

OUR HELPER IN PRAYER

Theme: The Holy Spirit is our divine helper in prayer.

It's very hard to draw near the end of a study on the Person of the Holy Spirit. There is so very much to talk about! In this closing section of our study of the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we'll be focusing on a variety of ways that the Spirit serves as the divine "Helper" of the saints that He indwells. Praise God, we have many things yet to discuss and celebrate!

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.

And one of the most precious of the helps He provides for us is in our prayers. William Fitch wrote; "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

A passage that very wonderfully describes this ministry for us—perhaps the very best one for us to go to on this subject—is Romans 8:26-27. In it, Paul wrote,

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 (Romans 8:26-27).²

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Consider what this passage tells us about . . .

I. THE NEED WE HAVE IN OUR PRAYERS.

- A. We should first note that the apostle Paul stresses that we are weak and in need when it comes to prayer. He says "Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weakness ..." (v. 26). This is not only an honest thing to admit, but it's also vital. 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 prayer was very arrogant and self-righteous; and we note that it specifically says that he prayed thus "with himself". In other words, God did not honor his arrogant prayer; and it ascended no higher than his own 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, in fact, to 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. So, Paul first affirms that we need help in our prayers because we are weak. But then, note further 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 met. We don’t know what it may be that God is seeking to do for them in and through their needs. We don’t know what the eventual outcome is that our sovereign God has decreed in those needs. What’s more, we don’t know our own selves as we should. We can’t always see how our motives may be wrong in our prayers. We don’t even know how much it is that we don’t know! We certainly don’t know how best to phrase things in our prayers. 1 John 5:14-15 speaks of a great promise when it tells us that,

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 (1 John 5;14-15).

But left to ourselves, there’s little we truly know of God’s will in order to faithfully ask in accord with His will! Our need in our prayers is very great because of the greatness of our ignorance. And if we don’t realize this fact, then—of course—it just goes further to show just how terribly ignorant we truly are!

II. THE HELP THE HOLY SPIRIT PROVIDES.

- A. In the light of this, then, we can see how wonderful the Spirit’s help is in our prayers. First, we can see—as Paul tells us—that “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weakness” (v. 26). The Greek word that the apostle Paul uses for “helps” here (*sunantilambanomai*) is a wonderful word in this context. (It’s such a long word, it certainly ought to be wonderful!) It means “to take up with” or “take hold of with” someone else—that is, in order to lend them support. The Gospel writer Matthew used this word to translate what Martha told the Lord Jesus, when she asked Him to command her sister Mary to “help” her in her “much serving” (Luke 10:40). Prayer is too great and wonderful a thing for the Holy Spirit to leave us to do it alone. The Holy Spirit ‘takes up with us’ and ‘takes hold with us’ this awesome task of prayer that we are far too weak in our ignorance to perform correctly.
- B. And He does so “likewise” or “in the same way” as something else that Paul mentioned in Romans 8. If we look at the immediate context of that chapter, we find that he had just mentioned the “hope” of our future glorification in Christ in verses 18-25;

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits 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; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body. For we were saved in this hope, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one still hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance (Romans 8:18-25).

That hope of our glorious future 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 “likewise” helps us in our prayers.

- C. In the light of our weakness through ignorance, the nature of the Holy Spirit’s help is—as Paul goes on to say—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 with us and 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. Just think of what prayers these must be that the Spirit prays for us on our behalf!

III. THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SPIRIT’S HELP.

- A. And as if to assure us of the efficiency 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” (Jeremiah 17:10).

And not only are our hearts thoroughly searched-out by God the Father through the ministry of the Spirit (who perfectly knows not only what we want in our stammering prayers, but also 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 (1 Corinthians 2:9-11).

- B. We could not have a more effective Intercessor than our divine Friend and Helper who has made His residence in us; and who—knowing fully what is in our hearts—is also fully known 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 His ministry should make us to be in our prayers! How His constant Help should encourage 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.