

Senior Pastor Kevin Flannery

Series: *The Word of God Continues to Spread and Flourish*

Sermon Title: *Costly Unity – Acts 21:18-26*

Big Idea: True unity in the gospel always comes at a cost.

Fall Term – Week 6 of 12



Opening Prayer & Icebreaker: When have you been part of a group or team where unity didn't come easily? What helped bring people together?

Read and Reflect on Acts 21:18-26:

¹⁸ The next day Paul and the rest of us went to see James, and all the elders were present. ¹⁹ Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. ²⁰ When they heard this, they praised God. Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. ²¹ They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. ²² What shall we do? They will certainly hear that you have come, ²³ so do what we tell you. There are four men with us who have made a vow. ²⁴ Take these men, join in their purification rites and pay their expenses, so that they can have their heads shaved. Then everyone will know there is no truth in these reports about you, but that you yourself are living in obedience to the law. ²⁵ As for the Gentile believers, we have written to them our decision that they should abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality." ²⁶ The next day Paul took the men and purified himself along with them. Then he went to the temple to give notice of the date when the days of purification would end and the offering would be made for each of them.

Sermon and Scripture Application Discussion:

The Cost of Unity: Humility — Laying Down Our Ego (Acts 21:18–20a)

Key Idea: Unity begins when strong people choose humility over pride.

- 1. Seeing God's Work, Not Ours — Acts 21:19.** Where are you tempted to take credit for what God is doing? How might giving God the glory strengthen unity in your relationships or church community?
- 2. Celebrating Together — Acts 21:20a.** What helps you genuinely rejoice in someone else's success or ministry impact? When is that hard for you?
- 3. Humility in Leadership and Service — Philippians 2:3–4.** What might humility look like in your role—at work, at home, or in ministry? How can we cultivate a community that values service over status? What would humility look like in a modern church conflict or disagreement?

The Cost of Unity: Tension — Holding Steady When Misunderstood (Acts 21:20b–22)

Key Idea: Real unity doesn't avoid tension; it bears it patiently.

- 1. Facing Misunderstanding with Grace — Acts 21:21.** The elders are thankful, but also anxious. How do you typically respond when others misunderstand or misrepresent you? What helps you stay faithful instead of defensive?
- 2. Unity in the Midst of Difference —** The gospel collides with culture. The church in Jerusalem faces a cultural, not theological, crisis. What kinds of "cultural clashes" or differences test unity in today's

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church (consider generational gaps, cultural differences, worship preferences)? How can we honor different expressions of faith while keeping the gospel central? Think about Benjamin Franklin's quote: "We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately." How does that idea connect to the church today?

3. **Staying Instead of Leaving — Ephesians 4:2–3.** Often in church life the temptation is to avoid tension, but unity that avoids truth isn't unity, it's avoidance. Unity costs emotional energy, it means staying when it would be easier to leave. When have you wanted to walk away from tension in a relationship or church setting? What helped (or could help) you persevere for the sake of Christ's unity?

The Cost of Unity: Sacrifice — Laying Down Rights for the Gospel (Acts 21:23–26)

Key Idea: Unity requires more than patience; it requires surrender.

1. **Costly Flexibility — Acts 21:26.** Have you ever had to give up something—comfort, opinion, or preference—for the sake of a relationship or shared goal? What freedoms are you willing to limit so that someone else can see Jesus more clearly?
2. **Freedom Expressed Through Restraint — 1 Corinthians 9:19–23.** In what areas of your life might love require restraint? How do you discern when to exercise freedom and when to surrender it?
3. **Following the Way of the Cross — Philippians 2:5–8.** How does the cross redefine what true unity costs? What are you willing to give up so that the gospel stays central? Where is Christ inviting you to embrace "costly unity" in your relationships, family, or church?

Closing Prayer: We pray that we choose costly humility, patience, and sacrifice for the sake of the gospel. May we be obedient to purchase it with humility, tested by tension, and sustained through sacrifice, so that this unity looks like Jesus. Help us to lay down our egos, stay through tension, and love enough to sacrifice. We want to be a church that is unified through shared surrender to Jesus through costly unity, so the world sees the gospel and the Word of God continue to spread and flourish.

Faith in Action:

- October 23, 7 PM, Young Adult Fellowship Night, F101
- October 24, 7 PM, College Campfire, Prayer Garden
- October 30, 10:30 AM, Meal Ministry Planning Meeting, A120
- November 2, 9 AM & 10:30 AM, Open House