

## PASTOR'S NOTES. Great Fundamentals

In 1919, a gathering called the World Conference on Christian Fundamentals created a list of what they considered the basics of the Christian faith and this is when persons first called themselves “Fundamentalists.” This was not the first time that a Christian group has tried to put together a list of what are the basics. While I could go into more detail about the points of their list, allow me to make the general comment that, like many Christian lists, these were mostly in response to what they saw among Christians, even among pastors: some were denying that Jesus was born of a virgin; some were teaching that Jesus might not have literally risen from the dead; some taught that many of the miracles have natural explanations; and some taught that the Bible might not be the ultimate authority when it comes to history and science. These debates, some of which are still going on among church leaders today, have been going on for more than a hundred years, and on some issues we have argued for more than a thousand years.

It is unfortunate that so much of our history these last 2000 years has been in debate about particular points. I can't help but wonder if these arguments have hindered the growth of the Christian faith more than they have helped. Our differences have certainly gone a long way toward creating different Christian denominations. The Center for the Study of Global Christianity estimates that there are currently over 45,000 Christian denominations in the world.

Churches often focus on how they are different than the other churches. Likewise, denominations have their statements, mostly about where they disagree with others. If everyone was part of a church, and our mission for Jesus Christ was to get everyone into *our* church, this kind of approach would make sense. However, we know that in our present day many (and in some communities, most) people are not connected with a church. It has been estimated that if all the churches in Fairfield County filled their sanctuaries twice each Sunday, they would hold less than 33% of the population. If this is true, it does us little good to focus on the differences between our churches—at best that might shuffle some of the existing church members around. In the meantime, there are many more who are missed.

So I've wondered if part of the solution is to focus on those areas where we believe in common. This is not to say that our differences are unimportant, but for many of the people we connect with, those differences are not so important. More important is that you are the one who connected with them.

Consider that almost all Christian churches would agree on these three passages as basic to the Christian faith:

### THE GREAT COMMANDMENT:

*“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” [Jesus] said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”*

Matthew 22:36-40 (NRSV)

## THE JESUS COMMANDMENT:

*“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”* John 15:12-23  
(NRSV)

## and THE GREAT COMMISSION:

*“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”*  
Matthew 28:19-20 (NRSV)

There are other passages people have suggested to me that are almost every Christian church would consider basic: *John 3:16, 1 John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 15:3-8, Acts 1:8, Matthew 25:34-40, Acts 2:41-47, Galatians 5:22-23, 2 Timothy 3:16*. However, I think that what makes the three passages special is that they are action-focused passages—these are the directions from Jesus about what we do, not just how we think or feel.

When people in churches are challenging each other, whether in small groups or one-on-one, to grow in their love of God and in doing good for others, they are growing in their faith. Likewise, their church, of any denomination, is growing in its faith, and is noticed by people nearby. So I believe it is a true statement (though I didn’t come up with it) that **A GREAT COMMITMENT TO THE GREAT COMMANDMENT AND THE GREAT COMMISSION WILL GROW A GREAT CHURCH!**

Anyway, that is my prayer for you and me.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Kam' or similar, written in a cursive style.