

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PRAYER

Romans 8:26-27

One of the ^{world's greatest} ~~greatest~~ poets ~~of all times~~ ^{wrote} declared, "The greatest activity of which the human soul is capable is the activity of prayer." I would add something to that: "The greatest privilege that any mortal man has is the high privilege of praying." How much do you know about prayer? I have been praying a good many years, yet I must confess that I do not know too much about prayer. When asked what he considered to be the greatest field for future discovery, Charles Steinmetz, the great scientist, instantly replied, "Prayer." Find out about prayer. You say that all of us pray and we believe in prayer - this is the most natural thing in all the world to do, but that is not true. The Bible does not teach that it is natural or easy to pray. The Bible teaches that prayer is a tremendous battle and that you and I must have help in prayer or we shall fail. I know that I fail in prayer many times. We need to find out about prayer. To find out what the New Testament teaches about prayer we must understand the relationship of the work of the Holy Spirit to that of prayer.

Our text says, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities." Paul is talking about our infirmities ^{or} weaknesses in prayer -- "for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." What truth does the apostle try to set forth about prayer in these verses? He points out three things:

I. First of all, he says that apart from the work of the Holy Spirit there is no real prayer. We cannot pray in our own power anymore than we can save ourselves - anymore than we can be filled with God of ourselves. The initiative and the dynamics of prayer

comes from God the Father through the Holy Spirit. Prayer begins in the heart of God and comes to our heart. If the Holy Spirit does not generate prayer, there is no real praying. Prayer is the Holy Spirit within us appealing to the God above us. This is why it is so tremendously important that we know the ministry of the Holy Spirit. We cannot pray unless we know Him and His ministry in our lives, according to Paul. Our prayers will fail absolutely unless we have His intercession and His help in prayer.

II. The text promises that the saints of God can prevail in prayer because of the intercession of the Holy Spirit. "The Spirit himself," Paul says, "maketh intercession for us ^{with groanings} which cannot be uttered." We have an intercessor in prayer. Paul points out many factors and you have to look at several things he mentions.

(1) He says the Spirit helpeth our infirmities. He is talking about our weakness in prayer. We are weak; we cannot pray of ourselves; we cannot merely say, "we are going to pray." We must pray in the Spirit of God and Paul says that the "Spirit helpeth." This word "helpeth" is a little word in the English tongue, but it is a long Greek word of 17 letters. It is the word sunantilambenetai. It is made up of two prepositions and one verb. I tell you this so that we may better understand it. It is made up of the preposition ^{"sun"} ~~#####~~ which means "with." It is made ^{up} of the preposition "anti" which means "at the other end of," and it is made up of the verb "lambenetai" which means "to take hold of." So what Paul is saying is, that the Holy Spirit "takes hold of at the other end with." In other words, prayer is too much for us. We cannot get through to God, but the Holy Spirit can and does take the burden of prayer, lifting it with us to God. It is the picture of two men carrying a tremendous load, one at one end and one at the other.

We used to have to move a lot of heavy things on the farm and my father would say, "Son, grab ahold and help me." That is the best way I can illustrate what the Holy Spirit does in prayer. The Holy Spirit grabs a hold and brings to heaven the desires of our heart if we will depend on Him. He puts the power and intensity of God in our praying

so that there will be real energy rather than futile words behind it. He helps us by "grabbing hold."

(2) But Paul also says that the Holy Spirit maketh intercession for us. I can illustrate intercession like this: Just suppose we have a court case and we do not feel able to plead our case because we do not know the law and legal terminology. So we employ a lawyer who can speak the language that a Judge appreciates and that the court will understand. The Bible says that the believer has two advocates at his disposal, — Jesus Christ in heaven, and the Holy Spirit in the inner sanctuary of our soul. He is our intercessor in prayer, Paul says. The Holy Spirit takes our feeble words, our faltering speech, even our unexpressed words, and translates them to God.

George Mathison, the great hymn writer, says that the prayers of the spirit are the unuttered voices of the soul. The Holy Spirit is the one we need to pray for us more than anyone in all the world. We need His intercessory work in prayer as He pleads and as He translates the real needs and desires of our *life. lives to the Father.*

(3) Paul says that the Holy Spirit intercedes for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. We are in the realm of great mystery. Some of the great prayer warriors of history tell of their groaning in prayer; they tell of their prostration before God in prayer. The great soulwinners have been men who have sometimes prayed all night and groaned in their spirit with the Holy Spirit. We cannot deny that prayer is the greatest battle in all the world and the greatest exercise of the soul. It cannot necessarily be done cheaply and quickly; it involves everything within a man. But I do not believe that the groaning is necessarily conscious to the spirit. I am sure that the Holy Spirit groans when we do not know He is groaning. I do not believe that prevailing prayer depends upon feeling and emotion necessarily. However, the great moments of prayer in my life have been when an intensity gripped my heart, enabling me to pray all night better than I can pray thirty minutes when ~~I am dull or when~~ I am not in the spirit of God. When the Holy Spirit moves and begins to do His intercessory work, then you can pray. This is the way we must

pray in order to get through to God effectively, according to Paul. I cannot say how it will take form in your life. You may groan along with Him, you may hear His groanings, I don't know, but Paul says the intercession of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by unutterable groanings.

III. The text says that if we depend on Him, the Holy Spirit will always prevail because He prays only in the will of God. That is what verse 27 says. "And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth the mind of the spirit, for he (that is the Holy Spirit) maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." The Holy Spirit will never bring anything to God except that which is His will. Not only will He do that, but He will sanctify our desires and our motives so that we will pray more and more in the will of God and will be asking those things that will glorify Christ rather than ourselves.

I like Psalm 37:4: "Delight thyself in the Lord and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart." But no one can claim this promise except through the work of the Holy Spirit, because only as He works in our hearts and purifies our motives will we delight in the Lord. When we delight in the Lord we will want the Lord's will, and He shall give us the desires of our heart. As we understand our absolute dependence upon the Holy Spirit we ^{realize we} cannot pray of ourselves. It is highly doubtful that just anyone should pray in a public service lest a farce be made of prayer. You must be very careful. You just do not pray anytime. We pray in accordance with our relationship to the Holy Spirit; He is the one who begins the prayer process in our lives. He is the initiative and also the dynamics of prayer. When we will realize this and will look to Him, He will grab ahold, Paul says. He will intercede and He will do it with groanings that cannot be uttered. He will never fail. A person who prays in the Spirit and depends upon the Holy Spirit will never fail to have a rich prayer life. There is nothing in the world that I would rather ^{experience} ~~unlock~~ than Romans 8:26 and 27. I hope that God will show me more and more about what He is trying to say, because this is the greatest insight on prayer that has ever

been written - the relationship of the Holy Spirit to prayer.

You might be thinking, "I give up. Prayer is too complicated." Paul did not write these verses to discourage us, but to tell you and me that we are weak and cannot pray of ourselves; that we have the Holy Spirit who will energize us to pray and will intercede for us as we pray. This proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that a man who is not a Christian cannot pray. Unless the Holy Spirit is within a man he cannot pray. Prayer begins with God - not with us. We need to recognize our weakness, and we need to avail ourselves of the wonderful aid that is proffered by the Holy Spirit. A man is very much like a receiving set on a radio when it comes to prayer. ~~According to Paul,~~ Just as the electrical current is necessary before there can be any reception on the radio, the Holy Spirit's presence and ministry must be present before there will ever be any response in our hearts to God and to prayer, *according to Paul.*

I have noticed that people who are filled with the Spirit are praying people. He wants us to pray. How about your individual life? Do you really feel a desire, a tremendous movement in your soul, to pray? The answer is to rely upon the Holy Spirit. When we do that, then there will be in our heart the initiative and the dynamic to pray. The Holy Spirit will never fail to prevail because He intercedes for us, according to the will of God.