

Unity Under Duress Philippians 1:27–30

Introduction:

As we continue through our new series, “Joy,” which will walk us through the short, but poignant letter from the imprisoned Apostle Paul to the Philippians. As we have already seen from the past few weeks, God has so much to offer us through His Word, which is both timeless and timely.

And today’s topic could not be more timely. The past year has been one rife with divisions on every level. The political divisiveness is palpable. Equally palpable are divisions within churches and among believers around issues of justice. As such, the Apostle Paul’s desire to see the church at Philippi “standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel” resonates deeply with us (**v.27**).

The fact that Paul mentions unity first in his prayer for the church he loved and helped establish reminds us that unity is paramount for the body of Christ. Paul’s heart for their unity is merely an echo of Jesus’s prayer, “that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they may also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me” (**John 17:21**).

It seems that disagreement is not unique to our circumstances or our culture. We know that there was relational disagreement within the church at Phillip, along with potential for ethnic and cultural disagreement (see Acts 16 to learn about the types of people who were part of the church at Philippi). Additionally, there was the ongoing tension of how to live as believers within the Roman empire. Sound familiar?

When Paul prays for unity, we must understand that unity does not mean uniformity. God, in His triune nature is diversity and unity. We will not always agree completely on every single thing, even in the ways we interpret Scripture.

In such a splintered time, Kevin DeYoung offers helpful categories of ways that people within Christianity respond to certain topics differently (contrite, compassionate, careful, and courageous). These categories at least provide a beginning framework to have discussions with those who respond differently than we do.

Disagreement does not necessarily have to lead to disunity. If we are able to keep the King as the center of the Kingdom, it will help us greatly when we have different ideas of how the kingdom in this already/not yet season should look.

As believers with different instincts (doctrinalists, pietists, and culturalists or head, heart, and hands), we need each other. The enemy would love to cause infighting within the body when we are called to be fighting together against a common enemy (**see Ephesians 6:12–13**).

Discuss:

1. What resonated with you from this week’s sermon? What challenged you?
2. In your own words, define unity. What are some of the ditches we can fall into when we talk about unity?
3. **Read John 17:20-21.** What can we learn about unity from this passage?
4. Pastor Paul referenced Kevin DeYoung’s 4 C’s (contrite, compassionate, careful, and courageous). Think of one of the current hot-topics causing disunity within the body of Christ. Process together how someone in each of those camps would approach that topic.
5. Out of which one do you most often tend to operate? How do you tend to approach those who operate differently?

6. What has helped you to keep unity with people within the body of Christ who do not agree with you on important topics? What has not been helpful?

7. **Missional Living:** As believers, even in times of disunity, we know that we have the New Heavens and the New Earth to look forward to. We know this is not our home. Are you living in such a way that people notice that you are living for a better city (see **Hebrews 11:10 and 11:15–16**).

Apply:

It is all too easy to let discussions and disagreements about how to live as kingdom people in this world in which we are exiles. When we get stuck there, it is helpful to fix our gaze and give more thought to the nature of our King. **Read Psalm 45:4-9 and Exodus 34: 6-7.** Seek to meditate on the nature of our King!