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The Holy Spirit—Our Helper

Bethany Bible Church, Adult Sunday School Class, February 12, 2012

The Spirit--Our Helper in Prayer

“In intercessory prayer . . . the Father is the Giver, the Son is the Teacher, and the Holy Spirit is the Helper. As we go to prayer, the first thing we should do is with bowed head and uplifted heart call on the Holy Spirit to aid us as we pray.”¹

In this closing section of our study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we’ll be focusing on several ways that the Spirit serves as the divine “Helper” of the saints that He indwells. Earlier in our study, we learned that the Lord Jesus called the Holy Spirit our "Helper" (see John 14:16-17). The Greek word that was used is *parakletos* (from *para*, which means "along" or "beside"; and *kletos*, which means "someone who is called"). A *parakletos* is someone 'called alongside' to provide comfort to someone else, or to stand as their advocate, or to provide help to them in times of need. That’s what the Holy Spirit is to us-- and in many different and wonderful ways.

One of the most precious of the helps He provides for us is in our prayers. The passage that best describes this ministry for us is Romans 8:26-27; “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God.”²

Consider what this passage tells us about . . .

I. THE NEED WE HAVE IN OUR PRAYERS.

A. First, note that the apostle Paul stresses that we are weak and in need. He says “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weakness . . .” (v. 26). This is a vital thing to admit. One of the very worst things we can do in prayer is to try to come to God in the confidence of our own merit and abilities. Perhaps a picture of this might be found in the Lord’s parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. We’re told that the Pharisee stood and prayed “thus with himself . . .” (Luke 18:11). His prayers ascended no higher than his nose! The Bible teaches us to pray to God with an attitude of reverent dependency. It is through Jesus, as Paul wrote, that both Jew and Gentile now “have access by one Spirit to the Father” (Ephesians 2:18). When we pray, our prayers are to, in fact, be uttered in dependency upon the whole Trinity; “praying” as Jude wrote “in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life” (Jude 20-21).

B. And then, note how Paul describes the nature of our weakness; “For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought . . .”--that is to say, our weakness is because of our ignorance. In our ignorance, we don’t know even a fraction of the full truth of the situations for which we pray. We don’t know the real needs of the people for whom we pray. We don’t know how those needs can best be answered. We don’t know what it may be that God is seeking to do in and through their needs. We don’t know what the eventual outcome is that God has decreed. What’s more, we don’t even know ourselves as we should. We can’t always see how our motives may be wrong. We don’t know how much it is that we don’t know. We don’t know how best to phrase things in our prayers. 1 John 5:14-15 speaks of how, “if we ask anything according to His will, He

hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.” But left to ourselves, there’s so little we truly know of God’s will in order to faithfully ask according to it! Our need in our prayers is great because of the greatness of our ignorance! And if we don’t realize this, then it goes to show just how terribly ignorant we truly are!

II. THE HELP THE HOLY SPIRIT PROVIDES.

- A. In the light of this, we can see how wonderful the Spirit’s help is in our prayers. First, we see that “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weakness” (v. 26). The word that the apostle Paul uses for “helps” here (*sunantilambanomai*) is a wonderful word in this context. It means “to take up with” or “take hold of with” someone else--in order to lend them support. Martha used this word when she told the Lord Jesus to command her sister Mary to “help” her in her “much serving” (Luke 10:40). The Holy Spirit ‘takes hold with us’ of this awesome task of prayer that we are far too weak in our ignorance to perform correctly. And He does so “likewise” or “in the same way” as something else that Paul mentioned in Romans 8. He had just mentioned the “hope” of our future glorification in Christ in verses 18-25. That hope of our glorious resurrection gives us confidence in our times of greatest weakness and suffering. And just as this “hope” sustains us in our times of suffering and trial on earth, so also the Holy Spirit also helps us in our prayers.
- B. In the light of our weakness through ignorance, the nature of the Holy Spirit’s help is to Himself make “intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered” (v. 26). Some have turned to this passage with respect to the practice of speaking or praying in tongues (see 1 Corinthians 11:13-14). But those would be “utterances”; whereas Paul is here pointing to our absolute dependency upon the Holy Spirit’s work of speaking on our behalf through ‘groanings which *cannot* be uttered’. The word that Paul used for that which is ‘unutterable’ (*alalytos*) is the same word Peter used when he said that, though not yet seeing Jesus, we believe on Him and “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8). Thus the Spirit helps us in our prayers not only by praying accurately for us about the things for which we are ignorant, but also through deep expressions of the heart to the father for which mere human language is insufficient to form into words. What prayers these must be that the Spirit prays for us!

III. THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SPIRIT’S HELP.

- A. As if to assure us of the sufficiency of the Spirit’s intercession on our behalf, Paul then adds, “Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is . . .” The One who searches the hearts (plural) is the Father. As He says in Jeremiah 17:10, “I, the Lord, search the heart, I test the mind, even to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” And not only are our hearts thoroughly searched-out by God the Father through the ministry of the Spirit (who knows both what we want and what we truly need), but the same Father who knows our hearts also knows the mind of the Spirit. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 2:9-11, “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God. For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God.”

B. We could not have a more effective Intercessor than a divine Friend who knows fully what is in our hearts, and is known fully by the Father. What's more, He knows fully what the will of the Father is, because He knows the mind of the Father. Thus Paul could stress the perfect efficiency of the Spirit's intercession for us, "because He makes intercession for the saints according to the will of God." This means that when the Holy Spirit intercedes for us, His prayers are prayed on our behalf perfectly, and in a way that is in complete accord with the Father's will and that truly meets the need. And therefore, all His prayers for us on our behalf are answered perfectly!

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In thinking of the Holy Spirit's wonderful ministry of intercession in our prayers, someone might be tempted to think, "Well, then; why should I even bother to pray?" But the exact opposite ought to be the case. We should become even more motivated to pray--knowing that we have a divine Helper in our prayers, whose ministry on our behalf ensures that our prayers are always made into that which the Father delights to answer.

How we should praise God, then, for the Spirit's help in our prayers! How confident we should be in our prayers! How encouraged this should make us to pray even more!

¹William Fitch, *The Ministry of The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 176.

²All Scripture readings are taken from *the Holy Bible, New King James Version*; copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.