Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Help from the Holy Spirit
Scripture: Romans 8
Code: BQ051512

And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; (8:26)

In the same way refers back to the groans of the creation and of believers for redemption from the corruption and defilement of sin. Here Paul reveals the immeasurably comforting truth that the Holy Spirit comes alongside us and all creation in groaning for God's ultimate day of restoration and His eternal reign of righteousness.

Because of our remaining humanness and susceptibility to sin and doubt, the **Holy Spirit also helps** us in **our weakness.** In this context, weakness doubtless refers to our human condition in general, not to specific weaknesses. The point is that, even after salvation, we are characterized by spiritual **weakness**. Acting morally, speaking the truth, witnessing for the Lord, or doing any other good thing happens only by the power of **the Spirit** working in and through us despite our human limitations.

Several times in his letter to the Philippians Paul beautifully pictures that divine-human relationship. Speaking of his own needs, he said, "I know that this shall turn out for my deliverance through your prayers and the provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). **The Spirit** supplies us with all we need to be faithful, effective, and protected children of God. In the following chapter he admonishes, "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12–13). The Spirit of God works unrelentingly in us to do what we could never do alone-bring about the perfect will of God.

To make clear how the Spirit works, Paul turns to the subject of prayer. Although we are redeemed and absolutely secure in our adoption as God's children, nevertheless **we do not know how to pray as we should.** Paul does not elaborate on our inability to pray as we ought, but his statement is all-encompassing. Because of our imperfect perspectives, finite minds, human frailties, and spiritual limitations, we are not able to pray in absolute consistency with God's will. Many times we are not even aware that spiritual needs exist, much less know how best they should be met. Even the Christian who prays sincerely, faithfully, and regularly cannot possibly know God's purposes

concerning all of his own needs or the needs of others for whom he prays.

Jesus told Peter, “Behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers” (Luke 22:31–32). Fortunately for Peter, Jesus kept His word despite the apostle’s foolish bravado. Not only was Peter no match for Satan but he soon proved that his devotion to Christ could not even withstand the taunts of a few strangers (vv. 54–60). How glorious that our spiritual security rests in the Lord’s faithfulness rather than in our vacillating commitment.

Even the apostle Paul, who lived so near to God and so faithfully and sacrificially proclaimed His gospel, did not always know how best to pray. He knew, for example, that God had allowed Satan to inflict him with an unspecified “thorn in the flesh.” That affliction guarded Paul against pride over being “caught up into Paradise.” But after a while Paul became weary of the infirmity, which doubtless was severe, and he prayed earnestly that it might be removed. After three entreaties, the Lord told Paul that he should be satisfied with the abundance of divine grace by which he was already sustained in the trial (see 2 Cor. 12:3–9). Paul’s request did not correspond to the Lord’s will for him at that time. Even when we do not know what God wants, the indwelling **Spirit Himself intercedes for us,** bringing our needs before God even when we do not know what they are or when we pray about them unwisely.

Paul emphasizes that our help is from **the Spirit Himself.** His divine help not only is personal but direct. **The Spirit** does not simply provide our security but is **Himself** our security. The Spirit intercedes on our behalf in a way, Paul says, that is totally beyond human comprehension, **with groanings too deep for words.** The Holy Spirit unites with us in our desire to be freed from our corrupted earthly bodies and to be with God forever in our glorified heavenly bodies.

Contrary to the interpretation of most charismatics, the **groanings** of the Spirit are not utterances in unknown tongues, much less ecstatic gibberish that has no rational content. As Paul says explicitly, the groans are not even audible and are inexpressible in **words.** Yet those groans carry profound content, namely divine appeals for the spiritual welfare of each believer. In a way infinitely beyond our understanding, these **groanings** represent what might be called intertrinitarian communication, divine articulations by the Holy Spirit to the Father. Paul affirmed this truth to the Corinthians when he declared, “For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man, which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God” (1 Cor. 2:11).

We remain justified and righteous before God the Father only because the Son and the Holy Spirit, as our constant advocates and intercessors, represent us before Him. It is only because of that joint and unceasing divine work on our behalf that we will enter heaven. Christ “is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb. 7:25). Jesus’ divine work of redemption in a believer’s heart begins at the time of conversion, but it does not end until that saint is in heaven, glorified and made as righteous as God is righteous, because he possesses the full righteousness of Christ. That is guaranteed by the heavenly high priestly work of our Lord and by the earthly indwelling **Holy Spirit**, which also make secure the divine adoption and heavenly destiny of every believer.

If it were not for the sustaining power of the Spirit within us and Christ’s continual mediation for us as High Priest (Heb. 7:25–26), our remaining humanness would have immediately engulfed us again in sin the moment after we were justified. If for an instant Christ and the Holy Spirit were to stop their sustaining intercession for us, we would, in that instant, fall back into our sinful, damnable state of separation from God.

If such a failing away could happen, faith in Christ would give us only temporary spiritual life, subject at any moment to loss. But Jesus offers no life but eternal life, which, by definition, cannot be lost. To those who believe, Jesus said, “I give eternal life … and they shall never perish; and no one shall snatch them out of My hand” (John 10:28; cf. 17:2–3; Acts 13:48). To have faith in Jesus Christ and to have eternal life are scripturally synonymous.

Were it not for the sustaining and intercessory work of the Son and the Spirit on behalf of believers, Satan and his false teachers could easily deceive God’s elect (see Matt. 24:24) and could undermine the completion of their salvation. But if such a thing were possible, God’s election would be meaningless. Satan knows that believers would be helpless apart from the sustaining work of the Son and the Spirit, and in his arrogant pride he vainly wars against those two divine persons of the Godhead. He knows that if somehow he could interrupt that divine protection, once-saved souls would fall from grace and again belong to him. But the never-ending work of Christ and the Holy Spirit make that impossible.

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