

The Spirit's Help in Prayer

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*"And in the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness...because He intercedes for the saints."
- Romans 8:26*

What does Paul mean, "IN THE SAME WAY"? Just as hope helps us persevere through sufferings, IN THE SAME WAY Spirit-energized prayer helps our weakness.

1. Why we need Spirit-directed prayer.

First, we are, in general, weak. Do you see yourself that way? The worldling wants to think of himself as sufficient. But the Christian admits that without God, he is liable to do any rotten thing.

We are particularly weak when it comes to KNOWING HOW TO PRAY. Have you ever been in a difficult situation where you had to talk with someone and use just the right words? Then, how much more it is true of talking with God -- bringing the right words and the right subjects and the right frequency (Judges 20).

Abraham missed it when he asked for Ishmael (Genesis 17:18). Moses missed it when he asked to go over Jordan (Deuteronomy 3:23). Joshua was told to quit praying (7:10). Samuel missed it praying for Saul (1 Samuel 16:1). The mother of James and John did not know what she was asking for (Matthew 20:22). The Gadarene missed it (Mark 5:18). Paul was not on target (2 Corinthians 12:10).

We say like the disciples, "Lord, teach us to pray" (Luke 11:1). We are like little children learning to use the intercom. Our clumsiness surely hinders good communication.

The business of prayer is important, as it is dangerously effectual for better or worse. God answered Israel's prayer but sent leanness to their soul (Psalm 106:15). God answered Abraham's prayer and made Ishmael a great nation, though they were an adversary (Genesis 17:18). God's anger is felt over Moses' prayer (Deuteronomy 3:23).

Our prayers have a lot of junk in them. There is much black smoke going up in the incense. Even our thanksgivings must be filtered through Christ (Colossians 3:17). We don't know how to pray AS WE OUGHT.

Moreover it is possible to get so heavy in spirit, so entangled in thought, so perplexed with difficulties that we have a hard time even getting words out of our mouth. The psalmist says, "I

am so troubled that I cannot speak". That is what you might see in an infirmary (Romans 8:26 puts INFIRMITY in the KJV), soldiers so wounded that they cannot speak, only GROAN.

2. How does the Spirit help us in prayer?

First, notice that the Spirit is a HELPER. Jesus calls Him that (John 14:16). He is not "our little helper", but it is more like the king helping the servant to do the king's will. The Greek word is "paraclete". It means one called alongside to help. It is like we are carrying a heavy log and a friend comes along and picks up one end, the heavy end at that.

Second, how does the Spirit help? He INTERCEDES. That means go-between. We actually have two intercessors. Christ is the other (Romans 8:34). He intercedes for us at the throne in a legal way and the Spirit intercedes through us in an experiential way.

Thirdly, the Spirit intercedes by stepping in to speak for us by speaking through us. He directs prayer ACCORDING TO THE WILL OF GOD. He puts words in our mouth, like Joab did the woman of Tekoa (2 Samuel 14:2), to intercede with David on Absalom's behalf.

But sometimes it is not words, it is only groans, sighs, cryings, and burdens. We see our iniquities come to the surface all at once and they are such a dark cloud over our head that we cannot look up--we groan. We look around and see the wrong so strong, injustice so prevalent and we groan. We see souls perishing, laughing their way to hell and we groan (Romans 9:2). We hear the name we love taken in vain and we groan (Psalm 139:21). We see the low-life amongst the people of God and we could pull our hair and fall to the ground and groan (Ezra 9:3). Maybe we are facing some new step of obedience and we see the cost of discipleship and we groan (Mathew 26:38). We don't know how to put it into words. All we can do is groan, but even at such a time as this, we may be confident that that is the Spirit at work and it is of God.

3. Summary

How does it all work? Verse 27 tells us it is God seeing, God knowing, and God causing.

God "SEES", HE SEARCHES THE HEARTS. The Coast Guard searches boats for drugs. The Homeowner searches the house for the lost coin. But God searches the hearts regarding our thoughts (Jeremiah 17:10).

God sees the wrong motives (Luke 16:15, Psalm 139:23). He sees hypocrisies, like with Ananias and his wife Sapphira (Acts 5:3). He searches for stagnancy (Zepheniah 2:2). And on the positive side, God is searching for true faith (Acts 15:7). He is searching out and rewarding spirituality (Acts 1:24, 1 Samuel 16:7).

God has a reputation for being a heart-searcher. And as He searches the hearts of the saints, He finds "unuttered words and unutterable groanings," and though inarticulated, there is meaning and intent that can't escape His omniscient eye.

God "KNOWS", He KNOWS WHAT THE MIND OF THE SPIRIT IS. Those groanings are wholly intelligible to Him. Who can interpret that baby talk like the mother? So also God knows the workings of the heart, for, the Spirit put it there and He knows the mind of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:10f).

God actually is the "cause", the instigator of it all. He told the Spirit what message to give. He sent the prompter to help the reciter. It is all ACCORDING TO HIS WILL.

4. Conclusions and Applications

1. We are commanded to prayer and our prayers are important. God has foreordained everything and even everything for us. He has foreordained the end but also the means. So we must pray. It can hurt us if we don't (James 4:3).
2. There is a right way to pray. It says AS WE SHOULD. God is concerned with content and intent. The Spirit is graciously helping, even in groanings of the heart.
3. These groanings, even these, are the promptings of the Spirit and meet with God's approval. They are from Him. You know Christ's intercessions are entirely accepted with God. We ought to feel the same about ours, being Spirit-directed. God hears the softest prayer. Remember Nehemiah (Neh. 2:4). Remember Hannah (1 Samuel 1:13). God does more than "we ask" (Ephesians 3:18).
4. We should not think that groanings are the normal. We should bring words (Hosea 14:2, Matthew 6:10). We should order our prayer (Psalm 5:3). We might start with God (Acts 4:24). We might then bring thanksgivings (Philippians 4:6). We might then hold up the promises and use the word -- the Spirit's sword against the invisible foes. Sometimes a word is quickened and you can pray the "prayer of faith".
5. The Holy Spirit is a person. He has a MIND.
6. The Christians are the SAINTS -- in contrast to the Roman Catholic idea.
7. Prayer is a great indicator of who the true saints are.
8. We see in this area again, the humanness of our Lord Jesus and His fittedness to be our priest. On one occasion Jesus prayed, "what shall I say" (John 12:27). He never prayed wrongly, but yet felt the difficulty of knowing HOW TO PRAY AS HE SHOULD. He was a man.
9. See the great power and provision attending us. Adam fell away when he had never known sin. Adam fell away in Paradise. We, in all our weakness, stand.