

Unity Over Preference 2026

Unity in Biblical Truth

Fairview Missionary Church | Angola, IN

Scripture: Assorted

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Many of you know that being a leader is not for the faint of heart. Everyone has an opinion, and from their perspective, their opinion is right. It's interesting that decisions always seem easier from the outside because you can make them in a vacuum, just inside of your head, without the need to deal with the fallout or unintended consequences.

Probably every single one of us has said in our head at one time or another, "If I were in charge, I would..." Right? We've all done it. We have all made those judgments. And not surprisingly, all of our ideas seem excellent and they work because when they're just inside our head, they aren't tested in the real world. There are really three areas in life where I have noticed this happens most and can potentially be the most hurtful.

The first one is with parents. We are very quick to judge parents. We see an interaction between a parent and a child in the store, we see it at church, or maybe on the ballfield, and we make a snap judgment on how we would handle the situation differently, of course implying better. And the best is when the person making that judgment doesn't have any kids yet, right? We all knew how we were going to handle kids before we had kids.

The second area I see this happen a lot is with coaches. These could be coaches of our kids' teams, could be college sports, even professional coaches. And in our minds, as we watch what is taking place on the field, we could solve all of the team's problems if they just let us take over, right? I could fix all of the problems. We know how to fix it, how to make them better. The final area where I see this happen often is in the church.

Now, I know I'm biased here because this is where I spend most of my time, but the church can often be the worst place for this type of judgment. I know that I have told you all this before, but if you're new, I discovered a long time ago that my favorite part of my job is people. It's you guys. It's my favorite part of my job. But I have also discovered that the least favorite part of my job is people. It's you guys.

It just depends on the day and on the circumstance and who I am talking with. You see, there are many in the church who feel and when I say the church, I'm talking about the large church who feel that they have all of the answers and they know how things should be done. They know the best way that a sermon should be preached. They know the music that pleases God the most. They know what the church should look like, the color of the carpet, the rituals that we should have, the color on the walls, maybe even the decor of the church.

We have people that think they know what the best translation of the Bible is or the most appropriate translation. They know what the pastor should wear on Sunday mornings when he's preaching. And they also know when the end of the world is going to be. They have the correct interpretation of Revelation, and they can tell you what the mark of the beast is going to look like. They can definitely tell you whether we should have stopped in-person services during COVID. That's for sure.

They know what the pastor should be doing every day of the week, what events will bring the most people to church, and which TV and online evangelists are the most anointed by God. Everybody knows that, right? Now, I could do this the whole time, but I probably should stop before I get in trouble, right? I probably already have.

Everyone has an opinion on these matters. And here is the sad part. Some people will even choose to leave the church because they don't agree with the decisions that the leadership made on some of these issues.

Now, let me pause and make a point before we go any further. I do believe that God has designed churches to meet the needs of His people, and they are all going to look different and feel different and have a slightly different flavor. And I think this can be beautiful. For we all have different preferences, different things that we appreciate, different things that speak to us. And I am not in any way trying to say that how we do it at Fairview is the way that everybody should do it.

That's just simply not true. We all have different preferences, things that we appreciate. We are not the only ones who get it right. But more often than not, we can begin to believe that our flavor is the only flavor and that every other flavor is wrong or even worse, sinful. It is for this reason that I believe Scripture spends a lot of time on this idea of unity.

If you have been at Fairview for any amount of time at all, you have probably heard me use this phrase, "unity over preference," because it's something that I speak on every year at least once. In fact, I know many of you are sick of hearing me use that phrase because you tell me about it. You probably know better than I do, and you want me to spend my time on something else, right? "Pastor, talk about something else." But here is the truth.

I believe that this idea of unity over preference needs to continue to be front and center as one of our main truths so that we are constantly reminded of the importance of unity in the church. The psalmist says in Psalm 133: 1, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in..." Unity. Unity.

Paul says in Ephesians 4: 3, "Make every effort to keep the..." Unity." Unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace ." And we just got done with the Gospel of John, but Jesus says in John 17:20 - 23, "My prayer is not for them alone," speaking about the disciples," but I pray for all of those who will believe in me through their message." That's you and I. "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.

May they also be in us, that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me." I could go on and on. The Scriptures are very clear on the expectation of those who follow Jesus.

The expectation upon us as His followers is that we would have unity. Why? Because our unity is to be a sign to the world that the Father has sent His Son Jesus out of His great love for us. This means that the opposite is also true, that if you and I are constantly fighting, if we're constantly fighting one another, if this church is fighting that church, and we're constantly having all of these public disagreements, then the world is not going to believe our message.

And many of you have probably heard, "Why would I want to join something like that? I have enough conflict in my life already." But some of you will ask me, "Is unity more important than truth?" Are you suggesting, Pastor, that we just let everyone believe what they want to believe under this umbrella of Christianity for the sake of unity? The easy answer is no. That's not what I mean when I say unity over preference.

But let me tell you what I do believe are our core values that are foundational to what we believe, and maybe some of those other things that are just preferences that we can find unity in. So let me pray, and then we will jump in. Heavenly Father, we come before You today knowing that You have called us to have unity. Those who follow You are to be one, just as Jesus is one with You.

And so, Lord, my prayer is that we would find that unity, that we would focus on those issues and things that are of priority, that are of most importance, and potentially on those other things that we're not fully sure or maybe

are gray, that we would offer grace, that we would have good conversations, but that we would not allow the enemy to get a foothold and to break us or tear us apart. Lord, this is for Your glory and for Your praise.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. The first thing that I want to make very clear, even when I talk about this idea of unity over preference, is that we do have unity in biblical truth, that the core truths of our faith are not a matter of preference. Let me just give you a quick example. I would not, for the sake of unity, be okay with someone coming into our church to teach about the person of Jesus if they did not believe in the resurrection.

If somebody did not believe in the resurrection, that is a foundational truth of our faith, and it truly impacts how you and I understand Jesus and the entire world. Now, I would welcome a conversation with that individual. I'm not going to hate that individual, but I would not say that we believe the same thing about Christianity. Why? Because we would have different foundational views about Jesus and the resurrection.

Now, on the opposite end of the spectrum, I would have no problem with someone coming to our church and joining our family who interprets the end times differently than I do. It is my belief that no one knows exactly how the end times are going to play out. There are many people that have tried to interpret that and spell that out, and I appreciate all of those. But if we are honest from a Scriptural perspective, it is open to a few interpretations.

God hasn't given us perfectly laid out guidelines as to what that is going to look like. And so here at Fairview, we have said that our foundational beliefs are based on biblical truth. And so when things are not clear biblically, there is no black and white, we allow for discussion and for healthy debate, but we refuse to push a strict belief on these issues.

At the same time, in our love for others, we believe it is fair to clearly state and defend what our foundational beliefs truly are. 2 Timothy 3:16 says, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness." So what is our foundation for truth? It is Scripture. It is the Bible. That is our foundation for truth.

And so we do list our core beliefs front and center on our website. They're on our app. We have printed documents that are out in the literature rack, that are in the sitting room, that are available to anybody who wants them. When individuals show a desire to become members, they meet with me personally, and I sit down with them. I love hearing their story and their past and how they met and how they came to Fairview and what life looks like for them. But also during that time, I give them an opportunity to ask me questions.

What does Fairview believe about this? What do they believe about that? And I will give answers based on our church, which is based on Scripture, and we can have conversations. In this area, unity over preference means offering grace in those areas that are not black and white. We try to offer grace. Romans 12:18 says, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." As far as it depends on you.

You notice what Paul said there? That means that Paul knew the people in your life as well that say, "It doesn't really depend on me," right? "I can't have peace with so - and - so because they don't want it, but as far as it depends on you, you should have peace with everyone." Paul says in Philippians to the church 3:15 - 16, "All of us then who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you."

Only let us live up to what we have already attained." Offer grace in those types of conversations. The other area that we have unity as a church is in our denominational beliefs. We also have clear lines on many specific issues of doctrine and lifestyle, again, that are backed by Scripture. Some of you may come week after week and not be aware that Fairview is part of a larger denomination.

We are called Fairview Missionary Church because we are part of the Missionary Church. It's a smaller denomination. It's made up of roughly 500 churches across the United States with thousands internationally because, of course, it's in our name, Missionary Church. We try to put a lot into missions, and so we have done

that throughout the years. But we do have our articles of faith and our position papers that, again, are available in the literature rack. We don't try to hide these. So if you're heading out the door and you want to know our stance on certain issues, you can go out there.

But they are biblically based. All of our stances are biblically based. And I am proud of the men and women who have labored over these position papers, which then present them to the denomination, to the pastors, and we all vote on these. It is good to know that these individuals have done a lot of effort and work to put these papers together that are biblically based but yet full of grace when necessary.

Some of our position papers on doctrine and lifestyle allow flexibility and freedom in the gray areas of life. Now, some of you have been listening to me talk and you say, "Okay, Pastor, you're talking about these main issues and then these secondary issues." Here is where we stand. Our desire is not to be dogmatic on secondary and tertiary issues while remaining steadfast on foundational issues, often referred to as the orthodoxy of our faith.

So what are those foundational issues? You might be sitting here going, "That's great. What are our foundational issues then?" Well, to give you the best and clearest example of that, we could just read the Apostles' Creed. Some of you are familiar with this. You've heard songs about this, right? We have the Apostles' Creed. And interestingly enough, the Apostles didn't write this creed, right? But it's called the Apostles' Creed. Here we would say, "These are the foundational truths of our faith.

I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ, His only begotten Son, our Lord, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried. He descended into hell, and the third day He rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

And from there He shall come to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church ." This is small C. You guys can go up and look this up online later today. Small C, Catholic just means universal church, not Roman Catholic Church, just the universal church. "The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen." These would be foundational truths.

If someone talks to me about their faith and they want to have a discussion and they do not believe in one of these things, if one of these statements they cannot make, then I would say we differ in our foundational beliefs of Christianity. Therefore, some of our position papers as a missionary church stand firm on these types of biblical truth. So some of our position papers that we stand strong on are the idea of the Trinity, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, the idea of salvation.

We do have a position paper on human sexuality, and we have one on what we believe to be the authority of Scripture. We do take a stand on issues that we believe are biblically clear. Now, the final thing that we choose to have unity on is our church mission. Again, if you've been here for any amount of time, you have heard me use the phrase helping people take their next step toward Jesus. This is going to be our top aim and priority in everything that we do as a church.

As a church, this is how we try to measure success and decide what is working, what is not working, how can we help people take their next step toward Jesus. And some of these steps are easier to measure. Things like church attendance, baptism, whether people choose to join a life group or a Sunday school class or a Wednesday evening class, whether people are serving. But the problem with all of those that I've just listed is that they are all external things, and they don't always show an internal change.

And as a church, as a group of leaders, we are much more concerned about the internal heart than we are about the outward actions. Again, many of you know it is possible to do every single one of those things I just listed and not have an internal heart change. These things are harder to measure, but we do our best to look at these

things. These would be things like your desire to have a personal quiet or devotion time with the Lord in His word and prayer. Do you desire to do that?

That's a good step. Maybe it's overcoming temptations and sins and struggles, and yet we don't often share those stories. If you notice, I don't stand out there by the door when I shake your hand with a clipboard and say, "Oh, have you struggled with lust this week? Okay, good. Check that off. Did you overcome that temptation? Good. Okay, check that off ." Those are more difficult things to measure. Things like relational victories, where you have relational trauma that's going on in your life, and yet through your relationship with Jesus, you work through those.

Maybe it's a shift in a worldview to a biblical perspective. You don't always come in through the doors and say, "Pastor, I just want to let you know I changed my view on this." Maybe it's the amount of spiritual conversations you're having or the amount of times that you share your faith. Again, we don't ask that question when you walk through the door. "How many times have you shared your faith?" "Three." "Okay, try for four next week," right? It's a heart change. The only way that we as a church can figure out if we are being successful in these real areas of your faith growth is through personal conversations.

This is why we love the emails that you send to us and share what is going on in your life and in your world. It's why we love the testimonies from the baptisms and from the praise nights that we have multiple times throughout the year. It's why we love the conversations that we can have at the altars and on the side when you come for prayer. We love these opportunities because it allows us to know, "Okay, God is doing something amongst us ." We love hearing from others the differences that they are noticing in you, and we love seeing those changes as well.

We even love walking through the difficult seasons of life with you because we notice the difference in your faith that Jesus makes. We enjoy that. Many of you are not aware that I have an agenda item at the top of every meeting that I lead at the church, whether it's with the staff or the leaders or the elders, and it's usually line number two. Line number one is prayer, and line number two asks the question, "Do you have any stories to share of changed lives?" Because I believe as a church, that's why we do what we do.

And we need to talk about those stories. And so I will ask those questions, and staff will share, " Yes, in youth group this happened, in children's ministry this happened, in men and women and adults this happened." And we share the stories, and yes, this does mean we talk about you when you're not around. We do. We share those stories. Why? Because we want to be a church that cares about people and helps them take their next step toward Jesus. And so we do our best to measure everything against that.

At the same time, there are some things at Fairview we refuse to argue about because there is not a biblical mandate, and unity is far more important. Let me just share with you some of the things that are on this list. We refuse to argue about the style of worship, the types of songs that we use, the volume, the tone that comes out of the speakers. We refuse to argue about sermon type, whether I should do expository or topical preaching.

And if you don't know the difference between the two, let's keep it that way, right? Because then you can't argue with us about it. We refuse to argue about carpet color and paint colors and decor in the church. We refuse to argue about budget spending and who the next staff hire should be. We don't want to argue about, "Well, I think this is the best and that's the best ." We try to just move forward in unity. We refuse to argue about the length of the youth pastor's beard. Levi? No. We refuse.

We refuse to argue about whether or not we can have deviled eggs at church potlucks, right? We refuse to argue about what type of elements we use for communion. We refuse to argue about whether you should have dancing or not at your wedding. We're not going to argue about the rapture or end times and exactly what that's going to look like, and we're not going to argue about the type of coffee that we serve because I don't like any coffee whatsoever. But I want you to notice I said we won't argue about those things.

We won't claim that there is a black and white in those issues. There is no biblical mandate, but I want you to know we certainly talk about those things. We discuss those things amongst leadership, and we try to have all areas of the church represented in our leadership. Now, we don't talk about the youth pastor's beard or deviled eggs, okay? Don't worry about that. But we do our best to find this idea of unity over preference, trying to find that middle ground, that we can just find a balance.

Because all too often, we allow way too many unimportant things to get in the way of Christian unity. And when we do that, it hurts our witness, it hurts relationships, and it hurts the body. Pastor Sam is going to talk about more of these in detail next week, including why we have landed in certain gray areas that we have landed within the church.

We fully understand with some of the decisions we made when it comes to the church designing and worship and preaching and everything else that we try to find that middle so much that we're probably not going to be anybody's favorite, right? We're just going to be in the middle, which means people on both ends are like, "Eh, it could be better," right? And so we live with that. Here is your challenge for this week. My challenge is that you would ask this question. What are the foundational truths of our faith that we must continue to stand on?

What are those foundational truths? Yes, we have the Apostles' Creed, but there are certainly more than just the Apostles' Creed that we would say these are foundational truths to what we believe versus what are issues that are important, they're all important, but not mandatory. And then when you find out these things, okay, are important, but they're not mandatory, ask the question why they're important to you. Why do you view them as important? Is it because of tradition?

So certain things you think the church should or shouldn't have because of tradition based on the way it's always been done. Is it based on scriptural support? If you say, "Yes, I think this is mandatory. This is a huge issue, and here is why biblically," at least understand you're coming at that from a biblical perspective. Are they important simply because of preference, because you prefer a certain style? Maybe it's a gut feeling. Maybe you would join the conversation and say, "Pastor, I don't have any biblical mandate for this.

I don't have anything. It's just this gut feeling that we should or shouldn't do this." That's great, but let's at least admit that, right? Let's be honest with each other about that. Maybe it's simply because you don't like change. And for most of us, that's probably high on the list of a lot of things why we think church should be the way church should be because many of us don't like change. Maybe it's nostalgia. You just say, "Pastor, it's just how I remember it when I was growing up, and so I like that ." That's okay.

That's fair. Let's talk about that. Let's discuss that. My second challenge to you this week is to refuse to let preferences tear apart the body. After you've taken the time to evaluate those things that are crucial and those things that are maybe secondary, refuse to allow it to tear apart the body. It's okay to talk about them. It's okay to have a preference. God has made us in a beautiful way. It's why there's different foods that we eat and different clothes that we wear and different teams that we root for, okay?

There's a beauty in that. It's okay to have preference. It's okay to miss certain things. It's okay if you come and talk to us and say, "You know what? I really miss this. I miss it from when I was growing up ." That's okay. What is not okay is to allow some of those things to become foundational beliefs that aren't foundational so that it rips apart the body of Christ. I want you to pray for unity and protection from the attacks of the enemy because the enemy wants to rip us apart.

And everything that I have just said about the church, you and I also need to understand about all of our relationships. We need to determine with our spouse, with our kids, with people that we interact with, what are going to be those foundational things within our relationship that we won't bend on, and what are other areas where we need to offer grace and mercy? Because the enemy wants nothing more than to rip us apart from our relationships. He wants to isolate us.

And so we need to learn where we can offer grace and where there are just foundational truths we cannot bend on. The altar is always open, as I tell you every Sunday, out of respect for individuals that want privacy. If you come to the altars, we will not come up to you. We will just let you pray and do your business with God. If you would like somebody to pray with you, we will have people on both sides that you can go to and request prayer either during the closing song or they'll even stay a little after about anything.

We love to hear your stories. Please share with us. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, your word is clear that you call for us to have unity. And it's not always easy. There are things that we can be passionate about, things that we deeply care about that are preference. They are nostalgia.

There are just how things have always been done, and we appreciated the way things were done. I pray that we would not allow those things to divide us, but instead, we would truly be your body that operates and functions to the best of its ability so that you would receive the praise and the glory. I pray that you would guide us. In Jesus' name, amen.