

Unity Over Preference

Beliefs

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

Speaker: Sam Schertz

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Good morning. Last week, Pastor Joel began a two - week series called "Unity Over Preference" here at the church, and so today I get the honor of landing the plane on this one. We're going to have two main texts for our message this morning, so if you're going to follow along in your Bible or on your phone, I would encourage you to begin turning to Colossians chapter 3 and 1 Corinthians chapter 12.

Colossians 3, 1 Corinthians chapter 12. This topic of unity over preference is honestly one of my favorite things that we talk about as a church. I absolutely love this one. On the positive side, I love it because even week - to - week leading worship, looking out and seeing a congregation of all ages, all kinds of life backgrounds, people at different journeys in their walk with Jesus, and yet together, somehow, in Christ, we become one family on Sunday mornings.

I love that. On the negative side, though, I've seen churches not commit to unity over preference, and things get ugly fast. I grew up in some pretty dysfunctional churches, and so I've seen the church splits, I've seen the pastors ousted, I've seen the secret board meetings. I mean, it gets gnarly fast in a church that's not committed to this. And so I believe that the stakes are way too high for us as a church not to talk about this regularly.

There may be a few of you who are sick of hearing the phrase "unity over preference." You've let us know. Whether that was an email or a conversation, can I just say that makes me laugh because I'm like, "Well, obviously we need to keep talking about it." But I think there is a valid concern maybe behind that.

It's the question inside of us that says, "Okay, I hear the phrase 'unity over preference,' and I'm wondering, is this a way for leadership to just silence anyone who has a different opinion? Does unity mean I'm never allowed to disagree with how things are going? Does it mean that leaders always get their preference and all of us have to sacrifice?" To which I say, "You're catching on." Obviously, I'm kidding.

I want to clarify to you what unity over preference does not mean at Fairview Missionary Church. Unity doesn't mean that every disagreement is unimportant in the family of believers. It doesn't mean you can't voice your concerns. It doesn't mean that leadership is above correction. And it absolutely does not mean that we are going to bend the truth to make sure everyone still wants to come to Fairview.

Last week, Pastor Joel talked about the three overarching categories that we are committed to unity over preference at Fairview, and that's unity and biblical truth. These are the core truths of our faith. Number two, unity in our denominational beliefs, saying, "Hey, we're the missionary church, and we belong to a group of churches that have put some clear boundaries on some biblical matters." And then number three, unity in our church mission, that we're all about helping people take their next step toward Jesus in everything that we do.

Those are the large categories. And underneath each of those, he mentioned Scripture as our ultimate authority. That's the backbone of all of it. This week, though, I want to zoom in. I want to say, "Okay, we've got these three big categories, but what does it look like week to week for us to live in unity over preference at

Fairview in Engola, Indiana, in this room on a Sunday?" I want to talk about three practical areas you and I can live this out.

I'll just give them to you right up front. Number one is unity in style. Number two, unity in service. And number three, unity in sacrifice. And so we're going to flesh those out this morning. But before we do, I just want to open us in a word of prayer today. Lord, I thank you for the gift of your word, that you have told us the things that matter to your heart, that you've given us direction for what it means to be the family of God.

And so, God, as we get into your word today, I pray that you would open our eyes and our ears to receive what your Spirit would speak to us. I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen. So let's begin reading in Colossians chapter 3. We're going to start in verse 12 this morning. Colossians 3, starting in verse 12, we read this: "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.

Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful.

Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. I want you to pause for a moment as we think about the family of believers.

Think of these qualities that the Apostle Paul writes of: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another, overall loving one another, forgiving one another. The peace of Christ ruling in this body and singing together as one people.

I want you to notice first, though, that Paul is obviously not talking to a church that had everything figured out because you don't have to be patient with somebody that always agrees with what you think. You don't have to bear with someone who never annoys you. This is a very real church with very real people that are figuring out what does it mean to love one another in spite of our differences. Life in the body of Christ is going to get uncomfortable.

So my question is, how at Fairview, then, do we seek to live out the heart of Christ in this uncomfortable tension as a church? Number one, unity in style. Truth is, every one of us here this morning has a style preference. Maybe it's because of your personality.

You are a boisterous and expressive person, and so when you go into a place where that's kind of the norm, you're like, "Man, these are my people ." And when someone is stoic and reverent, you may just want to slap them and be like, "Are you alive? Do you love Jesus? I can't tell ." Maybe you're the opposite. You're the calculated person and more of an introvert, and when you see that expressiveness, you're just like, "Really?

In the church?" Sometimes it connects with our experiences. Maybe you had a great experience in the faith growing up in a certain type of church, and so when you hear a certain song or they do things a certain way, it's just like, boom, you're back. And you remember God's moments of faithfulness in your life through that. Could be the opposite.

Maybe you grew up or you had a bad experience in church, and so when someone acts a certain way or church is structured a certain way, you're like, "Oh, I remember ." It could have even been an abusive church situation. We have these things we bring to the table when we come and do church on a Sunday morning, and I just want to say that's called being human. It's okay to have your preferences.

You're going to have preferences about the music and the preaching. You're going to have preferences about what type of clothing should people wear. Should they honor God with their best? Or some of you are going to

say, "Why are you putting obstacles between people hearing about Jesus?" We all have these preferences. How loud should the music be? Should we have lights? Should we not have lights? What instruments should be on stage? Some of you say, "Man, I just love a good hymn and an organ and a choir, and I love suits, and I love just this reverent feel when we gather together." Others of you will say, "Man, I love modern music.

I love, boy, hands raised and full expression and passion." I want to tell you, both of those lists I just mentioned, neither of them are a sign of how spiritually mature you are or are not. They're not. The problem is when we begin to take these preferences and we look around at those who might have a different preference and we say, "You know what?

That person is less spiritual or less biblical because they don't see it the way I see it ." Doesn't match the character traits that the Apostle Paul is writing here: compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, bearing with one another. Now, all of that being said, I do want to encourage you. There are things that the Bible does speak to when we gather together.

There are categories related to our worship gatherings that are not a matter of preference. I want to take a moment and talk about a category of church music. I'm talking about when we sing together as a church. This is one of the most common categories for fights in churches globally on a Sunday. We could do a whole sermon series on this, probably go a year long talking about church music, but I want to ask the question related to church music.

What is biblically spelled out and what is preference in our church music style? Paul addresses this very topic in the passage we just read. So would you look back at Colossians 3, verse 16? He says, "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts." What are some of the parameters that the Apostle Paul is placing for the gathering of believers?

Number one, our songs should be biblically accurate. He says, "Let the message of Christ" we have the written word of God, which is the message of Christ, and so every song that we sing, the question should be, "Is it biblically true?" I don't care how popular a song is, how many churches are singing it. If it's not in line with the word of God, it's not for the gathering of believers. Number two, our songs should be for the glory of God alone.

Every song should bring glory to Him. Now, even when I say that, that doesn't mean that every word of every song is directed straight to God. All throughout the Scriptures, there are different types of songs. There are times when the people of God sing to each other. There are times when the people of God sing to our own hearts. There are times when the people of God sing to the nations.

But in all of those songs, the question is, "Is it ultimately bringing glory to God?" Number three, our songs should be for the encouragement of God's people. These songs should be building us up in truth and cultivating a spirit of thanksgiving among the people of God, encouraging us to be honest before the Holy Spirit of where we're really at in our hearts. And number four, our songs should be diverse in content and purpose.

Different songs accomplish different things when we gather together, and it's all for the glory of God. It's good. It's even encouraged in Scripture. In this passage we just read, the Apostle Paul mentions three types of songs. First, he talks about psalms. This would be songs that are taken directly from the divinely inspired songbook of the nation of Israel that we would read in our Bibles as the Book of Psalms.

Second, he mentions hymns. I know there's a crowd of you that are like, "Yes, it's on the list ." Unfortunately, the Apostle Paul is not referencing your favorite 16th to 20th century song. There's nothing wrong with those songs. He's not even referencing a specific form or verse or meter or rhyme to a song.

When he speaks of hymns, this is likely speaking of a broader category of songs that were used to remember or recall truths about God. And so a modern worship song that recalls truths about God could be every bit as much a biblical hymn as your favorite 16th century song. Finally, he mentions songs in the Spirit.

These are songs that come from this overflow of the Holy Spirit's work in our lives. This isn't just, "Boy, hey, we're reciting some truth about God," which is great. We need songs like that. But there's times where we say, "This is what God has done for me. This is what God has done for us. This is what the Spirit has done in my life." And even as I mentioned these three categories very briefly this morning, what I don't want you to do is leave thinking, "Okay, every Sunday, psalms, hymns, spiritual songs.

I'm going to make sure these fit a specific way ." What I want you to understand is that it's okay for the songs we sing in church to be diverse in their content and their purpose if they are biblically accurate. They bring glory to God, and they build up the church. We've seen some things that the Apostle Paul has said. This is what songs should be like in the gathering. I want you to notice, though, what we did not read in this passage.

The Apostle Paul did not say, "Our songs should be played on guitars and drums. Our songs must be in the format of medieval music. Our songs have to be on an organ. Our songs should be exactly 75 decibels when we walk into the sanctuary on a Sunday morning. Our songs have to have colored lights. Our songs have to be full of public physical expression.

Oh, our songs should be reverent and stoic." None of these things are inherently wrong to do, and yet they aren't mandated in Scripture. There are things that are clearly important to God, and there are things that are not. And so at Fairview, on matters of preference in the corporate gathering of believers, we've generally chosen to just live in the middle ground.

What does that mean? That means for some of you on a Sunday morning, the music is way too modern for your flair. For others, you come and you think, "Man, this is just pretty traditional ." Some of you wish the service was quieter and more reverent. Others of you wish it was louder and more expressive. I can tell you we did not land on this middle - of-the - road approach because we thought as leaders, "This will just make life easy for us ." It does not.

I want to give you a personal example. I've had the great privilege and honor of leading our worship ministry on Sundays for the last six years. On any Sunday, I could have two people come to me or write me an email, give me a phone call with the exact opposite opinion, and they would believe that what they said was the right way to do it and was the biblical way to do it.

When you lead in the middle ground, pretty much nobody's happy. Everybody's always a little annoyed with you. And if I were just wanting to be selfish as a leader, I could say, " You know what? I'm just going to go to a church that likes exactly what I like, and we just do it, and we don't care about anybody else. But I believe this is worth it. I believe it's worth it to sacrifice for one another. This is beautiful," what I look out and see in this congregation.

And so in our worship ministry at Fairview, we try to major on the majors and sacrifice for one another on the minors. Do we get it right every time? Absolutely not. Are we above correction? Nope. But I can tell you that each and every person involved with this worship ministry is humbly trying to do our best each week to bring glory to God and to build up the body of Christ.

Many of you know that we're searching for our next worship pastor here at Fairview. I want to encourage you. When that person comes, be nice to them. I mean it. Many times in the church, when there's a transition in leadership, we all have this inner feeling of like, "This is my moment. This is my moment for my opinion to be considered or reconsidered.

I've got to tell them what to do ." Please don't. I mean it. Instead of telling them how they should do their job, can I encourage you? Get to know them. Love them. Pray for them. Encourage them. Christian maturity is not about coming on a Sunday morning and have church exactly like you want it to be.

It's being able to come to church on a Sunday morning and worship and fellowship even when things are not exactly the way you would want them to be. Unity over preference in our style as a church. But I want to encourage you that unity isn't simply about what are we willing to tolerate when we come here as a church, because I believe the body of Christ is not supposed to be something that you all just consume. Church shouldn't be something you come to just to receive.

It's something you give yourself and contribute to. And so that brings us to our next category of practically living out unity over preference in the church, and that is unity in service. In verse 15 of the passage we just read, we read that we are members of one body. And so now I want you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 12, because the Apostle Paul is going to flesh this out a little bit more. What does it mean to be one body?

1 Corinthians 12, beginning in verse 12, we read this: "Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body, whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free, and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

Even so, the body is not made up of one part, but of many ." Now, if the foot should say, "You know what? Because I'm not a hand, I don't belong to the body," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, "Because I'm not an eye, I don't belong to the body anymore," it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be?

If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them - I want you to hear that - every one of them just as He wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, but one body. I hope you're getting the picture. The Apostle Paul is saying unity does not mean sameness. God has uniquely created every person in this room.

And if you've said yes to Jesus, the Holy Spirit has uniquely gifted every one of you in this room for a specific purpose that God has placed on your life. No two members of this church family are the same. And we see this at work on a week - to - week. There are teachers and greeters and nursery workers and men's ministry, women's ministry, cars ministry, you name it. We've got a ministry. Trail life. But I want to encourage you.

We all should serve. We all should serve. Church is not something that a paid group of staff comes and offers for everyone to consume. The church is a family of believers where everybody has something to bring to the table. We need each other. I want to encourage you. Don't just think about serving also in the church where you think there's the greatest need.

Sometimes we come here and we're like, "Hey, we have need in this department ." And people are like, "Well, I guess I should serve in that department ." Please do not do that. What do I mean by that? Don't just serve where you think it's the coolest to serve. "Oh, if I serve there, people will notice me." Serve in the church where God has gifted you. I want you to look at verse 18 again. "But in fact, God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be." God did not accidentally give you the gifts He gave you.

And He didn't give them to you just for your own benefit. He gave them to you for the benefit of the church family. Older Christians need younger Christians. Younger Christians need older Christians. New believers need longtime attenders, and the opposite as well. Teachers need encouragers and helpers. The people on the platform need the people in the tech booth. We all need each other. And I hope you understand that this morning, my attempt is not to drum up volunteer help at the church.

Do we have ministries that are short on volunteers? Always. Always. But what I want you to leave here seeing is that the church is not something you consume. It's a body that you belong to and that needs what you bring to the table. Get in the game. Begin to ask the Holy Spirit, "Lord, where have You gifted me?" Ask yourself, "What are some things that I've done or that I'm good at?" Ask the people around you.

"What have You seen me do that I just do well at? Am I treating the church as something just to attend, or am I treating it as a body to which I belong?" God has called us to unity in the way we serve one another's. But there's an even deeper level of unity, and that brings me to probably the hardest form of unity that we're going to discuss today, and that's our third point, unity in sacrifice.

If you would turn back with me to Colossians 3. Colossians 3, we're going to start in verse 13 and read verses 13 and 14. The Apostle Paul writes this: "Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them together in perfect unity ." This is where unity becomes very costly in the church.

God has called us to love one another deeply, to truly lay down our lives for one another. This could be on the positive side of learning to give of your time or your attention or even maybe of your finances to people in the body of Christ. Making time for the people around you. We in our culture today love to just have our schedule. "I've just got my schedule, and it is loaded." Can I encourage you?

Make time for someone in the church. Get to know them. Have them over. Make the phone call. Walk across the foyer when you leave and say hello to that person you think might be hurting. A way I think we could grow in this, and I am including myself in this, so please hear me. Oftentimes in the church, we like to ask the question or we'll say to people who are hurting, "Let me know if you need anything.

Let me know if there's any way we can help." And I'm not judging you if you've said that, because I've said that many times in my life, and sometimes it works. Sometimes people say, "You know what? I do need this. Will you help me?" Oftentimes, though, people are too insecure to actually tell you what they need. Instead of saying, "Is there any way that I can help? What do you need?" How about we just start doing it? Just go mow that person's lawn.

Just buy the coffee for the person that you think might be struggling. Just go to that person's house and pray with them and cry with them when they're grieving. Give them a hug. Now, that all sounds great and dandy when we think about sacrificing for one another, because most of us like to care for someone. It feels good. When you do something nice for someone, it's like, "Whoa, that was awesome.

And so, hey, we're going to sacrifice for one another. This is like our big kumbaya Hallmark ending here." But I want to ask the question, what about the times when things aren't going well relationally in the congregation? The truth is, when we share life together over the years, you're going to have a lot of small offenses in the family of believers, and you're going to have some major ones. Major offenses that happen over the time of life.

You're going to have people that just get under your skin. You come to church and you're like, "Ugh." I don't want you to look across the sanctuary at those people. I'm going to look up here so you don't know who my people are. We've got them. That's human.

Maybe it's somebody you were in a small group with and it didn't go well, and now you're like, "Man, this is weird ." Somebody who offended you at work years ago or in the community, and now they go to Fairview, and you're like, "Oh, no." Someone you think is way too dramatic, and so when you see them, you're just like, "Ugh." Someone you think is way too cold and stoic and stuck up, and so you're like, "Ugh." Someone who didn't call you when you were struggling and you're hurt and never called.

Someone you shared something personal with in a group or in a gathering, and they told somebody, and it got out, and it hurts. Church hurt happens because it's a bunch of sinners here on Sunday. That's me. That's you.

And I'm not trying to make light of that because some of these things are world - changing moments in your life. They're deep. They're painful. I'm not making light of that.

But what does unity and sacrifice look like in these moments? It looks like forgiving, listening, being patient, being gentle, giving one another the benefit of the doubt, not always just interpreting what their motives must have been in that thing that happened. Choosing relationship at times instead of winning in a moment.

God is calling us to follow the example of Jesus and sacrificially love one another as an act of unity in the church, to commit to caring for one another and not being easily offended and forgiving one another. I want to bring all these together now as we close. One body, three ways in which we practically can live this out in unity over preference. Unity in our style. I don't always need church to look the way I like it.

Unity in service. I have something to give this family of believers. And unity in sacrifice. I'm willing to lay down something of myself for the good of my brothers and sisters.