

Love One Another

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Date: 31 July 2016

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[0 : 00] 1 Peter chapter 4 verses 7 to 11 The end of all things is at hand.

Therefore, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God. Whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies. In order that in everything, God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. Amen. I've been looking forward to preaching this message.

[1 : 24] We've been going through this book of 1 Peter. A lot of messages on suffering. And here are very directly speaking to our love for one another. There's a legend that has it that Apostle John, who outlived all the other apostles that were sent by Jesus Christ.

He's at his old age. He's all wrinkly. His faith is deep with character. You could see much suffering that he has suffered for the sake of Christ in his life.

And in a local church setting, he goes up to preach. And it takes him a little while to get up there.

He's old. But people know that this could perhaps be his last message.

So they're wrapped with attention. They're listening. Hanging on his every word. So once he gets up there, he says simply, Love one another.

And he doesn't say much else. He can't manage a long sermon at that point. But after that, he steps down. But in that short while, with that short message, people at the place just streaming down with tears.

[2 : 44] Because they have seen his life. How much he has suffered for the sake of Christ. How when people reviled him and cursed him, he blessed them. How he sacrificially gave to those people.

And forgave those who had wronged him and offended him. And so when they knew him and had seen all that. So when he said, Love one another. Very simply. That just landed on them with such power.

By the Spirit's power. And that command really encapsulates so much of what we are to be as a church. Love one another. And Apostle Peter also understood that.

And so this passage is really about that. And if you look at church history, just as many, if not more, churches break down or dissolve.

Not because of external pressures like wars and persecution. But because of implosion. Because of internal division. Because of disunity. And so because Peter understood that the church that he's writing to is under external pressure.

[3 : 48] And all the more, all the more important, they had to maintain internal unity. They had to love one another. Because otherwise the church could fold. And so he says, Above all, keep loving one another earnestly.

So I think Peter's teaching us here that we ought to love one another as stewards of God's very grace. And first he teaches us that by looking at the end times.

Looking at the fact that God's plan, salvation plan, is at its end. That's going to enable us to pray. And it's going to enable us to love. And that, the purpose of that is to the glory of God the Father through Jesus Christ.

So I'm going to use that kind of as an outline and speak to you about how having the end in view enables us to pray and love as God intends us to. So look with me to, at verse 7.

Where Peter begins by saying, reminding us once again, The end of all things is at hand. And when you hear that sentence, the first thing that comes to your mind probably is a lot of these end time movies.

[4 : 56] Nowadays everything has to be epic. So almost every single movie is about the end of the world. So something epic is at stake. If this isn't fixed in time, the world is going to end. And all these doomsday scenarios come to mind when you hear the word end.

But in Greek, just as, in the same way as in English, the word end can have two different senses. It could refer to a temporal end, right? Like the end of a time in succession.

It could also mean an end, like a goal or a purpose. The end of something. So we often say as Christians, the end of humanity is to glorify God, right? So I think Peter here, and I think there's a contextual clues to this, is referring not so much to a termination of time, but to a culmination of a purpose.

So that's what Peter is focusing on. So not so much to a termination of a time, but to a culmination of a purpose. So the Bible gives us categories of God's redemptive plan, salvation plan.

So it began with creation, and then it kind of was, it seemed to be, appeared to be ruined with the fall. And then God sends his son to redeem, that's redemption. And then at the end times, everything will be consummated, right?

[6 : 09] So that's kind of the salvation categories that God gives us, the arc of salvation history. So with that in mind, and the Bible uniformly speaks of Christ's revelation, Christ coming to earth and redeeming humanity as the beginning of the end times.

So we're now in that final stage of the consummation of the world, consummation of God's salvation plan. And that's what I think Peter's referring to. And we see this in chapter 1, verse 20 to 21, which we looked at several weeks ago.

It says, So again, Christ, who was foreknown before the foundation of the world, now being revealed to us, that's the sign that we are now in the last times, right?

So when he says end times, he doesn't, I don't think it so much means, okay, so the world is about to end right now. That's what Peter's saying, because that's what the disciples believed at the time as well.

So they're saying it's not so much a temporal termination, but it's a teleological, it's a purpose. It's a culmination of the purpose. That God's salvation plan is coming to its intended course, coming to its intended end.

[7 : 24] And now we're at that final stage, which Christ has come, he's been revealed, now he's redeeming humanity and bringing all creation, consummating God's redemption. So, and it says, it says that end of all things is at hand.

And in the actual, the original language, the word all is in the front. It's the very first word of this verse. It's there for emphasis. All things, the end of them is at hand, right? So that's to emphasize the fact that nothing is, you know, outside of this grand plan of God.

Everything, no one and no thing is exempt from this. It's the fact, end of all things at hand. So whatever you're dealing with, whatever you're suffering, whatever you're going through in your life, you have to recognize that it's all going to be under, come under God's ultimate judgment and vindication.

So that's why he says, therefore, at the second part of verse seven, be self-controlled and sober-minded for the sake of your prayers. So this is where I get that original sentence I started with, that keeping the end in view enables us to pray.

Because Christian prayer is, if you think about it, it's at the very heart, it's future-oriented. It's about, it has the end in view, the God's purpose and end in view. That's why in the Lord's prayer, Jesus teaches us to pray, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[8 : 43] And it's because our hope is in heaven and we see that the earth is not what it should be, that's why we pray, right? And it's because we are not defined by and characterized by the heavenly realities as we ought to be, that's why we pray.

So when we pray, our orientation is always toward that end that God has in mind for us. It has, it has, the prayer has an end time in view. And in order to pray, then we must be self-controlled, it says, and be sober-minded.

This kind of harkens back to chapter 1, verse 13, where it says, therefore preparing your minds for action and being sober-minded, set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the

revelation of Jesus Christ.

I was just having a conversation with someone about a co-worker who did some really foolish things. And then, and I asked, was that person drunk?

And of course, he was drunk when that happened. And I mean, being, that's often the case, right? It's, an inebriated person is the perfect picture of a lack of self-control.

[9 : 49] Their speech, they have lack of control of tongue, they can't, their speech is slurred, they have lack of control over their vision, bodily coordination, so they can't drive or walk in a straight line, right? There's, that's the opposite of what Peter's calling us.

He says, be sober-minded. Set your hope fully on the grace that we've brought to you. And if we're not sober-minded or self-controlled, we will not be able to pray. And, but it's curious because you would think that when someone says, be self-controlled and sober-minded, you would think that he would continue by saying something like, well, be sober-minded so that you can give a defense for your faith.

Or, be sober-minded so that you could do these rigorous things. But instead, he says, be sober-minded, self-controlled so that you could pray. Peter's first order of business for believers is prayer.

And it's, you'd think that, I mean, this is something that I really hope we get as a church, and that's why we do monthly prayers and fasting, and to emphasize prayer.

It's, it's, some people think that if God ultimately controls everything, right, if God is bringing his salvation plan to its end, then why pray at all? Doesn't that make prayer unnecessary?

[11 : 06] If God's sovereign over all things, he's doing all this. But the truth is that scripture never sets God's sovereignty against human responsibility, right?

They're always juxtaposed together. We're squarely next to each other. And in fact, it is God's sovereign will that he works through and responds to our prayers. That's his intention.

And in fact, I'd go as far to say that if, and only if, if we believe that God is in full control of everything and is bringing the salvation course of history to its end, that we can truly pray, right? Because if you think about it, when we pray, we are acknowledging our helplessness, right? And saying, Lord, I can't do this in my own strength. I need you to move. I need you to act. We're saying, we're saying that we're not the ultimate end of all things.

We're saying that God is the ultimate end of all things. We're seeking his will, not ours, right? That's what prayer is as an exercise. And so if that's the case, but when we don't pray, it's precisely when we think that what we do is much more important than what God can and does, right?

[12 : 12] When we don't pray, when we believe that we can accomplish so much on our own and we don't need God's help, right? That's when we don't pray. So prayer, when we believe in God's sovereignty, when we don't believe in God's sovereignty, we don't pray, right?

Because God can't answer our prayers. He's not powerful enough to answer our prayers. But when we believe that he is sovereign and in control of everything, that's when we can fall to our knees and in faith pray and ask for big things, right?

And that's why I think J.I. Packer writes in his book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*. He writes, and this is a paraphrase, that on our feet, we might argue and philosophize about the sovereignty of God.

But on our knees, we are all agreed because in prayer we acknowledge that we cannot control the world, but that God can and does. So if we pray as Christians, then we recognize God's sovereignty because we don't pray, oh, Lord, make these circumstances happen so that this person will do this and this.

No, we pray, God, change this person. God, bring this person from death to life. God, do this mighty work. God, heal this person. The prayers that we pray are not, they all recognize God. They presuppose God's sovereignty.

[13 : 25] And that's why Peter grounds his exhortation to pray in the truth that the end of all things are at hand. The end of all things is at hand. The reality that God's sovereignly bringing salvation history to its end, it doesn't obviate prayer.

It rather enables our prayer. Because we recognize it's God, not we who save people, as we do evangelism, as we do ministry, we pray to God that God would bring people to faith.

And my hope as a church for us is that really we might not do everything well. We might not do everything correctly.

We might make several mistakes before we get some things right. But that in everything that we do, people who look at us from the outside will say, well, they're not perfect, but everything they do is birthed by prayer.

It's bathed in prayer. That they depend on God in everything they do. That would bring so much glory to God if we as a church were characterized by that. So keeping the end in view enables us to pray.

[14 : 29] But keeping the end in view also enables us to love one another. If you look at verse 8, Peter continues. Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins.

I think Peter has in mind Jesus' warning in Matthew 24 that because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold. But the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.

So Jesus warned that our love for one another will grow cold. But that we must love to the end. We must persevere. And so Peter is saying here, no, keep loving one another earnestly, especially with the end in view.

So keeping, knowing that we're at the end times, knowing that we're in the final stage of God's salvation plan helps us to keep loving. Because loving can be discouraging.

Loving can be difficult. But when we recognize that we're in that final stage of God's plan, we know that the end is near. We know that the vindication is near. We know that God's eternal rewards are near. Then we can say, yes, we can keep loving.

[15 : 36] We can persist in love. And it's a love. And the reason why Peter emphasizes love is that because love is going to hold the church together. And the reason is that since love covers a multitude of sins, he says.

What does it mean that a love covers a multitude of sins? There's two important aspects to a covering love. And the first is that this part of the verse is a paraphrase of Proverbs 10, 12, which says, Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.

So if you look at the poetic structure, hatred stirring up conflict is opposed to, is contrasted from love covering over all wrongs. Right? So that means covering over wrongs is not so much about, you know, denying something or covering up something, but rather it's the opposite of stirring up conflict, stirring up hatred.

Right? So then this is kind of, this is what I might call a forbearing love. A love that covers is a forbearing love. Right? So when someone wrongs us, someone in the church offends us, right, says something offensive to us, or hurts us in some way or another, we can easily let that offense spiral out of control.

Right? But when we decide instead of retaliating to forbear, right, then we halt that downward process. Right? And we cover one another, right, in love.

[17 : 03] Right? That's what he's referring to is a forbearing love. But secondly, it's not just a forbearing love. I think the love that covers is also a forgiving love. Right?

And I get that from a parallel in Psalm 32, 1-2, which is quoted in Romans 4. It says, blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.

Right? So here, the parallel structure, it emphasizes the fact that being forgiven is alike to sin being covered. Right? So when it says that love covers a multitude of sins, our love for one another is going to cover a multitude of sins.

It's calling us to forgiveness. Right? So if we, like, we might be offended and we might not act out or retaliate right away. So let's say we forbear one another. But if we nevertheless still hold a grudge and have resentment toward one another, it'll be like the embers of coal.

Right? That at the slightest wind, the provocation just, you know, comes right back into flame. It will have resentment and grudge that becomes a full-fledged hatred.

[18 : 09] So a love that covers has to involve not just forbearance but also forgiveness. We have to forgive one another so that we don't let our anger, resentments simmer and continue.

And this is all the more important because as you guys all have families, and if you have families, you know that conflicts are more common in families.

Right? As he is wailing. So we, and the reason why is because you guys kind of, we let our guards down.

Right? We're more intimate with one another. We know each other better and we expect more of one another. Right? So we, we, we are more easily angered and we're less, more selfish even.

We get into fights more with people that we're close to than with people that we're not close to. Right? So in the same way, the church calls us to, the God's community calls us to a great degree of intimacy and commitment.

[19 : 09] And for that reason, there's going to be conflict. Just like you fight with your family, there's going to be conflict. And we shouldn't be surprised by that. Right? That's something that we should expect and will happen.

But when they do happen, when there are opportunities for us to sin against one another, we have to remember this. That above all, keep loving one another earnestly. Keep loving since love covers a multitude of sins.

Forbear with one another. Forgive one another's sins. And the following injunctions in the verses 9 to 11 are really, I think, further expressions of love or the illustrations of love that Peter's calling us to.

Sorry for distraction, guys. But try to focus. So I'm in verse 9. So if you turn with me to verse 9. It says, show hospitality to one another without grumbling.

I think this is one illustration or expression of the love that Peter's calling us to. And this is not a trivial commandment. I mean, it's so easy for us to overlook hospitality because, like, oh, that's so ordinary.

[20 : 16] That's just something anybody can do. Or we think of it that way. But hospitality is physically, emotionally, and economically costly. Right? It's physically taxing to prepare everything and then to, after people leave, to clean up things.

And it's economically costly to buy more things, buy more food, utensils, whatever else that you need to be hospitable toward people. It's emotionally probably even more so draining and taxing. Especially when you're trying to be hospitable toward someone that you don't have a natural liking to. Right? Maybe someone that you find difficult to be hospitable toward. Right? So hospitality is not an easy thing to do.

Yet we are to do this for one another without grumbling, he says. And when we are regularly, and this is significant because if we're regularly in our homes, if we're regularly hospitable toward one another, there's going to be far less opportunities for us to hold bitterness or resentment toward one another.

Right? Because in isolation, you can imagine all kinds of things about people. Right? But when you're interacting with them daily, there's opportunities for reconciliation. Opportunities to see one another and to love one another.

[21 : 24] Right? And that's, I think, and to speak the truth in love to one another. And this kind of hospitality is so important. In fact, that in 1 Timothy 3.2, the qualification for elder, right?

The office in the church, the leaders in the church, is that they must be hospitable. Right? Alongside things like they have to be able to teach. They have to be not greedy.

They have to be a husband of one wife. Alongside of all these qualifications, it says they must be hospitable. That's how important hospitality is in the eyes of God. Right? And in Matthew 25, it actually even suggests that hospitality will be one of the criteria for the final judgment of God.

He says, God's going to judge us on the final day on the basis of our hospitality. That's going to be, he's going to use that as a standard. So when we're being hospitable toward one another, we're not just being nice people.

Right? We're exemplifying what it means to be fundamentally a Christian. Because we are those who have been shown hospitality by God himself. When we were his enemies, when we were aliens, he was hospitable toward us.

[22 : 32] And that's why we are now hospitable toward one another as the family of God. Because we have been adopted into his family, that's why we're now hospitable toward one another. And as we know, Peter's been emphasizing throughout his letter how we're aliens in this world.

Right? We're foreigners, strangers in this world. And if that's the case, and that is true, then all the more we have to be hospitable toward one another. Because if we're not hospitable toward one another, who will? We're strangers and aliens in this world.

We only have each other. So that's why Peter's saying, above all things, show love to one another and be hospitable toward one another without grumbling. He says. And I think this is particularly helpful for us as a church in East Cambridge, too.

Because just a generation ago, all the Portuguese and Italian and Irish neighbors that we have, they had a great sense of community.

Like, for example, they all used to sit out on a nice evening, bring lawn chairs out and sit out on the streets. Yeah.

[23 : 45] It's, unfortunately, she takes after her father in that way. Hannah was like an angel baby. So, and I lost my place.

It's, we're talking about our neighbors in East Cambridge. Yeah. And so people used to sit out with lawn chairs, you know, just talk, like whole blocks of people. The whole streets would be filled with people sitting out just talking on nice days.

And they used to let their kids just roam the streets of East Cambridge because they knew that everybody else was watching after them, right? No, that doesn't happen now, right? I mean, there's no way that happens now. Yeah.

In fact, people, especially the new population that's moving in, the urban professionals and students and postdocs, they're so busy and live such isolated lives. Yeah.

And a lot less kids, too. So we see things like website meetup.com come up, right? It's trying to fill a vacuum of people lacking community, people looking for community. They're willing to get together with complete strangers to do something that they're, you know, vaguely interested in, right?

[24 : 48] I mean, that's the kind of culture we live in. So if we as a church exemplify this kind of radical hospitality, sacrificial love and showing love to one another, I guarantee you that this will be an irresistible community to the outside watching world.

And that's exactly what Jesus had in mind in John 13, 35. By this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another, right? So love is expressed in hospitality and also in serving.

So Peter continues in verse 10 to 11. Look with me there. As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace.

Whoever speaks as one who speaks oracles of God, whoever serves as one who serves by the strength that God supplies, in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

So we have been privileged to receive God's grace, God's very grace that we may serve one another, right? And it doesn't leave anybody out, right?

[25 : 52] Verse 10 says, each has received a gift, right? And I have real faith for this. I am confident in this truth that each of us has a gift that God has given, measured His grace that He has given to build up this church.

I believe this very firmly and strongly. That means every single one of us has a role and purpose to fulfill in the life of this church. It's not, this verse isn't just referring to the leaders, the elders or the deacons.

It's referring to every one of us. And what's really cool about here is that he says that we are good stewards of God's very grace, right? And the word varied is the same word that was used in chapter 1 verse 6 where Peter says, In this you rejoice, though not for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials.

So it's the exact same word. So he's saying, you've been grieved as a church by various trials, right? And correspondingly, God has given us a varied grace to sustain us, right?

Through those times, right? And Christians are afflicted in the world by various trials. Some of us are going to be deceived, right? By the lies of this world, right?

[27 : 06] We're going to be afflicted by the lies of this world, right? In that very trial, there's going to be those of us who are gifted with the very gifts of speaking the oracles of God to bring that person, that bring that brother or sister back to truth and to lead them in the right way, right?

In a similar way, there's going to be some of us who will fall ill in the life of the church and infirm, right? And need care. And according to that varied affliction, there will be a varied grace that God's given us of those of us who are called to provide and care for someone and to love those who are in need.

And at some point in the life of the church, some of us will become impoverished. And in those times also, God has given a varied grace, a gift of generosity to provide for, to supply that need. Isn't that a beautiful picture? We as a church are afflicted by varied sufferings, various trials. But correspondingly, God has given us a varied grace to sustain us as a church.

So the love that we are to show one another, it expresses itself in hospitality and is serving one another. And what is the purpose of all of this? Why does God do this?

[28 : 22] Why does He work in this way through the church? It's to, so that it may be to the glory of God through Jesus Christ, right? It says. We pray and love one another in the strength that God provides.

And we show hospitality to one another with strength that God provides. We speak to one another as those who speak the oracles of God, not our own words, not worldly wisdom, but as oracles of God.

Right? So we do all of this as stewards, right? It says we are stewards of God's very grace and not owners. Like, these are not intrinsic to us. We don't own these things that we do.

We don't own our acts of service or love. We're stewards of God's grace. And the reason why God works in that way is so that He receives all the glory. Right? Right? Because if we are responsible for it ultimately, then we deserve the glory for it.

I'm a nice person, so that's why I'm nice. I'm a generous person, so I'm generous to this person. Then I get all the glory for everything that I do. If I'm a good teacher, then I teach everybody. Then I get all the glory for what I do.

[29 : 22] But if we do all these things because God gives us that gift, if God works through us and we're just stewards, we're just vessels, conduits of the work that God is doing, then when great things happen, God gets all the glory.

That's exactly why He works in this precise way. And it's so true because everything that we do, we do it by God's strength. Right? Acts 17 is in Him we live and move and have our being.

We can't breathe. We can't do anything apart from God's grace. That's great. There's an exhibit at the Museum of Science that I really like.

I think it's a permanent exhibit. If you go, it challenges you to try to push a cube that weighs literally a ton. So a ton is about half the weight of a small elephant.

So, I mean, there's no way you can push that thing. But it challenges you to do it. So you try it and you can't do it, but then you notice that there's a little button on the side. And if you press that button, it releases air from the bottom to just raise, to lift the cubes just slightly so that there's no friction.

[30 : 26] And it's friction that makes it so hard to push heavy things. So when there's no friction and you push it, you could literally push a ton, a cube that weighs a ton. And I think about that.

I think it's a great illustration of how we work as a church, as stewards of God's grace. We can't move something like that in our own strength. Right? It's God's work.

It's God's grace that enables everything that we do. And when we do that, it's not we that deserve the glory, but God who receives all the glory. And everything that we do is done through Jesus Christ, as it says in this verse.

The glory that redounds ultimately to God the Father is mediated through His Son, Jesus Christ. And the reason is that every gift that we receive, every good thing that we have, every grace that we experience of God, comes through Jesus Christ.

As in Ephesians 4, 7, it says, But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Right? It's everything that we have, the grace of God, the gifts of God, it's a measure of what Christ has given to us.

[31 : 36] And the ultimate gift that we have from Christ through our reconciliation to God the Father is the Spirit of God. It's the very presence of God in us. And it is He who sovereignly distributes the gifts, it says in 1 Corinthians 12.

So this is important to keep in mind because we don't deserve glory as human beings. Ultimately, if we get glory for ourselves, we're glory thieves. Right? Because God alone deserves glory.

But if we don't keep this commandment in mind to love and to serve out of strength that God provides, one of two things will happen. Right? We will be, appear to be, very successful.

Right? When in reality, we only have a semblance of godliness, we're going to mistake that for true godliness. When we really have just a superficial effectiveness and success, we're going to confuse that with lasting, eternal influence and impact.

Right? And because we think that we're successful, we become legalistic and prideful. Right? That will happen if we don't keep this truth in mind that we are to serve and to love and pray with the strength that God provides.

[32 : 48] If that doesn't happen, the second thing will happen is that we will fail miserably. Right? And we'll become despondent. And we'll be plagued by doubts. Oh, I thought I was supposed to do this.

I thought God gave me. But I can't do it. Maybe I'm not a Christian. Maybe I'm not a, maybe Christianity is not true at all. Like, we will fail miserably as we try to serve.

Because the commands that God gives us, the demands of the Bible for the love and service that He calls us to, we can't do that in our own strength. Right? So when you find it then hard to pray, right, you have to remember God's sovereignty at work.

That He has brought the course of human history to its intended end. And when we find ourselves burdened by responsibilities of service and loving one another, being hospitable toward one another, we have to pull and look not inside of ourselves for that resource.

Okay, well, but I have the strength to do that. No, but we look instead to, God's grace that He has shown us through Christ. How He showed us mercy and grace when we did not deserve it, when we were His enemies.

[33 : 56] And that is an infinite pool of, a reservoir of grace that we can pull from. Right? That's how we are able to serve and we're sustained to serve. Right? And I was really struck, and I'll close with this, as we were singing this morning, and I think this hymn really encapsulates what I'm trying to get at, how deep the Father's love for us.

In verse 3, it says, I will not boast in anything, no gifts, no power, no wisdom, but I will boast in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection.

Right? Let's be a church that is jealous for God's glory. That is not to, and careful not to take any glory for ourselves, but to point in every way to God and say, He deserves, alone deserves glory, because I'm serving, I'm loving, I'm praying in the strength that God supplies.

Let me pray for us. God, we really can't do nothing apart from You.

And we acknowledge that You have accomplished all for us, our salvation. We recognize that we are just a small part of the cosmic salvation history that You have been bringing about.

[35 : 41] We ask, Lord, that You help us to keep this end in view, so that we may be humble, so that we may be dependent on You, so that we may abound in love for one another, to Your glory, through Your Son, Jesus Christ.

And it's in His name we pray. Amen.