkward situations.

Strange situations and going into ministry as a high school and college student, I didn't know about this, that I would constantly find myself in awkward situations. I'm going to take a moment here to share some examples, but the names are going to be left out to protect the innocent. All right? I've been doing this long enough now that even in these awkward situations, I find that I'm fairly comfortable.

So being in an awkward situation is normal for me, but I love when I take a new staff person or sometimes my wife or kids will go along with me to do something and we're in this awkward situation and I love just watching them just kind of squirm, you know? It's uncomfortable. They don't know what to do. They don't know what to say. So let me give you some examples. And this first one I am going to share the name with you because you all love them. So it's okay. All right? Sitting in a vehicle for a long time and not having a conversation.

I will remember my first ride down to a funeral in Fort Wayne with pastor norm for the rest of my life. We got in his truck and I sat in the front seat and it was just me and him and I was fairly new to the church and he asked me to go to this funeral with him down to Fort Wayne. And by the time we got to the Ashley exit on 69, nobody had said a word. I was just sitting there not sure what to do. It was extremely awkward. So by the time we got to Ashley, I started asking him questions. I knew he grew up on a farm and so I was doing my best to ask him questions about farms, but I grew up in the city.

So I had no idea what I was even asking. And so I would ask him questions. And his answers were basically yes or no. And so by the time we got to auburn, I gave up. And we sat there in silence the rest of the way to Fort Wayne and all the way back home. And I thought I'm never doing that again. I'm never doing that again. Awkward situations. As a pastor, I have the privilege of going into the hospitals often to pray with individuals before surgery or something has happened.

And you often find yourself in a situation where the patient is kind of in their gown, but kind of not in their gown, right? As a youth pastor, I would have parents who would call me and say, hey, I need you to fix my teenager. And I thought, I don't know that I can do that, but I guess I'll try. Then there are times that a family

or a couple, maybe it's a group of teenagers, and they're just having a difficult time in life. They're having an argument, and so they need some help.

And they know that this particular argument can cause one or both parties. Their emotions to raise. And so just for safety reasons, say, hey, can we kind of meet in your office to talk through this and have this discussion and you can kind of be there as the mediator or a referee, you know, can you help? And I remember when the first time someone asked me this, I thought, you want me to referee your argument? Okay, you know, that's fine. And it can be very strange when you're sitting in my office and people are going at it, right?

They're fighting with each other, yelling at each other. And you know, it can be strange, but I have gotten comfortable in that situation. Now, I'm not sure if I actually help or not, but I'm okay sitting there and listening to what's going on. Sometimes as I'm hearing these conversations take place because that's what we want to call them, right? They're not arguments. We're just having a conversation. As we're listening, I'm listening to these conversations, take place. I just want to say the famous words of Rodney King.

Why can't we all just get along? Why can't we all just get along? You know, when I'm sitting in there and those disagreements are between unbelievers, I totally get it. I understand. I wish that I could help, but oftentimes I can't. But when the disagreement is between two believers, I can't help but think of the phrase unity over preference. Now I know some of you have heard this phrase before, and some of you are actually sick of hearing this phrase.

For the last few years now, I have told you that this is one of our core values that fairview missionary church that we believe in unity over preference. And for those of you that are maybe new this morning or you're watching online or listening on the radio, I will describe, I will define what that word means. But you need to know, even if you're new, that we didn't just make up this core value, because we thought it was important. We believe that unity over preference is a command that has followers of Jesus Christ.

We have been asked to live in. We have been asked to live in unity over preference. We actually believe that it is a command from Jesus himself. John chapter 13:35. Jesus says this. By this, everyone will know that you are my disciples. If you love one another, one of the calling cards of a believer is his or her love for their fellow brothers and sisters.

This is one of the ways that as followers of Jesus Christ, you and I are supposed to be different in the world in which we live. It is a character trait that we are to have so that we can shine for Jesus. After being involved in ministry now for over 20 years, I can tell you from my own personal experience that unity in Christ amongst the churches is almost nonexistent.

Church A and church B and church C, the ability for them to get along even with their slight differences is not common. And unity within the church is also hard to find. And so because of that, our witness to the world as followers of Jesus Christ has suffered because of our inability to show unity.

So I want to spend some time today looking at some scripture references that can give us some advice to share with you the importance of having unity over preference, not for our benefit, but for the benefit of those around us that we love and care about, who we want them to know, Jesus Christ as their personal savior. So if you have your bibles, our first section of scripture is going to come from the book of proverbs, proverbs, chapter 6, and while you are turning there, I will open with prayer, proverbs 6.

Heavenly Father, we come before you today. And I believe that you have laid it on my heart. The importance of unity amongst the family of Christ. That we would be united, again, not for our own benefit or for our own pleasure. But fathers so that those that are outside of the family of Christ that they would look at what is happening within the body, the family of Christ, and they would long for that because we are different.

Because of our love for one another, because of our unity, they would be attracted to you. And so help us with whatever we are able to show that unity to others. We ask this in Jesus name, amen, in proverbs, chapter 6, starting in verse 16, Solomon is going to share with us 6 things that the lord despises 7 things that are detestable to him, all right?

There are 6 things that the lord hates 7 that are detestable to him. And he's going to begin to list these in verse 17. Number one, haughty eyes. Number two, a lying tongue. Number three, hands that shed innocent blood. Number four, a heart that devises wicked schemes. Number 5, feet that are quick to rush into evil. Number 6, a false witness who pours out lies and look at number 7, a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

A person who stirs up fighting in the community, in the family of Christ, scripture actually says that God hates that. And when I look at this section of scripture, that's the first thing that stands out to me is that the lord hates something. Some of you maybe grew up in a family like I did, where you weren't even allowed to use the word hate. It was almost like a cuss word. It was just too harsh. And so your parents would tell you, don't say you hate something, just say you strongly dislike it, because that's a lot better, apparently, right?

But obviously, it's not a sin to actually hate something because we have recorded here that the lord hates these things. It's a strong word on purpose. So what are these things that are so bad that Solomon would write and tell us that God hates these things? Some of these you're not shocked by, murder, lying, evil. But of all of the things that Solomon could list, that the lord hates is its surprising at all to anyone that number 7 is a person who stirs up conflict in the community.

This should give us a window into the heart of God. The desire that he has for his people to get along with one another. There's two reasons that I see too easy reasons. They're not the only reasons why God desires for us to have unity. First, he desires that you and I would have peace and love and compassion as we gather with each other.

He wants his children to get along. And of course, we understand this. We all have children. We have grandchildren. You have nieces and nephews, kids in your life. And you just want them to get along. It's so disturbing when your kids or your children are fighting over things and often the things that they're fighting about don't even matter. You all know what I'm talking about. You have the kids that are throwing a fit because kid number a wants the pink cup, but kid number, you know, two got the pink cup. And they're gonna fight over that.

Who gets to hold the remote while we're watching television, even though nobody's pushing buttons, they wanna hold the remote. All of these things that our kids fight over that don't seem important. And so as parents, we say, can it just not matter? Can it just not matter? And I think sometimes God looks at us. The family of Christ. And we fight over so many things. And he wants to say, does it really matter? Can you just get along?

The second reason, I believe God desires that we would have unity is because when we don't, it destroys our witness in God's reputation. As followers of Jesus, you and I are representing God to those we come in contact with. And I know some of you say, pastor, that's not fair. I don't want to represent God. I know that I'm a sinner. I know that I make mistakes. Why would he make it so that we represent him, but it's just how we are wired?

It's how human beings are wired. If you don't believe me, think about this. Have you ever gone to the grocery store or watched a show on TV or even gone to the church and you see a child who's throwing a fit there? And you think to yourself, man, those parents have failed, right? Often, it's the people that don't have kids yet that think this. At least it was for me. I remember before I had kids, you know, I'd see someone throwing

a tantrum at the store because for whatever reason, the evil store people put candy right up by the cash register, right?

And the kid wants a candy bar and the parent says, no. And so he starts throwing a fit, and I remember thinking to myself, my kids are never going to do that. And they haven't, right? Never, never done that. I'm joking. You know, it's this idea of judging the parents for the reaction of the kids. And those of us that now have kids and they've maybe grown up, you recognize, you know, I really shouldn't judge the parents because of the kids reaction, but it's hard to do that. It's hard when people look at us.

When they look at followers of Jesus, those that claim to be Christians, we are representing God to them, whether we want to or not. And so people begin to judge God based on our actions. And so when we don't have unity, we give God a bad name. We misrepresent him. And we turn people away from God. Therefore, God hates conflict that is stirred up in the community.

Unity amongst God's people is important because that unity will reflect who God is, and it will draw others toward a relationship with him. You know, I've been in the church for a long time, and I've had the opportunity to hear a lot of messages about this word, evangelism. And usually when the pastor says, we're going to talk about evangelism. You can hear an audible groan in the congregation, right?

Because most of us are afraid to share our faith. It's the last thing we want to do because we've been heard in the past or because we tried it and it failed miserably. And so we don't want to share our faith with others. And so over the years, many brilliant people have come up with simple ways for us to share our faith. They've come up with bracelets that you can put on or a necklace that has different colors on it or some people talk about hearing their story and then sharing my story and relating that with God's story.

And all of those things are very easy, but no matter how plain and simple and easy we make it, we still shy away from sharing our faith. Because it's difficult. So allow me to make a bold claim to you today. A bold claim, look at this. I believe that the best way for a believer to share their faith with others is to have the mindset of unity over preference with fellow believers.

I'm going to share with you why I can make that statement, but let me read it again. The best way for a believer to share their faith with others is to have the mindset of unity over preference with fellow believers. I personally believe that this would be more effective than any evangelism plan that has ever been presented to the church. Let me give you two reasons. The first is the example of the early church.

If you go through the book of acts, if you read in the New Testament, and you read about the early church, it exploded in growth. And that explosion didn't take place because of miracles. It didn't take place because Peter stood up and gave a great message, though those things happened. The early church, when you study the history of the early church, you find that that church grew because people wanted to be a part of the movement because of what they saw. Amongst the people. They saw the unity.

They saw the love for the first time. They saw a group of people that were more concerned about the welfare of others and about their own. They became selfless in a world where everybody was out for number one. They were thinking about how can I help and serve other people. And this made them stand out in such stark contrast that people said, what do they have that makes them different? And so they were able to point to Jesus.

The second reason why I can make this statement that the best way for us to share our faith with others is with unity over preference is what Jesus said in his prayer and John chapter 17. John 17:20, let me read this to you. These are words from the very mouth of Jesus, moments before he would give his life. For his belief and for us, Jesus said, my prayer is not for them alone.

Speaking about the disciples. He had just gotten done praying for his friends. He said, but I also pray for those who will believe in me through their message. That's you and that's me. You ever wondered if Jesus ever

prayed for you in scripture. It's here in John chapter 17. I believe because of the message that was spread from those early believers. And so Jesus is praying for me, those who would believe through their message and what is his prayer for you, what his prayer for me and for the church that they all may be one.

That they all may be one father, just as you are in me and I am in you, May they also be in us. Why? So that the world may believe that you have sent me. That's the reason. Why do we why do we push unity over preference? Why are we to be one? It's so that the world may believe that God has sent Jesus. I have given them the glory that you gave me, Jesus said, that they may be one as we are one. I in them and you and me so that they may be brought to complete what's the word?

Unity. Then the world will know when we have complete unity, then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them, even as you have loved me. Jesus wants his followers to live in complete unity. A unity that we can't even understand because he compares it to his unity that he has with the father. The holy Trinity. That's how he wants us to live. It doesn't get much clearer than this, does it?

These are from the very, this is from the very mouth of Jesus. Unity was so important. That in his final moments before his death, it's what he spent time to pray to the father about. Because our unity shows others that God sent Jesus into the world, and that Jesus loves those in the world the same way that the father loved him. So what do I hear Jesus saying?

More specifically for our life. I hear him saying this. You know, the next time that you have a disagreement with another believer, over anything, and that disagreement is so strong that it makes your blood boil, and it makes your face turn red because you're just so upset. I want you to think about your friend, your loved one, or your family member that doesn't know Jesus. Because the best way for you to share Jesus with them is to have unity with that person you are furious with right now.

That's another believer in Jesus Christ. Let me give you some examples. I'm basically saying this. I'm asking the question, are you willing to sing and listen to worship music on a Sunday morning that doesn't fit your style? If it would mean your family member coming to follow Jesus. How many of you would be willing to sit into a church service where maybe it's too loud or maybe you think it's too quiet.

Maybe you don't know the words, maybe you would rather go to a service where they're singing all hymns or how many of you would sit in a service where they sing only hymns and you have the hymnal in front of you. How many of you would willing to go to a worship service like that if it meant your loved one, your family member, your friend, coming to know Jesus Christ as their personal savior? Would that be too much of a sacrifice? I hope not. How many of you would be willing to attend a church with puke orange carpet?

And old pews, and even had a little moldy smell to it if it means a loved one coming to know Jesus. How many of you would sit in a room that's just a little uncomfortable because the pews aren't as soft as they could be, or you'd rather be sitting at tables or in theater chairs or maybe you're in theater chairs, but you think you should be in pews. How many of you would put yourself in that environment if it meant your loved one coming to know Jesus? I think all of us would.

How many of you would be willing to forgive that person in the church, businessperson, who took advantage of you? Sometime in the community, you had a deal that didn't go through or there was something that happened just miscommunication. And so you look at that business member. And they sit across the sanctuary from you and you just think, I can't go to that church because that business person is there and they took advantage of me.

How many of you would be willing to sit in the same service with somebody that maybe took advantage of you that you could forgive them if it meant that a loved one would come to know Jesus Christ? All of you may have been willing to do the first three, but this one might get a little more difficult. How many of you are

willing to fellowship with someone who is on the other side of the political aisle? If it means your loved one coming to know Jesus.

How many of you are willing to fellowship with somebody who maybe has just some different views of how the country should be run or how decisions should be made and you know you can never agree with what they believe when it comes to all of that. There's just some things that are just too hard for you to comprehend, but you can have a good conversation with that person. You can fellowship with them. You can worship God with them. They can sit next to you. How many of you would be willing to do that if it meant? A family member coming to know Jesus.

I would. You know, I could keep going with examples to make the point. But hopefully you understand how important unity is. God loves it when we get along. God is blessed when you and I are willing to play nice together in the sandbox. For too many years, I've had too many conversations where people can't sit in the same worship service was so and so or with that person because of what happened and they've offended me.

I've had so many people say, I can't, I can't go to church there anymore. We can't have unity anymore because this happened or because that happened and it just breaks my heart. I'm not saying we have to be best friends with everyone. But can you fellowship with them? I want to give you some specific action steps to take this week. As next week, I'm going to be talking a little more about unity and one of the questions that I often get asked when I speak about unity is how far do I take this?

Am I supposed to get rid of my own convictions and in order to have unity with a fellow brother or sister? Let me just ease your mind for the next week. The answer is no. All right? There are certain foundational truths that we believe to be true. That I can still love that person, but I don't expect to have unity with that person. You know, am I am I supposed to have unity with a building down the road that believes that Jesus was not the son of God and that he was just another man who whatever else? No, I don't have to have unity with them. I can love those people.

But I don't have to have unity with them. So don't think that I'm going that far. I'll explain more next week, but I just wanted to ease your minds and make sure I don't get any emails this week, all right? But most of the things that we fight about that cause disunity are not important things. So let me give you some action steps. Number one, quickly. Spend some time thinking about how important unity is to you this week. Maybe you've just gotten used to disunity in the church.

And so the fact that there's you know 50 different churches in our region is not surprising to you and that none of them talk to each other and we don't get along. You just said, well, that's just the way it's going to be. Maybe you need to change your mindset. Maybe as you're praying this week and thinking about it this week, maybe you try to ask the question, how am I a part of the problem and how can I be a part of the solution? The second thing I'd ask you to do this week is to spend some time reading about unity in the Bible. We're going to do this next week. I'm going to spend a lot of time in scripture because the Bible has a lot to say about unity.

And so we're going to look at a lot of those scriptures. A lot of those verses next week. But maybe this week as a preparation, you will spend some time looking up the word unity in scripture. The third thing I'd ask you to do is spend some time praying about unity. Ask God to show you what part you have to play in bringing unity back to the church. Maybe as an entire body, a family of believers that has fairview, how can we bring unity in our community? It may be most importantly that you and I would ask for forgiveness for the ways that we have brought about disunity in the past, intentionally or unintentionally.

I understand that some of you may be sick of hearing this phrase. Unity over preference. Maybe you even wanted to get up and leave when I said it because you thought I've already heard this. I don't have to be

here. Can I just encourage you to live by example? You can only control you, but honestly, ask God for the picture. What would the body of Jesus look like if we loved everyone and had unity? Let me close in prayer.

Father, I know it's a difficult task. And it's a hard ask for us to have unity. But I pray that we would be obedient to you, and that in so doing, we would be a mirror that reflects your image to others. So they would come to know you. We ask this in Jesus name.