

Next weekend, starting Friday evening, is our 4th Annual Southwest Bible Conference. Our theme this year is “Growing in Prayer with the Apostle Paul.” Today we are getting a head start, hearing what Paul taught the church in Rome about prayer and the role of the Holy Spirit.

Our Need in Prayer (8:26a)

8:26a *In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should...*

In the Same Way

- “*In the same way*” connects what Paul is about to teach concerning the Holy Spirit and prayer with what has come before. “...*the glory that is to be revealed to us*” (8:18), when compared to “*the sufferings of this present time,*” provide us comfort. Having the beginning blessings/gifts from the Spirit, or His “*firstfruits,*” we are given “*hope*” concerning our approaching “*adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.*” In fact, “*with perseverance we wait eagerly for it*” (8:23-25).
- Just as the Holy Spirit is – right now, in this world – the beginning of our eternal bliss with God, “*in the same way*” He helps us as we pray to the Father through the Son. He helps us commune with the Divine object of our desire through prayer.
- Hope helps us in suffering, and “*in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness.*”

Help Does Not Replace Our Spiritual Discipline

- The Spirit doesn’t pray in our place, and “*our weakness*” doesn’t excuse us from praying. We still must pray.¹

¹ The verb translated “*helps*” (συναντιλαμβάνομαι) has the Greek preposition σύν prefixed to it, which means “together with.” The Holman Christian Standard Bible comes closest to giving us this sense: “...*the Spirit also joins to help in our weakness...*” The only other place in the New Testament where this verb occurs further

- There are two other places in the N.T. where the Holy Spirit and the prayer of the saints are spoken of together:
 - In Ephesians 6:18-20, believers are commanded to “*pray at all times in the Spirit.*” In this case it is for evangelism/missions – a high priority for God, and therefore a pray the Spirit would help us to pray.
 - Jude 20 summarizes “*building yourselves up on your most holy faith*” with three steps. The first is “*praying in the Holy Spirit.*”² Praying this way would never mean praying outside of God’s will, since you cannot pray “*in*” the third Person of the Trinity and pray for that which is against God’s will.
READ 1 John 3:22.

illustrates its meaning for us. When Jesus is visiting Mary and Martha, Mary “was seated at the Lord’s feet, listening to His word” (Luke 10:39). Martha, on the other hand, “*was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, ‘Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me’*” (10:40). Martha isn’t wanting Mary to take over all the work; Martha desires that Mary helps her in the work she is already doing. In the same way, the Holy Spirit helps the praying we are already doing.

² The second is keeping “*yourselves in the love of God*” and the third is “*waiting anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life*” (vs. 21). Jude 20-21 are Trinitarian, since the Holy Spirit, God (the “*Father,*” see vs. 1), and “*our Lord Jesus Christ*” are separately mentioned.

Our Weakness

- What is “our weakness”? Since Paul says “we do not know how to pray as we should,” we should probably assume this is “our weakness.”³
- We are moved to pray by “the sufferings of this present time” (8:18) as “we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body” (8:24). We “groan,” but we don’t know how to pray.

How the Spirit Helps Us Pray (8:26b)

...8:26b *but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words...*

Christ: Our Intercessor in Heaven

- Later in this very chapter the apostle Paul will describe the Son’s intercession for us: “Christ Jesus is He Who died, yes, rather Who was raised, Who is at the right hand of God, **Who also intercedes for us**” (8:34).⁴
- “He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since **He always lives to make intercession for them**” (Hebrews 7:25).

³ This word is used to describe physical illness (Matthew 8:17; Luke 5:15; 8:2; 13:11,12; John 5:5; 11:4; Acts 28:9; 2 Corinthians 12:10; Galatians 4:13; 1 Timothy 5:23). However, in Romans, Paul seems to be using “weakness” to describe an inability to understand or to know how to do something because of our spiritual immaturity still remaining. For example, the apostle, in trying to explain our newness in life, uses an illustration of slavery, “I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh” (6:19).

⁴ When I think about Jesus’ unceasing intercession for us, I think of Jesus’ words to Peter before His crucifixion: “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail” (Luke 22:31,32).

- “...if anyone sins, **we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous**” (1 John 2:1). “Advocate” is the word *παράκλητος*, variously translated as “Helper,” “Comforter,” or “Encourager,” a title given by Jesus to the Holy Spirit in John 14:16,26; 15:26; 16:7.

The Holy Spirit: the Intercessor Dwelling in Us

- While Christ is in heaven at the right hand of the Father (Psalm 110:1; Mark 16:19; Acts 2:33; 7:56; Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 1 Peter 3:22; Revelation 3:21), the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers in Jesus Christ (Matthew 10:20; John 14:17; Romans 8:9,11; 1 Corinthians 3:16).
- The Spirit is the One Who moves us to groan to God for the change of all things: “...we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even **we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body**” (8:23). Our tendency is to be comfortable in the world, to accommodate to worldliness, and to not have our minds set on heaven. The Spirit moves us to dissatisfaction with the world, a steadfastness in staying faithful to the truth of the Bible, and a desire for God to make all things as they should be for His glory. The Spirit moves us to groan. “While we are in this world, hoping and waiting for what we see not, we must be praying. Hope supposes desire, and that desire offered up to God is prayer; we groan.”⁵

2 Peter and the Illustration of Lot

- “...if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (for by what he saw and heard

⁵ Matthew Henry (1662-1714).

that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority” (2 Peter 2:6-10).⁶

⁶ While “*the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah*” are mainly noted for the sin of homosexuality (Genesis 19:1-29), the rest of the Old Testament uses the names to condemn other sins, as well. In Isaiah 1:9-17, the LORD calls “*Judah and Jerusalem*” (1:1) by the names “*Sodom*” and “*Gomorrah*” (1:10). Their sins are seen in how what the LORD commands them to do: “*Seek justice, reprove the ruthless, defend the orphan, plead for the widow*” (1:17). All this is while they are offering the sacrifices required by the Law (1:11-15); their religious devotion is disgusting to God while they are ignoring the needs of the weakest among them – and so God calls them “*Sodom*” and “*Gomorrah*.” They don’t even try to hide their sin (3:9), but are proud of it. Jeremiah criticizes the false prophets of his day for their “*committing of [spiritual] adultery and walking in falsehood.*” They were guilty of strengthening “*the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back [repented] from his wickedness.*” And so they are, to the LORD, “*like Sodom, and...like Gomorrah*” (Jeremiah 23:14). In fact, the LORD will say that “*the iniquity of the daughter of My people is greater than the sin of Sodom*” (Lamentations 4:6). In Ezekiel 16, Samaria and Jerusalem are compared to Sodom and Gomorrah. Their sin? “*...this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food and careless ease, but she did not help the poor and needy*” (16:49). The Revelation speaks of “*the great city which mystically is called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified,*” that is, earthly Jerusalem (11:8). All this is to say that we cannot limit our groaning to sexual sin alone; while mentioned in Romans 1:26,27 as the inevitable fruit

- What tormented Lot’s “*righteous soul*”? When Peter says “*lawless,*” to Whose law is he referring? Are you “*tormented day after day*” by the world’s breaking of God’s Law in every possible way it can? Are you tempted to accommodate the world by ignoring or softening the requirements of God’s Law? From what does Peter say the Lord rescues “*the godly*”?
- **READ 2 Peter 3:10-18.**
 - In light of the renewing of all things (for which the Spirit leads us to groan), how does Peter command us to live?
 - In our character (3:10)?
 - What characterizes the newness for which we are looking (3:13)?
 - What should be the goal of our spiritual self-discipline and mutual discipleship (3:14)?
 - As we groan for the Lord’s coming to make all things right and new, how should we view His delay (3:9,15)?
 - In regard to the Scriptures, what is the threat against us while we wait (3:15-17)?
 - What does Peter say about our responsibility as believers to continue growing in Christ (3:18)?
 - In light of these verses about longing for “*for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells*” (3:13), we see that the Spirit-given groaning is manifests itself in our lives in daily Christian discipleship, too.

of idolatrous hearts (1:18-25), it is not the only sin that merits God’s death penalty (1:28-32). Groan over it all before the Lord.

The Groanings of the Spirit and a Longing for Exodus

- The only other place in the N.T. where “groans” occurs as a noun is in Stephen’s telling of the history of Israel: “...an angel appeared to [Moses] in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, in the flame of a burning thorn bush. When Moses saw it, he marveled at the sight; and as he approached to look more closely, there came the voice of the Lord: ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.’ Moses shook with fear and would not venture to look. But the Lord said to him, ‘Take off the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground. **I have certainly seen the oppression of My people in Egypt and have heard their groans, and I have come down to rescue them; come now, and I will send you to Egypt**” (Acts 7:30-34). The “groans” of Israel in Egypt are analogous to the “groans” of believers, who long for the Lord to “come down to rescue” us, delivering us from our enemies and bringing us and creation into a state of eternal glorious bliss and rest.
- You and I can only be groaning in the Spirit if we are firmly convinced of the Scripture’s witness that we are not home here, but are pilgrims on our way to our true home. A people comfortable and at home here will not groan in the Spirit as the Israelites did while they were sojourning in Egypt.⁷

⁷ They’d been in Egypt over four hundred years. Egypt was all they’d known for generations. No wonder it was tempting for them to long to return to it (read Exodus 16:3; Numbers 11:5 for their longing for the food of Egypt). The journey to the Promised Land is not easy.

The Spirit’s Qualification As Our Intercessor (8:27)

8:27...and He Who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

God the Father, Searcher of Hearts

- David tells his son this before dying: “As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind; for **the LORD searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts.** If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever” (1 Chronicles 28:9).
- READ also Psalm 139:1,2,23; Jeremiah 17:9,10; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Hebrews 4:12,13.
- The same omniscient God the Father not only knows all the thoughts and desires of His people, but also knows the “*the mind of the Spirit.*” There is a connection between the Father and His people, and that connection is the interceding Holy Spirit. This Spirit connects us with the Father according to the Father’s perfect will. Our sin is atoned for by Christ, and the Spirit lifts our sanctified thoughts and desires through our prayers to the Father.
- In the next verse (on Sunday, November 13), we will read one of the most precious promises in the whole Bible: “...we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose” (8:28). This week we see, in part, why. “No wonder all things are working out for our good – the Spirit is effectively praying for us so that the will of God will be accomplished in our lives.”⁸

⁸ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1998), 447.