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The Benefits that Flow from Christ, Part 9

The Benefit of God's Presence

There are times in our reading of the Bible when our soul longs to have been apart of what we read. For example in 2 Kings 6 Elisha prays for the eyes of his servant to be opened that his servant might see the host of angels surrounding and protecting them. Imagine being there and beholding God's power?

Or think of Moses in Exodus 13 where God manifested Himself to the Israelites in the cloud and fire. You would only need to look up and see your redemption. Or perhaps the most incredible time would have been when Christ walked the earth. Imagine being able to talk face-to-face with the Lord of creation and watch the miracles being performed and participating in His power.

We would all probably respond like Peter. Peter was a weak and cowardice man. But when he was in the presence of his Lord, he became a man of boldness knowing that NOTHING could harm him so long as Christ was there.

And that is why Christ's words in the gospel of John are so amazing.

John 16:7, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you."

According to this passage God's people would receive the fullness of Divine help when Christ left; until He "went to the Father." Now brothers and sisters, as amazing as that promise is, the passage we are addressing

today serves as partial confirmation of it.

Help in the Time of Our Weakness

Paul has been discussing the benefits that flow from Christ. In Christ we receive

- No Condemnation, Romans 8:1-4a.
- Fellowship with God, Romans 8:4b-8.
- A Transformed Life, Romans 8:9-11.
- A New Priority, Romans 8:12-13.
- Sonship, Romans 8:14-17.
- The Promise of Glory, Romans 8:18-25.

Now, the seventh benefit that Paul mentions in Romans 8 is the benefit of help in the time of our weakness. Let us examine this passage, looking first at the nature of our help.

The Nature of Our Help

Romans 8:26, "**Likewise [just as the knowledge of God's promised glory helps us in our sufferings] the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities:** 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.

This is an incredible promise. The word for help¹ is a combination of three different words which denote the idea of "laying hold of someone's weakness along with them and helping them carry the burden that is being faced."

This concept reminds me of the friend I had in Seminary who illustrated this relationship with the work he used to do as a child. He lived on a ranch, and so every year they had to fix the fence that bordered their property. Now when he was a little boy, he would help his father by digging the holes for the new fence posts. Yet, looking back he related how his ability to make any of the holes was solely on account of his father grabbing the fence-hole digger over his hands, AND DIGGING WITH HIM!

That is a beautiful illustration of the Spirit's aid in our lives. Where we are weak, the Spirit of God "comes along side us and carries our burdens" or our "weaknesses." And what specifically are these "weaknesses"?

The term *weak* originally referred to bodily sickness, but it came to be used of any sort of weakness, especially that of a SPIRITUAL kind. It is to be one who easily falls into sin or quickly shrinks back from life's struggles. For example, notice how it is used in other passages.

- Hebrews 5:2: speaking of the importance of having priests who are human, "He can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness."
- Leviticus 26:36: speaking of the discipline God would give if His people disobeyed, "...I will also bring weakness into their hearts... And the sound of a driven leaf will chase them and even when no one is pursuing, they will flee as though from the sword, and they will fall."

See, to be weak in Scripture is to be vulnerable or susceptible to failure. It's to be easily frightened; it's to be

¹ συναντιλαμβανομαι sunantilambanomai

one who easily flees. It's like the injured animal that has a lame leg. The lame animal holds his leg up into his body so that the leg won't make contact with the ground.

That's the idea here. Rather than confronting the difficulties of life, the weak shrink back to a comfortable distance. And such is the state of so many of us. Though we have been saved by grace, nevertheless we have weaknesses. Perhaps yours is a difficult relationship. Whether it is a co-worker or one of your children, you can't seem to make it work. And so, rather than addressing the issue, you've begun to shrink back or give up.

Or perhaps your weakness is difficult past. Perhaps you were abused as a child. Or maybe you had some rough college years. And for fear of anyone finding out, you have withdrawn.

Or perhaps your weakness is a fear of the future. You've just received an unfavorable diagnosis. Your debts are piling up. You're not sure where you will be working. And so, you've begun doubting God's goodness.

Whatever may be your weakness, your area of struggle, the GOOD NEWS is that as a result of the cross of Christ, the child of God has a Comforter who comes along side and helps them in their weakness.

Romans 8:26, "**Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities²**: 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."

Now, as wonderful as this truth is, up till now Paul's explanation is rather "pie in the sky." Knowing this, Paul gives an example of how the Spirit of God "helps us."

An Example of Our Help

Romans 8:26, "**Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: 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."

This is such an important example. Paul is not being arbitrary here when it comes to his choice of examples. No, the Apostle has chosen to illustrate the Spirit's help when it comes to our ULTIMATE WEAKNESS: Prayer!

You say, "Wait a minute! Prayer is my greatest weakness? Yes, my prayer life isn't what it ought to be, but you obviously have never walked in my shoes!" And yet, think about it. Is there any greater area of weakness in a mortal's life than when he is in the presence of God?!

Truly there is no greater illustration of weakness than when

- The finite approaches the Infinite.
- The mortal approaches the Eternal.
- The ignoble approaches the King of Kings.
- The sinner approaches the Great I Am.

Questions³

² Other examples include Philippians 1:19; 2:12-13

3. Another example are the Seraphim of Isaiah 6. Do you remember them, how they constantly cry out, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts..."? What makes this cry significant is that these angels are without sin! See we tend to think that "Holy" is a declaration of one's sinlessness- but it's not. "Holy" in the Bible first and foremost means "different" or "other." And so, as the

Recall Isaiah's response when he was confronted by God in Isaiah 6. He pronounced the strongest self-curse that the Hebrew language employed.

Isaiah 6:5, "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts."

Recall Ezekiel, who can begin to understand his description of God as found in Ezekiel 1? Read it sometime; it's incredible! And yet, this is the God with whom we have to do! And recall Moses, who in the presence of God "made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship" (Exodus 34:8). Truly, time would fail us to consider

- Job.
- Habakkuk.
- The Apostles.
- The Prophets.
- The Angels.
- And many, many others who in the pages of Scripture sit speechless before the Majesty and Glory of Almighty God!

This is why we are not shocked to read of the testimony of A. W. Tozer when he said this:

"The man who comes to a right belief about God is relieved of 10,000 temporal problems, for he sees at once that these have to do with matters which at the most cannot concern him for very long; but even if the multiple burdens of time may be lifted from him, the one mighty single burden of eternity begins to press down on him with a weight more crushing than all the woes of the world piled one upon another. That mighty burden is his obligation to God..."⁴

Truly, when it comes to the sinner approaching God, when it comes to the area of prayer, we discover that we are indeed weak. What mortal can approach an eternal and holy God and not be inadequate? John Bunyan describes it this way:

"I find that my heart is slow to go to God; and when it does go to Him it does not seem to want to stay with Him; so that very often I am forced in my prayers, first to beg of God that He would take my heart and set it on Himself, and then when it is there, that He would keep it there."⁵

Paul here is not being arbitrary when it comes to his example of our weakness. No, when it comes to a sinful being approaching a holy God, there is no better example of our greatest weakness. One of the ancient church fathers put it this way, "There is no work quite so difficult as praying to God."⁶

AND YET NOTICE: It is at this point of weakness that the Spirit enters in and helps us: the Spirit gives our desires a language that is both heard and understood by God.

Romans 8:26, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: 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**

SINLESS Seraphim minister in the presence of God, they are shocked and amazed at His Greatness!

⁴ A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, HarperOne, 1978, page 10-11

⁵ Quoted in Leon Morris' commentary on Romans, page. 327, footnote #113

⁶ Quoted by Martin Luther in Luther's commentary on Romans, page 176.

uttered.”

As we struggle when it comes to approaching God, we can take comfort in knowing that the Spirit is also praying for and with us, He is helping us in our weaknesses! As much as some might insist, you cannot read tongues into this verse (if for no other reason than Paul is describing ALL Christians- and not everyone spoke in tongues in the Apostolic age). In fact, the object of the “groanings” in this verse is not the believer, but the Spirit of God.

And so as the Spirit prays for the child of God, He prays with “groanings too deep for words” which carries the idea that the Spirit's prayer on our behalf is profound. It is so profound that words cannot express it. They are the inaudible words of the Spirit of God on behalf of the spiritual welfare of each believer. And so, just as Christ intercedes for us in the courts of heaven⁷ so also the Holy Spirit prays for us in the theatre of our heart.⁸ **AND THUS WE OVERCOME OUR GREATEST WEAKNESS AS MORTAL MEN: COMMUNION WITH GOD!**

The Certainty of Help

And yet, as Wonderful and Comforting as this truth is, this raises a question: Is the Spirit's “help” able to be thwarted? Can Satan, man, or my sin mess up God's plans?

Romans 8:27, “**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.”

Paul continues with his example of prayer with the implication that if it is true of prayer, it is true with every other weakness.

In Scripture, only God is the One who can search the heart of man.⁹ If God knows the heart of a weak and sinful man, certainly He also knows what the mind of the Spirit is.

Now, much could be said about this phrase, specifically the words used and their influence on the overall meaning of this verse. And yet, let me try to simplify the idea here that God knows the mind of the Spirit is to say nothing less than God hears the Spirit's prayer on our behalf, approves of them, and thus answers them.

This is the force of *knows*! To say that God “knows” the mind of the Spirit is to say that God approves of that which occupies the Spirit's mind. This leads to the conclusion that the prayers of the Spirit are effectual! Whatever the Spirit prays on our behalf WILL take place! Now if there was any doubt remaining, Paul adds these words final words “because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.”

This is an important addition to Paul's argument. Recall God's word elsewhere regarding prayer.

1 John 5:14, “And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”

John 14:14, “If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it.”

Christ is saying that our asking must be according to the character of Christ. Prayer in Christ's name is saying “This I believe to be the prayer Christ would have prayed if He were in my situation.” When we go to God in

⁷ Compare also Romans 8:34; Hebrews 7:25; 1 John 2:1

⁸ Compare John 14:16-17

⁹ Compare Psalm 7:9; Proverbs 17:3; Acts 1:24; 1 Thessalonians 2:4; Revelation 2:23

prayer and ask for that which He already is going to do, asking according to His will, we know that God surely will answer that prayer in the affirmative.

And yet, this is where the problem arises. We do not always know how to ask according to God's will. And so, like Paul, at times we can be found asking for that which is not God's will, and the answer we receive is "No." Now, as difficult as that can be for us, the incredible news is that the Spirit never has this problem. He always prays according to God's will, which leads to the conclusion that the Spirit's help in the area of prayer is always effective!

And if He is effective in the area of our greatest weakness, Prayer, we know that the Spirit's help in all other areas of our lives will likewise be effective! And so, whether it is in the realm of

- Prayer.
- Ministry.
- Family.
- Work.
- Conflict.

The Spirit's workings on our behalf are always effectual!

Now this is an important truth to understand when it comes to our lives on this earth. At any given moment in your life there are two that are working: you and the Spirit.

- When you pray: It is you AND the Spirit.
- When you Witness: It is you EMPOWERED by the Spirit.
- When you Struggle: It is you SUPPORTED by the Spirit.
- When you Grieve: It is you COMFORTED by the Spirit.
- When you Fall: It is you PROTECTED by the Spirit.
- When you Sin: It is you CONVICTED by the Spirit.
- When you are Restored: It is you STRENGTHENED by the Spirit.

What a glorious truth! Oh, what sort of people ought we to be in this life?

Hebrews 10:39 is a phenomenal passage. It was written to a group of people who obviously lived in a time of severe persecution. Christians were being imprisoned and even killed. Their property was confiscated. Their homes were destroyed. And yet the believers who had yet to be so treated were faced with the question of whether they would go underground and disappear or fulfill their debt of love and visit their brothers and sisters in prison so that they could comfort and encourage those being persecuted. As they visited them they too would be at risk of being identified with them and thus be persecuted themselves.

And yet, the Hebrew writer exhorts them NOT to shrink back BUT, by implication, to continue to

- Endure!
- Stand!
- Serve!
- Suffer!

Now the question we ask is this: On what basis? How could these persecuted Hebrews continue to endure such great sufferings? Notice the Text.

Hebrews 10:39, "But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul."

Oh brothers and sisters, don't miss it. The persecuted Hebrews could have "steadfast reliance" ****AND**** we too can have steadfast reliance because they and we have someone to rely upon: The Spirit of God. We can rely upon the fact the Spirit of God NOT ONLY is with us during our greatest time of need BUT ALSO is there strengthening us!

And thus, in our greatest times of weakness we can pray with the weak father who approached Christ:

Mark 9:24, "And straightway the father of the child cried out, and said with tears, Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief."

We can have the confidence that the Spirit will certainly help us!

Oh, what a glorious benefit that flows from the cross of Christ: The Spirit helps us in our weakness! And yet, this is not without its struggles. Because of our feeble frame and mind, there will be many times in our lives when

- We work at cross purposes with the Spirit.
- What we want is not what God wants.
- What we desire is not the Spirit's desire.

Yet let me encourage you that it is at these times, when it doesn't work out as we have labored and prayed, that we must NOT doubt the Spirit's presence in our lives BUT submit to the wisdom of God and trust Him! That is why the very next verse in our passage is so important.

Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

The Spirit of God helps us in our weaknesses. And thus, we must trust that He knows what's best when life doesn't make sense! I love the account related by Dr. Hendriksen:

"A pastor, loved by his people, became grievously ill. The congregation prayed, 'Lord, please restore him to health.' But he died. At the funeral a minister who had been a lifelong friend of the departed made this remark to the assembled mourners, 'Perhaps some of you are in danger of arriving at the conclusion that the heavenly Father does not hear prayer. He does indeed hear prayer, however. But in this particular case two prayers were probably opposing each other. *You* were praying, "O God, spare his life, for we need him so badly." *The Spirit's* unspoken prayer was, "Take him away, for [his work is done]." And the Father heard that prayer.'"¹⁰

Oh brothers and sisters, at those times when our circumstances don't turn out the way we want, we must NOT doubt whether the Spirit of God is there helping us BUT RATHER, we must know that such is the will of God for our good and continue to trust in Him!

There was a time in Paul's life when he found himself, like many of us, weak! Now he couldn't understand why God had ordained such a weakness. He in fact believed that he could better serve God without and that

¹⁰ From Hendriksen's commentary on Romans, page 274.

certainly God would be pleased to take it away. And so he prayed to God on two separate occasions, "Oh God, take my weakness away!" And God was silent.

But then the third time that Paul prayed this, God answered him with these words:

2 Corinthians 12:9, "And he said unto me, **My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.** Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

a.

Now let me ask you a very important question. What is the grace of God in this passage? What is the grace of God that...

- Satisfies our weakness?
- Strengthens us?
- Upholds?
- Enables us to stand in the midst of great difficulty and trial?

While we might suggest a variety of means whereby we receive God's grace, nevertheless we believe that those "means" become a source of grace only by the working of God's Spirit in them! And so understand God's answer to all those who are weak and long for deliverance the salvation of God in this life is maintained NOT by God removing us from our weakness BUT by God strengthening us in them such that we learn to rely wholly upon God.

And brothers and sisters, that is one of the benefits that flow from the cross of Christ, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities," Romans 8:26.

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on October 19, 2008. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church