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That They
May All
Be One

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Series: Prayer: God's "Secret" Weapon

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That They May All Be One

It definitely wasn't an idle wish or a casual thought. It was a distinct request from God to God. It was God the Son, living on planet earth, talking to His Father who was in heaven. It was not a request that could be easily misunderstood. Yet, as we look down through the corridors of history since that wonderful day, we see that man has done his best to thwart God's plan and keep that prayer from becoming a reality. Ultimately, however, it will be answered. God will honor His Son, and that which He asked, He will receive. What a travesty that in this crucial age in which we live, we who call ourselves His blessed born-again ones are the very ones who are keeping that prayer from becoming reality.

The request? Let's listen to it from the lips of the Master Himself, and then let's see what He must have meant by it, and how understanding that request should affect the way we live and the way we pray.

Jesus, you remember, is talking heart-to-heart with His Father. Three great issues surface again and again in that prayer. The first was glorification. He asked the Father to be glorified in the Son. He asked that He would have the same glory returned to Him that He had before the worlds came into being. And He asked that the same glory the Father gave to Him be given to us. We were to behold His glory, return that glory, and look for that day when, without the limitations of sin, we will become just like Him, for we will see Him in all His glory.

We now embark upon a look at the second great theme of Jesus' prayer in John, Chapter 17. It is that of unification. It is a dangerous subject for, taken out of context, it can lead to great doctrinal misunderstandings. Overlooked, it can lead to great strife and contention. What He said was this:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;

That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may

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believe that thou hast sent me.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.
(John 17:20-26)

GLORY IN THE CHURCH - UNIFIED BELIEVERS

Jesus never left the subject of glory. But within the context of that subject, He now applies it personally to each of us who would be part of that body of believers who were His in ages to come. We are those who “would believe on Him through their word.” He had a plan for us. It was His means to an end. The end was the evangelization of the world. His means was unification without compromise.

He wanted the world to believe that the Father sent the Son to be the propitiation for the sins of the world. The way He would do that is by demonstrating within the framework of the church the awesome love that led Him to the cross. We who call ourselves Christians, were to be so unified in love, so constant in our concern and acceptance of one another, that a contentious world would stand in awe and say, “I want to know that God.” That is exactly what God said in His Word. Listen:

By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.
(John 13:35 NAS)

The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him.

But the one who hates his brother is in the darkness and walks in the darkness, and does not know where he is going because the darkness has blinded his eyes.

(I John 2:10,11 NAS)

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For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another;

Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth.

And this is His commandment, that we believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, just as He commanded us. (I John 3:11,18,23 NAS)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (I John 4:7,11 NAS)

We love, because He first loved us.

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (I John 4:19-21 NAS)

Perhaps we cannot truly embark on this journey without taking time to really meditate on those passages. Here is the cardinal philosophy behind the cross: "God so loved, He gave." Loved who? Those the Father had given Him in eternity past who would believe, but who were in rebellion, unlovable, and unresponsive. For them, God would die. Then He would go back to the Father and send His Spirit to live in them and love through them, the same kinds of people Jesus died for: those who were imperfect, often unlovable, seemingly unlovely as well.

God did not get a prize when He got me. And, Beloved, as hard as it is to say, you were no great catch, either. But He chose to love us, and He chose to place us in a family of believers who were made out of the same unlovely material as we are. Clothing us all in His blood, we were to be cloaked in a cloud of glory, the result of which would be a kind of love, a quality of love, and a duration of love the world would have never seen before. It would be a love which would suffer long and be kind. It would be a love that does not envy, is not puffed up, and does not behave itself unseemly.

Does that seem like a description of the Christian church in the world today? We've had 2,000 years to fall in love with each other; to become one in the same way that He and His Father are one.

We sing, "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord." But

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we're not. We bicker over everything. We don't trust the guys in the church around the corner because they don't pray the same way we do. We won't cooperate with the church up the street because they have a different kind of church government. We don't work with that mission organization because they help some people who think differently than we do. We aren't one in the Spirit. The world looks on and sees, not a body working in harmony to bring glory to the Head, but a body at war with itself. The arm is calling the leg names. The eyes are refusing to listen to the ear. The nose can't stand the odor of the feet. We aren't one. We aren't even civil, for the most part.

You will often find more civility and more unity in the world than in the church. Corporations often work together, even with their competitors, more than denominations do with one another. Jesus asked the Father to "make us one as He and His Father were one." Just what does that mean?

1- Jesus and the Father were one in substance. They were different in function, but one in substance. They were inseparable, though they were separate. The Trinity was all deity, and all possessed the same attributes. If the Father was Omnipotent, then so was the Spirit. If the Father was Omniscient, then so was the Son. There was no difference in substance within the Godhead. What one was, all were. What all were, each was. In like manner, those of us who have been born again by the blood of Jesus Christ possess exactly the same Spirit. We differ in function. We differ in gifts. We differ in heritage and in personality and in ethnic origin, but the same spiritual heart beats in each of our souls. Paul made it plain in his letter to the Ephesian church. He said:

I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

But unto every one of us is given grace according to the

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measure of the gift of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:1-7)

Then Paul goes on and explains how we are gifted differently; but only if we use those gifts in harmony with other parts of this one body will we demonstrate the one Spirit who works within us. The person sitting across the aisle from you in church who dresses differently, says “amen” differently, and looks at some peripheral doctrines differently is your brother. He has the same Father, and he has the same purpose in life. It doesn’t matter how different he is. What matters is that inside, where it counts, he is just like you, if he has been born again.

How do you go about loving him?

With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. (Ephesians 4:2,3)

You humble yourself. You overlook your differences and even their faults. You set as your goal to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If need be, you give up your right to be right so the One who is righteousness can shine through you. For just as God the Father, Son and Spirit are one in substance, you and every other believer in the world are one in the Spirit as well.

2- Jesus and the Father were also one in purpose. John wrote these words:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (John 1:1)

It means their hearts were of one accord. They had the same reason for their existence. They had the same purpose in their relationship with man. They would associate with man in different ways: one would indwell, one would intercede, one would oversee and fulfill; but all for the same reason—to return man to the image in which He was created, thus bringing His life back into harmony with the One who made him. So the Father’s plan for us is exactly the same as the Son’s. The Son’s plan for us is exactly the same as the Spirit’s. And in like manner, whether or not you look like that believer in Africa or Russia or Bolivia or across the street or across the city, and whether or not you see them as spiritual the way you are; *if they are believers, they have exactly the same purpose in life you do... to know Christ and to make Him known.*

They are working for the same Employer. They are placed

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in different places with different tasks, but the end product will be exactly the same...the glory of God. That's why God's glory is contingent on our unity. To the degree that we fight and compete, we steal His glory, the glory we would have if the world could see His love by the love we have for one another.

3- The Son and the Father were one in Spirit as well. They not only were and are one in substance and one in purpose, the same thing drives the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. They don't ever feel pulled apart by different motives or methods. Though the Son does not meet our needs in the same way the Spirit does in this age, they do not argue over which one is the most productive. In the same way, we are told as believers that:

So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase.

(I Corinthians 3:7)

So Father, Son and Spirit are one in substance, one in purpose, and one in spirit. What, then, separates us? We stray from the one essential we have in common, the cross. Paul said this:

But God forbid that I should glory, save [except] in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.

(Galatians 6:14)

And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:

(Ephesians 2:16)

And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

(Colossians 1:20)

Reconciliation takes place at the cross. Reconciliation is possible only at the cross. Reconciliation takes place only because of the cross. We have only one thing to glory in: not in our buildings, not in our doctrine, not in our numbers, not in our ministries. *We glory in the cross.* That's our common theme. That's our common denominator. That's why, when you finally get a group of Christians outside the walls of their sanctified sanctuaries into the mission field or into the streets to share their faith, they don't care what their differences are. They are seeing men and women who are lost find salvation at the cross.

The cross was the agent of reconciliation. It brought man back to God. It made Jew and Gentile one again, and it is designed to take all who name His name and give them the common cause for

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life itself: to proclaim that cross. Most of our arguments, most of our petty disagreements, and most of our competitiveness are over issues that have nothing to do with the cross. Paul said:

For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom:

But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;

But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

(I Corinthians 1:21-24)

The Jews, Paul said, were looking for experience. The Greeks were looking for knowledge. Both delighted in arguing and setting themselves above the other. We don't preach that, Paul said. We preach Christ crucified, God on a cross. It stumbles the Jews, and it's nonsense to the Greeks, but *to them that believe, it's everything*. It's the glue that bonds their lives to God and the glue that bonds their hearts to one another.

God help us to become bridge builders in the body of Christ. God help us to encourage one another in brotherly love. God help us to see that all men can know that we are His disciples by the love we have one for another. Not for some others. For all others. "That they may all be one..." No exceptions.

Do we compromise our doctrinal positions? Absolutely not. But do we glory in them? Positively not. Do we ever exalt doctrine above the cross? Not on your life. Much of the dissension in God's body comes from the same root cause that destroyed the angelic host. Pride. We think we have the answers. If we have the answers, anybody that has different answers is less spiritual.

Not true. They may be less informed; that's possible. They may be less doctrinally correct; that's possible. But that doesn't make them less spiritual. Only the Spirit knows who is spiritual and who isn't. Paul told us to humble ourselves in order to keep the peace in the body. You can stand firm on your own convictions while still loving others (not condescendingly, but genuinely) who do not have those convictions. When we get to heaven, we'll find out who was right. But we'll also find out that God was more interested in whether or not we became one in the Spirit than whether or not

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we proved a point and elevated our position. Unity in the body of Christ—it is what Jesus prayed for. God help us to participate as He seeks to bring it to pass.

GLORY IN THE HOME - UNIFIED FAMILIES

The Master has made it very plain. God plans to use unity to demonstrate His glory. He took us out of the cesspool of Satan's kingdom and, through the miracle of what He did at Calvary, adopted us into the Royal Family. We are now heirs of the King and joint-heirs with Christ. As such, how we behave in the family of God tells the outside world what kind of difference knowing the God of Glory has made in our lives. If we are filled with jealousy, competitiveness, backbiting, and pride, we tell the world that the prince of this world still rules our lives and that knowing God has assured us a place in heaven, but made no difference on earth. This is not very comforting—not very comforting, indeed.

The family of God, this unique creation known as the church, is supposed to behave in a decidedly different way than its counterparts in the world. In fact, John, as we just read, went so far as to say that *this would be the tool God planned to use to show the world we were His... the love we demonstrate one to another*. No wonder the world is confused.

He has still another tool, as well. It is a direct descendant of the first. It is also a family matter. It is the matter of the family unit that issues forth from God's spiritual family. God, in eternity past, designed the home to be His primary schoolhouse and His primary mirror for demonstrating truth. The church would be a composite of those families. In the home, as in the church, the kind of love demonstrated would be the vehicle for showing a lost and dying world that there was something better than what they had.

No generation has needed that demonstration more than this one. Even secular politicians are surmising that the problems facing this nation and the world are somehow related to the breakup and breakdown of the family unit. Love no longer dominates. The essence of the Jewish-Christian principle that made the marriage relationship a portrait of man's relationship with God has nearly vanished from sight. God said He "married" Israel. He did so, among other things, to demonstrate how intimate and dependent a family could be. He wanted to show how a loving husband could and must care for, provide for, and love the one he had chosen as his bride. His bride, Israel, was given commandments and laws that would

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allow their submission and loving responses to God to be a reality. It was to be a glorious portrait; but man could not really see God, so the portrait was hard for many to grasp.

So God came all the way down to us from Heaven. He laid aside His robes of royalty, took on the garments of a slave, and ultimately gave His life so we could wear the robes of royalty once meant for only Him.

Greater love hath no man than this; that He would lay down
His life for His friends. (John 15:13)

There is no greater love.

Then He gave us these amazing commandments:

Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the
church, and gave himself for it; (Ephesians 5:25)

That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love
their husbands, to love their children, (Titus 2:4)

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto
the Lord. (Ephesians 5:22)

Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives
be to their own husbands in everything. (Ephesians 5:24)

He placed the mantle of love upon an old institution with a new calling. The home was to be the place where a potential battlefield could be turned into a new garden of Eden, a place where peace and love would rule and through which all men might know that we are His disciples, by the love we have one for another.

It didn't so much have to do with how we felt. It had to do with how we obeyed. It wasn't, "Husbands, love your wives so long as they are lovable." It wasn't, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands because they are so godly." No, the commandments to love and submit were not predicated on the worth of the other party, but on the purpose behind them. The purpose was to demonstrate to a lost, dying world that *even the unlovable will be loved in Christ*. That even the rebel can learn to submit. And beloved, what you say to the world and to your children when your home becomes a battlefield, a refrigerator, or a hypocritical time-bomb where undercurrents mar the smiles you wear, is that *it doesn't work*. You say "Christ in me is not enough to make this marriage work."

The answer most give is that it takes two to make a godly

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marriage. Yes, it takes two. One of you and God. Hello? That's what the Scripture teaches. The husband is to love His wife as Christ loves the church. Christ loves the church with agape love. It is unaffected by response or worthiness. In fact, the less lovable we are, the more His love shines because it demonstrates its depth and creates even more awe at His nature. That's one reason.

...not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: (I Corinthians 1:26b)

God has chosen the seemingly worthless things to love, so His love can be demonstrated in its fullest spectrum.

That's what I Peter, chapters 2 and 3 are all about. When you are rebuked or rejected or punished, and you haven't done anything wrong, if you respond with love, *God is glorified*. And isn't that why we're here? This is not meant to be an unsympathetic word to those who have troubled marriages, but it is intended to remind you that the more troubled your marriage, the more on stage is your character (God's character in you).

It's time Christian husbands and wives stopped blaming their mates and behaved. Husbands are to love their wives anyway. Why? Because God said to. It is a picture book. Wives are to be loving and responsive anyway. Why? Because God said to. It is a picture book. The truth of the matter is what He is looking for is Christian homes where both husband and wife behave as godly representatives of the kingdom for which they are living. It has nothing to do with feelings. It has everything to do with choice. Believing husbands and wives are to be one, even as the Son and the Father are one. By this the world will know that they are His disciples. The home is to be the church in miniature. Maybe that explains the problem. God help us.

GLORY IN THE FUTURE - A UNIFIED BODY

Still one more truth seems to reach out from this passage and beg to be addressed. It is both the portrait and the promise all wrapped into one beautiful package. It is the promise of the glory which is to come when the body of Christ becomes one at last in heaven. Jesus said,

And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.

And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one:

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I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.

Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me.

And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them. (John 17:5, 22-26)

One day the glory cycle will be complete. We will no longer need to appropriate His glory, reflect that glory, and return that glory in the same way. It will happen, but it will cease being an activity and become a natural process. The reason? We will behold His glory at last. We will actually step inside the glory cloud, for sin will not separate us from it; and as we do, His very nature will be ours at last. Not appropriated nature: imputed nature.

We will be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.

(I John 3:2b)

“Oh, that will be glory for me. When by His grace, I shall look on His face...that will be glory for me.” The words to that old song say it all. It will be glory. It will be the culmination of the glory cycle. His nature, ours. Our adoration, His. Nothing between. So intense will be that glory that *we will literally become like Him*. The filter of sin that keeps us from beholding His glory will be gone. We will not need to go from one degree of glory to another any longer. The veil will have been torn asunder. It will be 100% glory.

And what else will happen? We will all together *behold that glory as one*. The same filter of sin that has separated us from the fullness of His glory also has separated us from our brothers and sisters in Christ. The conflicts in the family will be over. The pettiness and the competitiveness and the bickering will be gone. We will love one another. You are going to love that Christian at the office that's so overbearing. You are going to love that pastor with whom you had the conflict. You are going to love that Sunday School teacher that so grates on your nerves. You are going to love your wife unconditionally. No, you won't be married to her in heaven, but you will love her. And she will love you.

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There's only one problem. It's a kind of love you could have been enjoying for years. It's a sample of relationships that were available, within the limitations of a world dominated by sin, but that you never paid the price to have. We will behold His glory as one. One unit. One family. One body. All of us who name His name will marry the Lamb. The divisions and the power structures we have constructed in the church will be gone. Old Joe, the custodian who quietly labored in the Spirit in the background will be right there along with Dr. Knownwell, the famous evangelist. Mrs. Humble, the woman who stayed on her knees for hours every day praying will be right there along with Sister Sayalot. We'll all be there, and we'll all be as one. One Lord. One faith. One baptism.

That will be glory, indeed. That's what Jesus was praying for. He was asking the Father to give to us the same glory the Father gave to Him while on earth. He was asking the Father to return to Him the glory He had before ever the world was. Then He asked the Father to make us one *in exactly the same way that He and the Father were one*. On that day, it will be a reality at last. His prayer will have been answered. We will be one in substance. Sin will be gone, and all that will be left will be our new nature, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. We will be one in purpose. All we will live for will be to worship God by allowing His glory to be set free in us. We will be one in spirit. For nothing will interfere with His Spirit's working in us and through us.

There will be perfect unity, perfect harmony, perfect love. No one will vie for first place; everyone will be satisfied just to be in the presence of the King. No one will advertise his or her righteousness, because as we behold His glory, our righteousness will no longer exist. We will experience true love at last.

But what a shame. A king-size taste of heaven is waiting for us here on earth. Jesus was asking the Father to begin the process on earth that would end in heaven. He was asking Him to take the glory that was His, give it to us, and draw us by His Spirit through His Word to love one another.

Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than ourselves.

(Philippians 2:3)

That is what the body of Christ is supposed to look like. That is what the Christian family is supposed to be like. One day it will. But until then, can we not stop the pettiness that overtakes us

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and, by choosing to allow God's Spirit to perform the miracle of love through us, *actually get a taste of glory before we get there?* We can. And we are instructed to do just that. It's not a new thought. We don't need new books written, new songs sung, new sermons taught. John said it all:

For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. (I John 3:11)

Same old message. Just a reminder. We are all one in Christ. Until we learn to live like it, the world will have no way of knowing what love the Father hath bestowed upon us. And until they know that, they may have a hard time hearing this good news about the love of God. They can't hear our message because our lives are saying something else.

GLORY IN THE PRAYER CLOSET — PRAYING FOR UNITY

Lest we forget, however, the subject of this study is prayer. And the reason we are in John, Chapter 17, is to see how Jesus prayed, and how the way he prayed ought to affect us. He prayed for the Father's glory to be given to us; for us to be one as He and the Father are one; and one day, for that to become a reality as we behold His glory without the filter of sin, and become, in reality, just like Him in character and purpose.

If that's what Jesus prayed for us, *what should we be praying for ourselves and for one another?*

1- We should be praying for unity in the body of Christ. We should be asking the Father, in these last days, to make us one, even as the Son and the Father are one. We should be asking God to break down the barriers that separate the parts of the body from one another and keep it from working as one. We should pray that the body of Christ (those who have been born again by His shed blood) will begin behaving in these last days as they were intended to behave. God still answers prayer. He will bring about situations and relationships to foster that atmosphere. But we must ask. If Jesus thought it was important enough to pray about, shouldn't we? And we know that we have whatsoever we ask, *because in this case, we know we are praying according to the will of God.*

2- We should be praying for those individuals and organizations who are stepping out and doing what God commanded in terms of unity without compromise. The Co-Mission is an example. They are gathering the manpower and resources of scores of denominations

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and mission groups and bringing about a concentrated effort founded in unity, but based on the cross. Their impact is awesome. Other groups, such as the Billy Graham Association, for years have kept the cross at the forefront, and focused individuals of all persuasions on a single purpose: the bringing in of the kingdom. There are many. Pray for them and for the people responsible.

3- Pray for other believers in your world who are living for Christ in their worlds, but who don't belong to "your church" or "your group." Ask them to pray for you. Pray for opportunities to be one with those who are like-minded where the cross is concerned.

4- Finally, ask God to use you as a vessel in your church, in your family, and in your world to be a person who builds unity rather than dissension. Ask Him to sensitize you to times when you are about to get caught up in trivia or personalities, missing the blessing of seeing the kingdom come and God's will being done in the process. Ask Him specifically to lift you above the pettiness that divides believers into the realm of unity without compromise.

Don't change your convictions about Scripture. Don't weaken your awareness of the absolutes. Don't ever forfeit truth for the sake of harmony. But, Beloved, *so much of the time truth is not what is at stake; pride is.* Remember Jesus is coming soon. Then, we will behold His glory, and we will be one at last. It cannot come too soon. Until then, empowered by His Spirit, may we live as though we were the one body we are.

Let's pray.

Our Father God,

Forgive us. We don't pray for one another very often. We don't encourage one another in the body. We divide into little groups and we advertise our group and we promote our group and we become proud of our group. Occasionally we'll reach out and find another group that's a little bit like our group and we touch them, too.

And so often, Father, by snide remarks or by the look on our faces or by the absence of prayer, we say to the world and we say to You that they don't think exactly like we do. We think that You couldn't love them as much as you love us.

What a horrible lie. By Your grace, Father, grant us the privilege to begin living in the oneness of the spirit that is ours by divine decree. May we not compromise our convictions; may we never

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take the Word of God for less than it is. But by Your grace, may we continue to love, to encourage and to build up all the parts of the body who claim the name of Jesus by virtue of that wonderful cross and who have, by Your blood, been born again.

To Jesus be praise and honor and glory,

Amen.

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