

Unity of the Spirit

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Every year for the past few years now at least. I have been taking a section out of every year to talk about one of our core values here at fairview missionary church, one of the values that I believe God desires of his church. This isn't something that I've made up or come up with, but I believe there is a strong push for it in scripture. And that's this idea of unity over preference. Now, I know I joke about it a lot with sports teams and things like that.

But really, this idea of unity over preference is extremely important in scripture. We believe that God has a desire for his church to be united as followers of Jesus. We also believe that in general, the church in America has not done a good job in having unity over preference. And so when those outside of the church are outside of our faith, see the infighting that takes place between denominations and between churches, they don't desire to be any part of that.

We are not representing God well when we are fighting amongst ourselves. I did a Google search and I was amazed to find out how many different denominations there were in the United States of Christianity. And if Google is correct, there are over 200 Christian denominations in the United States of America. 200 different churches, different organizations that have some huge differences and some small differences in their belief system.

And then I searched even further to find out how many Christian denominations there are in the world. And this is one that I don't trust Google on. They said that there was over 45,000 Christian denominations in the world. That's crazy. If that's even close to accurate. That's actually insane. Now, one of the questions that I almost always get asked when we do this series, talking about unity over preference is this. Okay, pastor, I understand what you're saying.

But how far are we supposed to take this? Am I supposed to pursue unity at all costs? Michelle, you're going to have to move to the next slide. I'm frozen there. Am I supposed to pursue unity at all costs? And the answer to that is no. Okay? We're not to pursue unity at all cost of giving up convictions that God has put on our hearts. We're not to give up those convictions as God is speaking to us. Unity doesn't require us to compromise on our own convictions.

But the apostle Paul says this. It helps if I turn it on. Don't blame Michelle. I didn't have it on. All right? That was me. That was me. All right. Philip's chapter three 16. The apostle Paul says only let us live up to what we have already attained. What is Paul saying there? He's saying we're all at a different spot in our spiritual journeys. Only let us live up to what we've already attained. Now please don't hear me saying truth is relative.

I'm not saying that. I believe that the scripture is truth. This is one of our core values at fairview. It's a core value of Christianity that we believe that the scripture is the inspired word of God, and it is useful for teaching and rebuking and correcting and righteousness. We believe it is the very breath of God that it is God's words spoken to us. Truth is truth. But we are all at a different spot in our journey of understanding and comprehending that truth.

And so the apostle Paul says, only let us live up to what we have already attained. There are lines that we can't cross when you say, okay, what about unity over preference? You know, I don't need to join forces with other churches if they call themselves that that would say Jesus isn't the son of God. He wasn't killed. He wasn't raised back to life on the third day. I don't need, I don't believe that unifying with a church that would preach that would make any sense, because that's one of our core values.

There are certain things that really help us fall under the Christian umbrella. So what are the non negotiables? That becomes the next question. So if you say, okay, unity over preference, it's important. It's what God wants, then what are those things that are non negotiables to our faith? And to answer that question, I think it would be good for us to go all the way back to the nicene creed. How many of you grew up in a denomination or a tradition where you often would repeat either the nicene creed or the apostles creed every Sunday?

Many of you did. Many of you grew up in a church that way. And the reason why the church would have us repeat this over and over again was so that we would understand these are the core values of Christianity. If you can not adhere to these things, that's great. We still love you. Let's have a conversation. Let's talk about life and about faith, but we really don't believe the same things if you can't adopt to this. This was kind of their foundational truth.

Now, this statement, the nicene creed was written by the early church fathers to declare their beliefs. Now, it should amaze you. Can you imagine all of the Christian churches today getting together and trying to agree on one statement? That's what this is. This is the early church father saying, this is what we agree. And so I wanted to take a moment before we even go any further to recite this together. So I'm going to try to lead you if you can read it on the screen, go ahead and read it with me.

It's always fun when you try to do that because everybody's off. And so I'll try to read at a steady pace. So we're all on the same page here, all right? So here is the nice scene creed. We believe in one God, the father, the almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is seen and unseen. We believe in one lord, Jesus Christ, the only son of God, eternally begotten of the father, God from God, light from light, true God from true God, begotten, not made of one being with the father.

Through him, all things were made for us and for our Salvation, he came down from heaven by the power of the Holy Spirit, he became incarnate from the virgin Mary, and was made man. For our sake, he was crucified under pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day, he rose again in accordance with the scriptures.

He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end. We believe in the Holy Spirit, the lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the father and the son with the father and the son, he is worshiped and glorified.

He has spoken through the prophets, we believe in one holy Catholic and apostolic church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come, amen. These are our core foundational beliefs. This is the entry pass into Christianity, right? If we're going to say we believe the same things, we must adhere to this truth.

And again, if you can't agree with this statement, that's okay. We can still talk, have conversation, but I would say we don't believe the same things. We're going to love you. But I can't compromise on these truths. So to begin our time together today, and to share with you how important this idea of unity is, I want to look at some of the scriptures that talk about unity. I'm going to warn you that if you think the Bible doesn't address unity, you are going to be shocked.

And after I read these verses to you, they're really won't be much room for argument, concerning how important unity is to God's heart. And so my prayer is that we would open our hearts to what God wants and how he wants to speak to us today. So let me pray and then we'll jump into some scripture. Heavenly Father, we believe as we read your word, that unity is important. That you desire for us to get along, you desire for us to have true fellowship with one another.

You desire for us to love you and to love others well. And so I pray that we would do that. Help us to be focused on those things which are important to you, and which matter to you, and those things that we don't have the best answers for, may we be willing just to have good conversation. We ask this in Jesus name, amen. We're going to begin today in the book of Ephesians in the New Testament, but we're going to be jumping all over as we talk about this idea of unity.

So if you have the you version Bible app, all of the verses are listed there for you. If not, they're going to be on the screen behind me so that you can read along with me as I read these out loud. And so you guys can just follow along. So as we begin, Ephesians chapter four versus one through 6, the apostle Paul says this. We believe in one holy Catholic. That is not it. Man, I am off. Okay, here we go. At least I caught it in the first line and didn't keep going.

Paul says, as a prisoner for the lord then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. Be completely humble and gentle, be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort Paul says to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. For there is one body and one spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called.

One lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and father of all who is overall and through all and in all. The apostle Paul says to this early church, bear with one another in love. Have a spirit and attitude of love, be patient with one another,

be humble, make every effort to keep the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace. In other words, Paul is saying to the early church and he's saying to us today, get along with each other.

Your family, there is only one God that you are worshiping. Keep him the focus of everything you do. And everything else should be secondary after that. The book of Titus chapter three versus 9 through 11, we read this. We are to avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and corals about the law because these are unprofitable and useless. We are told to warn a divisive person once and then warn them a second time and after that have nothing to do with them.

This is pretty harsh language here. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful. They are self condemned. Again, very harsh words. We are told to avoid foolish arguments that don't help anyone. This doesn't mean that we can't have conversations about things we're passionate about. It doesn't mean that you and I can disagree on the end times or on some theological, you know, small minute detail. It doesn't mean we can't have conversation about that.

But don't get into foolish arguments about it. Don't cause division because of some of those things that really aren't black and white that we're really just trying to figure out to the best of our abilities. I truly believe that if God wanted those things black and white, he would have just spelled it out, detail by detail. But there are some things that are left gray. And so we can have conversations. But we're told not to get in silly fights. Which happens often in the church that we get an arguments believing that we know everything and other people don't.

And so we get in these fights. Those of you who have young kids know what I'm talking about, when kids fight over silly things, right? I talked about this a little bit last week. Our kids will fight over who socks are on the floor, or who left that toy out, or who gets to sit in the chair at dinner because they can't both sit on the bench because they fight with each other. Who gets to last of anything? Who gets the first of anything? Now I want you to be honest with me. Hopefully you'll make me feel better this morning. How many of you have had your kids fighting about who gets something?

And you just take it away and say, fine, no one gets it. Please. Okay, others. Thank you. I'm not the only one. All right. I think that sometimes we get in these silly arguments and sometimes God is like, do you realize how much I have given you? How much of a blessing that I have given into your life? Why are you fighting about these silly things? He wants us to get along. Paul writes to the Galatians church in chapter three starting in verse 26. And he says to that church, so in Christ, Jesus, you are all children of God through faith.

For all of you who were baptized into Christ, have clothed yourself with Christ. So now there is neither Jew nor gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus. Now I don't want you to miss what the apostle Paul is saying here. He's saying that, you know, there aren't different nationalities anymore. And there aren't any genders anymore. He's not saying that. But what he is saying is, all of these things are secondary to whether you know Jesus or don't know Jesus.

That should be the first kind of understanding that we talk with individuals. We talk with people. Do they know Jesus? Do they don't know Jesus? That should be the most important thing about us. The apostle Paul is saying that we shouldn't divide ourselves by nationality. We shouldn't divide ourselves by skin color or hair color or eye color. We shouldn't just divide ourselves because of potentially the political party that we vote for.

Some people get really upset when I talk about this. I'm not going to spend a ton of time on it. I know there are moral issues that we either agree or don't agree with, that the Bible says are right or wrong. And so we stand on those things. But sometimes, if we find out that somebody is the opposite political party of us, we no longer even want to talk with them. All I'm suggesting is that you would love the person that you would love that individual and that, again, as we are describing ourselves, we wouldn't describe ourselves by our political party first, but by our relationship with Jesus Christ first.

And everything else would come after that. And we can have a conversation about it, because there are certain things that are right and wrong, no matter what political party, you're part of. We either belong to the family of Jesus or we don't. They possibly Paul goes on in first Corinthians chapter one verse ten, speaking to the Corinthian church, he says, I appeal to you, brothers and sisters. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another in what you say and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in mind and thought.

And I read that, and I think Paul, is that even possible? How is it possible for millions of followers of Jesus to be perfectly united in mind and thought, isn't this optimistic? Can this even happen? But Paul says, we should agree with

one another. Not to unnecessarily cause divisions. This is nothing new in the church today. Divisions in the church started from the very beginning, because the enemy would try to divide us.

Now, as you think about the church in general, there are believers that are halfway around the world. How are we supposed to be united with them? Now, of course, it's not possible for me to know all these other believers that are halfway around the world, but I believe there are certain things we can do to be united, like spending time praying for the persecuted church. Spend time praying for those that are halfway around the world that maybe don't have the freedoms that we have, praying that God would bless them and use them and that the church would grow.

You know, something amazing has happened in my life when I've gone on mission trips or you know I've been to Israel and China and Brazil and you meet other people around the world and it's just amazing to me that there is a connection that takes place when I meet another believer. I don't know anything about them, but there's just this beautiful thing that happens. You feel like instant family, you feel like you know each other. We are to be united in that way. Paul says to the philippian church.

Therefore, if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the spirit, if any, tenderness and compassion, then Paul says, make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love being one in spirit and of one mind. Be one in spirits. Be one in purpose. One of the ways that we can understand and realize unity is when we are pursuing the same goals.

And our desire as a church, I have told you ever since I have been here that our number one goal is helping others take their next step toward Jesus. That's why we exist. It's why we do everything we do. We're all at a different spot in that journey, and we just want to help you take that next step. Working toward that common goal and not allow division to creep in.

The apostle Paul writes two letters to a young man named Timothy that we have in the New Testament and Timothy is going on to lead a church and to be a leader in the church and so Paul gives some advice, some direction to this young man, Timothy, and he takes time in one of these letters and second Timothy chapter two versus 23 through 25. And he says this to the young man, Timothy, don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know that they produce quarrels.

And the lord's servant, you, must not be coral some, Timothy, don't be a quarrelsome person, but instead you should be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Opponents must be gently instructed in the hope that God will grant them repentance, leading them to a knowledge of the truth. The first thing that I see is I read this versus another one of these words, as we talked about last week that some people raised in their home, they weren't even allowed to use this word stupid, right?

It's just a harsh word. Don't use the word stupid. Don't call anybody stupid. But yet, Paul, when he's writing the Timothy, there's no better way to describe these arguments. He says, just don't have anything to do with these foolish or stupid arguments. There's no better way to describe them. Instead, be kind to everyone. Learn to gently instruct and a loving and caring way. As followers of Jesus, we should be known as a person that is humble and gentle and kind and loving.

Those should be the things that define us when others have interactions with us. We shouldn't be known as individuals that have a quick temper. Don't produce corals, he says. Instead, learn to put water on a fire, not gas. And so many times we get so worked up about things that we're passionate about, and they are important things, but many of them, not all of them. Many of them are secondary issues. And so because of our passion for these secondary issues, we turn somebody away from the primary issue.

Do you know Jesus or not? That's the number one issue that should always be on our hearts and on our minds. First, John, John says in chapter two versus 9 through 11, that anyone who claims to be in the light, but yet hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. Anyone who loves their brother or sister actually lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness, they do not know where they are going because the darkness has blinded them.

John says, listen, if you hate your fellow believer, then you're missing the point. You're missing the whole point of this thing. How is it possible that the spirit living inside of you can hate the spirit that's living inside of somebody else?

That's like living in total darkness. It's like saying one thing and then doing something completely different. Again, in first John later, in chapter four versus ten through 12, John says, this is love.

Not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Okay, it really is frozen this time, I promise. It's on. Dear Friends, since God so loved us. We also ought to love one another. Did you see the reason? Why are we to love others? It's because God loved us.

No one has ever seen God, but John says, if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in a it is God's love that allows us to love one another. I know it always seems too simple, but love is the answer. If we love others, the way that God loves us, we will see change.

We will see transformation, Marx says in his gospel, chapter 1228 that one of the teachers of the law came and he heard these people debating and noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer. He decides to ask a question of Jesus. And so he says to him, of all the commandments, which is the most important. So you've got this whole list. Many believe there are over 600 commandments at this time that had been written down that the Jews were supposed to follow. Jesus of all of these commands, which is the most important.

And Jesus answers him. The most important one is this. Here all Israel, the lord our God, the lord is one. And so because of that, you should love the lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. But he doesn't stop there because the second part of this, it's connected to the first part. The second part is this. Love your neighbor as yourself. There is no commandment greater than these.

Jesus has asked the question, what's the greatest commandment? What is the number one thing we are supposed to do? And Jesus says, love God, love others. There is no greater commandment than these. There's nothing better than we can do than to love God and to love others. This is our number one and number two command. Greater than anything else. As Paul writes to the colossians church in chapter three 12, he says, therefore, as God's chosen people, wholly and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion and with kindness and humility and gentleness and patience.

These are supposed to be the character traits that define those that follow me. Bear with each other and forgive one another. If any of you has a grievance against someone, forgive as the lord forgave you and then listen to this over all of these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Bear with each other. This isn't always easy, is it to bear with one another? Sometimes this is the hardest part of our faith, putting up with other people.

I know that I have been honest with you over the years, and I share with you again that most days the favorite part of my job is working with people. It's a favorite part of my job. But I have also shared with you that there are other days that the worst part of my job is working with people. It just depends on the day. It's difficult, but God says we're all members of the same body, the same family, and we are called to live in peace.

And the one way we can do that is to bind ourselves in love. You see, it is true. There may be days that we don't like each other, but we still have to love each other. There might be days that we're not getting along. We're not seeing eye to eye, but we are still called to love one another. The apostle Paul and first Corinthians chapter 11:18 says in the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you and to some extent, I believe it.

Again, this is not a new issue with our church today struggling with division. But we still need to continue to fight against this. Some of you have heard of the author pastor Francis Chan and he says this, the more we neglect our mission, the less chance we have of seeing true unity. The more that we neglect our mission, which is to help others take their next step towards Jesus to point them towards Christ, the less chance we have of seeing true unity.

But the more focused we are on reaching the lost, the greater chance we have for unity. And again, I see this in the mission field. When I go and help other missionaries, you will find that all of the denomination like separation that exist in the states is nonexistent when you're overseas. Because they have this one goal, we need to win the loss. And we may disagree with each other on some slight theological differences, but we are here to win the loss.

I asked this question of us as a church. Why do we get more emotional about people leaving and going to a different church than we do about people dying and going to hell? That's a tough one. Let that sink in for a little bit. You see, until we experience true unity, it's like trying to win a race on one leg. The application today is simple.

The takeaway for all of us is simple. I truly believe that as followers of Jesus, if you and I will commit to this one goal, then the rest will fall into place. If you make it your goal to love God and to love others. To truly be a light that shines in a dark place, you will make a difference. Every day, my prayer is that you and I would wake up and we would say to God, God held me to love you today and help me to love others today.

I believe that if you and I will commit to do this, we can be united in Christ. If you and I will commit to do this, I think that we can believe to put all these foolish arguments and controversies behind us. You see, when we strive to love God first and love others second, we are doing what God has asked of us. Just think about everything you do. If we were to run it through this filter, is this showing love for God or others, then yes, go ahead and do it.

If the answer is no, then it's not worth it. I want you to remember that you can only control yourself in the midst of all of this. You don't get to control other people. You can't control how they're going to respond. And so your goal in my goal is to keep my head high and to pursue God and to love others. Don't get caught up in foolish controversies. Foolish debates.

Make the main thing the main thing, and then have conversation after that. Let me just close in prayer. Heavenly Father, I know that it's difficult to find unity. There's probably nobody on this planet that we agree with on everything.

We're going to have slight differences, but lord my my prayer, my desire as I read your word is that we would focus on those things which are important to you. Give us the boldness to focus on those things. As we have conversations with others, may we be able to love them and care for them, even though we don't see eye to eye on everything. We point them towards you. Help us not to get caught up in foolish controversies.

Help us to represent you to a world that desperately needs you. It is our prayer it's our desire that you would receive the praise and the glory. That we would turn our eyes upon you. And everything that we do. And we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.