



Sermon Notes | Spirit Help | Romans 8:26-27

INTRODUCTION

Romans 8:18-30

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now, And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of the bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."

We continue in these blessed Words, and we see as we look at these verses, that creation 'groans' waiting with eager longing. And we ourselves also 'groan' inwardly.

We ourselves groan inwardly for our 'adoption', for our 'bodily renewal', our 'firstfruits of the Spirit' consummation. This is our 'hope', 'unseen but sure', and thus we wait with patience. This is the reality of living the 'in between', the already, but not yet. We are justified, but not yet glorified, saved eternally, but not yet completed presently, and thus we 'groan in hope' and live in 'weakness'.

But we are not left in our weakness. This 'help' is how Paul continues our study.

I. SPIRIT STRENGTH: (v. 26)

Romans 8:26

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

In the same way that the Spirit has helped us before in our weakness, He does so more. Therefore this is nothing new.

Our problem is a general state of 'weakness' in both our 'cursed' bodies and the 'cursed' earth. It is the 'weakness' of sin and decay. We still 'groan' now because we are weak as we wait for our ultimate renewal. And therefore, because of our 'weakness' we do not know what to pray for. Our weakness manifests itself, demonstrates itself, even in our prayers. "...we do not know what to pray for as we ought..." (8:26). This verse does not say that we are weak because we don't pray enough, or use the right words in our prayers, or because we are not mature enough in our faith. No. It states that 'we don't know what to pray for. This is our struggle, what, not how. Our lack of knowledge for our prayers is 'what' to pray for. We are limited in our knowledge. We are not omniscient. We are not all-knowing. We do not know the future nor what is best for us. We may pray, 'God remove this trial', but this trial that we face may very well be God-ordained. What if God has decreed this trial for endurance and hope?

Romans 5:3-5

"Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us."

We are prone to ask God to 'grant me this or grant me that', but what if we pray for something that is not in our best nature, and would cause ultimate harm? We may pray against the very things that are meant for us. We are weak and unknowledgeable, limited and finite. How many times do we look back and thank God for not answering our prayers?

So then, why do we pray? We groan, but the response is not to stop praying. No. Scripture assures us that the Holy Spirit helps us in our 'weakness'.

Romans 8:26

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The Spirit helps us. The Holy Spirit, who is our helper, helps us in our 'weakness', and therefore we pray with Spirit help. Jesus assured His disciples:

John 16:7

"Nevertheless, I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you."

The Holy Spirit is our Helper. This is the present ministry of the Holy Spirit. He sustains the believer in hope, and enables us to obey God's Law.

Romans 8:2-8

"For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; Indeed, it cannot, Those who are in the flesh cannot please God."

He subdues our fallen nature, and bears witness that we are His, a child of God.

Romans 8:9-13

"You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you, anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live."

Romans 8:14-17

"For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, 'Abba! Father!' The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him."

The Holy Spirit guarantees our inheritance, and also ministers to us in prayer.

Romans 8:18-22

"For I consider that the sufferings of the present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now."

Romans 8:26

"Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

The Holy Spirit is not, therefore, a crutch, nor a handy accessory to use if we remember or like to. He is God Himself, our perfect Helper, interceding for us, with divine groans, with audible cries, not groans like ours, but with 'no talk groans', too deep for words.

Romans 8:27

"And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Our groans are but futility, weakness and suffering, with nowhere else to turn. But the Holy Spirit helps us, His 'groaning' is different from that which we know. He has helpful 'divine groans'. His 'groans' are not like human groans. They are 'no talk', 'groans' too deep for words.

What His 'Divine Groans' Are Not:

1. They are not a gift of 'speaking in tongues', as in 'glossa' in the Greek. They are not a 'known tongue', not a recognized foreign language.
2. They are not a gift given only to some Christians. There are no limits on who the Holy Spirit helps. His help is not limited to only the godly or the mature Christian. Further, 'divine groans' are certainly not a second blessing.
3. They are not a special revelation, not secret things of God given to some in a secret closet, and do not come by contemplative prayer, or by writing down what we think. Such can be dangerous, and can lead to heresy.
4. Nor are they us talking to God receiving 'God-talk' in special revelation. If you want to hear from God, read the Bible. The Bible is His Revelation to us.
5. The 'groans' of the Holy Spirit are not like our groans. Our groans are but futility in our 'weakness'. Our 'groans' are the 'cry of wanting' but being unable. Our cries spring from limitation, from impotency, from weakness. It is impossible for the Holy Spirit to 'groan' like we do, for the Holy Spirit is not weak, is not futile, or limited, weak or impotent. He is perfect. As God Himself is perfect, powerful, infinite and capable, so also is the Holy Spirit.

It is the contrast of the 'groanings' that we are considering here, not the similarities.

Romans 8:20

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope..."

But the Holy Spirit is different, and His 'groans' are different from our 'groans'. If they were the same as our 'groans', they would be of no help to us, but would be just more of the same, and would only compound the problem. We need 'divine help' by way of Spirit strength, perfect help, special help, help which will help our weakness.

So what are these 'groans' and how does the Holy Spirit help us?

II. SPIRIT SUPPLICATION: (v. 27)

Romans 8:27

"And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf! Such a pregnant verse. It reveals that the Holy Spirit 'helps us' in prayer by unutterable 'groans'. And He who searches hearts knows. The 'divine' who searches our heart, who mines our heart, that being God, 'knows', for He is working in concert with the Holy Spirit.

David said to his son, Solomon:

I Chronicles 28:9

And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will cast you off forever."

And Solomon prays:

I Kings 8:39

"... then hear in heaven your dwelling place and forgive and act and render to each whose heart you know, according to all his ways (for you, you only, know the hearts of all the children of mankind)."

Scripture bears witness that God searches hearts:

Psalm 44:20-21

"If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god, would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart."

Psalm 139:1, 23-24

"O LORD, you have searched me and known me!"

...

*"Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting."*

Proverbs 15:11

"Sheol and Abaddon lie open before the LORD; how much more the hearts of the children of man!"

Jeremiah 12:3a

"But you, O LORD, know me; you see me and test my heart toward you..."

Jeremiah 17:10

"I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give everyman according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds."

And so it is clear, God the Father searches hearts. The New Testament also presents God as the One who knows. God is still God.

Acts 1:24

"And they prayed and said, 'You, Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which one of these two you have chosen...'"

I Corinthians 4:5

"Therefore do not pronounce judgement before the time, before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God."

Revelation 2:23b

"... And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works."

The same One that makes approaching God possible, the Mediator, the Intercessor, Jesus Christ, second person of the Godhead, is working in Spirit, in perfect concert with Father God.

Hebrew 7:25

"Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them."

This is the Godhead: God the Father, as seen in Israel. God the Son, Jesus Christ, as seen through the Church. God the Holy Spirit, as seen in the hearts of God's faithful. And He, the Triune God, 'searches hearts'. The Trinitarian Godhead is communicating within the Godhead. There is overlap. God the Father, who 'searches hearts' knows the mind of the Spirit. God the Son 'searches hearts' and intercedes on our behalf before the Father. God the Holy Spirit intercedes for us enabling us to pray as we ought. This is the Godhead working in concert, without our help at all. It is All Him.

Prayer is not about us, or about our right words, or about our blessing. Prayer is all about the Triune God. We cannot approach God on our own, and we have no idea of

what to pray for. Yet, the Will of God is in full grasp, by way of the Spirit, who is in us. Those in Christ have an external intercession, in the Christian's heart, to align our lives to His Will. It is nothing of our doing. It is only Him who does this. C. H. Dodd says it this way. "Prayer is the divine in us appealing to the Divine above us."

This is God moving us to pray, searching us while we pray, giving us what to pray for by His Holy Spirit, as we seek His Will. Can there be any greater encouragement than this? No. Prayer is the Spirit's supplication. Prayer is not left to us to sort out.

A Proper Theology of Prayer:

It is the Spirit who is in us that intercedes with/before our hearts, along with Christ, who intercedes for us before the Father. Prayer, then, offers to God, by way of the Spirit, what we 'ought'. This is 'Triune' work.

Triune Prayer, understood rightly, is not our words at all, but what lies behind them. Yes we use words to pray, but what is important is what lies behind those words, that being the work of the Spirit on our behalf, the intercession of Christ on our behalf before the Father.

The prayer of Acts 9 has recognition of this truth, acknowledging all that God Alone offers to the 'weak' creation. Only God has power over life.

Acts 9:36-42

Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas, She was full of good works and acts of charity. In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her they laid her in an upper room, Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him. Please come to us without delay. So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed and turning to the body he said, 'Tabitha, arise.' And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord."

We cannot leave today without considering the implications of these verses. We all struggle in our prayer life. But there is Spirit Help in prayer.

Spirit Help in Prayer:

1. The text presupposes that there is a right way to pray, and we 'cannot pray as we ought'. We cannot do it, apart from the Holy Spirit. So, what of the prayer of the unbeliever? The unbeliever has no access to God through Christ, and therefore there is no intercession present. But for the believer, we have Spirit Help. Yet so often we choose self help.

Galatians 5:16

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh."

Galatians 5:17

"For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do."

Yes, we choose self-help because of our propensity to act in the flesh. Thus, in the economy of the flesh, we offer up these types of 'wrong' prayers.

i) Prayers of Sensuality: Prayers focused on the material goods scene where the mindset is set on self, on selfish requests, on what the senses are wanting, instead of eyes being focused on the unseen things.

ii) Prayers of Idolatry: Prayers focused on one thing, that you should never lose 'your idol'. 'All I am asking Lord, is just this.' But this is 'bargaining' with God.

iii) Prayers of Anger: Prayers stating, 'God, you understand why I am so mad.' But such prayers are irreverent, and are not true prayers. Calm down, repent, and then go to God in the Spirit.

2. Prayer is not about requests. Prayer is about recognition. Prayer is knowing that we cannot do it.

Recognition is not knowing what is coming, and having to ask for it. It is not about appealing to God to change His mind about a matter. It is acknowledging that God-Alone knows what is best. Jesus left an example of prayer for us to follow.

Matthew 6:10

"Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."

Jesus does not say 'do it my way'. No. He states 'your kingdom' and 'your will' when He speaks to God the Father. And James confirms this proper mindset when he states the right way to pray.

James 4:15

"Instead you ought to say, 'If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.'"

God, you are omniscient. Not me. You know the future. I do not. You know what is best for me. I do not. Therefore, Father, help me never to pray against Your Will, in my weakness.

3. The reality of Triune Activity is its own motivation. Triune Activity is our motivation to pray, not circumstances. No amount of prayer guilt can help us to pray correctly. Guilt will not help our prayer life. Neither prayer steps, nor prayer amount, will correct and

establish our motivation. It is not about the amount of prayer, or that more prayer is needed. It is about our motivation to 'pray rightly' to God. The work and the person of the Triune God will motivate us to pray as we ought, not job, circumstance, or any earthly thing. What God does, and who He is, having blessed us with salvation, and being Sovereign God, He fuels us to prayer. Triune God Alone is doing the work, establishing the motivation. Prayer is obedience, but it is also a window for Triune activity, where God's good Will is being worked out through Triune Activity. Prayer is driven by this reality. Does this not stir us to pray? We are weak, and we don't know, but God does. And in and through prayer, God the Almighty condescends to allow us, to help us, to access His Will. Prayer is 'front row seat' access to God.