

Romans

Romans Chapter Eight

Romans 8:26-27

January 9, 2011

This is lesson number 72 in our exposition of the Book of Romans.

The Theme of the Letter

“For I am not ashamed of **the gospel of Christ**, for it is the **power** of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the **righteousness of God** is **revealed** from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’ ” Romans 1:16-17

“The Work of the Spirit”

Let me begin by making a confession. For many years I did not have a proper appreciation of the work of the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Holy Trinity. Like most Baptists I allowed the charismatics to hijack talking about the work of the Holy Spirit because of their abuse of who He is and what He does. Consequently, I did not speak much about the extent of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Of course I knew that the Holy Spirit is the One who applies the Word of God to convict of sin and judgment. The Holy Spirit is the One who through the means of the gospel quickens or makes alive the soul that is dead in trespasses and sins. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit, no one is able to effectually hear the Gospel and receive the Gospel by faith and be saved.

But the thing that has recently been impressed on my mind as I have studied Romans Chapter Eight in order to teach it to you is the continued work of the Spirit in the life of the believer. I am not saying that I had no idea of the work of the Spirit, but I failed to see just how pervasive is His work in every aspect of the believer’s life from his calling and justification, his sanctification, and ultimately to his glorification.

Please entertain that thought, **the extent of the work of the Holy Spirit**, as we study this section from verse 18 through verse 27.

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Romans 8:18-27

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.

19 For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; 21 because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

23 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. 24 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? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we eagerly wait for it with perseverance.

26 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. 27 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.

We have been considering how the Holy Spirit gives assurance to those who are in Christ Jesus. Chapter Eight begins with perhaps the greatest statement of assurance that a guilty sinner can ever grasp:

“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus!”

Then Paul is very careful to define **who is** and **who is not** a Christian.

Only the genuine believer may **rightly** claim this assurance. There are many who claim to be Christians who have false assurance. Their assurance of being saved is based on something added to what Jesus has already done.

Paul, in Galatians, calls adding to the work of Christ ‘another gospel.’

Jesus said there were many who claim to believe in Him but who are on the broad way that leads to destruction.

How then can you be sure that you are really saved?

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Peter said to “**make your calling and election sure.**” My urgent plea is for each one of us is to examine ourselves by honestly asking ourselves how we live our lives and how we make choices that affect our lives.

E.g., There is something important looming in your life. Does it always occur to you to know what the Bible has to say about a matter before you make your choices? Conversely, if you know that Bible condemns an action do you go ahead and do it anyway?

In other words, are we living our lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit lives in the believer and therefore the believer lives his life under the influence of the Holy Spirit. By contrast, the unbeliever, no matter how many professions of faith he has made, and no matter how many times he has been baptized, continues to live under the influence of his sinful nature. He may be as religious as was Nicodemus before he was born again but he is too stubborn and prideful to submit to the word of God.

So the apostle, here in Chapter Eight, gives us a clear way to tell if we really are a believer or whether we are only religious and lost.

For one thing he tells the believer that suffering should not surprise him.

Nowhere in the Bible are believers promised that they are exempt from tribulation and suffering and sickness and death.

Verse 18 tells us that the suffering of this **present time** cannot be compared with the promised **glory**.

Let me clarify what I said about the ‘present time.’ I said that the present time was from the resurrection of Christ to the end of the age. In the context of this chapter that is certainly true.

Another Bible term for the period from the resurrection of Christ to the end of the age is the ‘Last Days.’

But in terms of eschatology {last things – vs. 18}, there are only two ages. You can search your Bible from cover to cover and you will find only **two ages**: the **present age** and the **age to come**.

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The **present age** spans from the creation of Adam until the return of Jesus Christ at the end of the age. The **age to come** immediately follows the return of Christ and last forever.

And that's it: only **two ages**: the **present age** and the **age to come**.

All the other eschatological divisions of time, or so-called dispensations, are simply inventions of men that have been imposed on the Scripture.

So what I said about the present time is correct in the context of this section. The present time continues until Christ returns in glory.

And so Christians are subject to suffering for the present time while they wait for glory.

While the children of God wait for the adoption of their bodies, and the glory that is promised, there is **groaning**.

In verses 19-22 it is the **sub-human creation** that groans in eager anticipation of the revelation of the sons of God.

The very earth from which God made Adam, the first man, the rocks, the trees and the birds and beasts of the field: everything else that makes up the non-rational creation **groans together** eagerly waiting for the revelation of the sons of God.

Verses 23-25 tell us that **the elect of God**, "we ourselves," groan in **hope**.

We said that Christian hope is not a "maybe so" kind of hope, it is the absolute confidence that what God has promised He will do.

Those who are in Christ Jesus can know for sure that **they are no longer** subject to the wrath of God, '**no condemnation!**' But the saints of God **are** subject to trials and tribulation and tragedy and sickness and anything else that may come to a human being. **And so they groan.**

But this groaning is in hope. **Groaning to be glorified!** Christian hope is the absolute assurance that no matter what the circumstances of this present time may be, when Christ returns everything will be made perfect. As the song goes, "That will be glory for me!"

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The child of God can know that God has given him God's own righteousness as a gift from God. The child of God is not guilty!
The child of God is a joint-heir with Christ.

The child of God can know that no matter how great are his sins the blood of Jesus propitiates {covers} them. The child of God is no longer under the wrath of God because of what Jesus Christ did on the cross of Calvary.

That assurance is hope that is **seen**.

But Jim, I can't 'see' with my eyes. No but you can 'see' with your understanding. That's one way we use the word 'see,' "Oh, I see!"

The Bible calls hope that is seen **faith**.

Hebrews 11:1

**Now faith is the substance of things hoped for,
the evidence of things not seen.**

Illustration of a bowl of chicken gravy: All of the chicken has been eaten but the gravy is the evidence that there was chicken in that gravy. Faith is the realization, the confidence, and the evidence of things not seen.

Faith that what the virgin born Jesus did by His sinless life and vicarious death, by shedding His precious blood on the cross of Calvary, and having been raised from the dead, is **sufficient** to satisfy the demands of God's holy law. **That is the evidence of things not seen.**

That is what God has already done for His children. But we have the promise of God of what He is yet to do for His children.

That is Paul's argument. We can trust that God is able and willing to keep His promise to His dear children. The promise is that they will be glorified.

So don't ever let suffering or tribulation or anything that happens in your life cause you to doubt the love of God.

Still we groan!

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Today we come to verses 26 and 27 and there is something else about this groaning. Listen very carefully so that I don't confuse you.

In three previous lessons on this section I said that there were **three** subjects who make groanings.

The sub-human **creation** groans,
the **elect** of God groan,
and the Holy Spirit, I said, also groans.

I need to correct what I said.

After more study and thought I am now persuaded that it **is not** the Holy Spirit who makes these groanings that cannot be uttered.

26 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.

This is a difficult passage to interpret and if you read William Hendriksen's commentary and a few of the other writers you could be convinced that it is the Holy Spirit who makes these groanings that cannot be uttered.

The strongest argument that it is the Holy Spirit who groans is that Paul has already brought out the groaning of the elect in verse 23 and so he would not now be referring to the elect in verse 26. Besides, the second part of verse 26 seems to say that it is the Spirit Himself who groans.

But Lloyd-Jones' and other commentaries make an even stronger case that it **is not** the Holy Spirit who is groaning, but rather He **helps** us to pray with groanings that cannot be uttered.

The Holy Spirit is called the 'Helper.'

There are **two things** that convinced me that it is **not** the Holy Spirit who is Himself groaning.

The **first thing** that caused me to change my understanding of this verse, as to who is groaning, is that there is perfect knowledge in the Godhead. The Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God in three persons all have perfect knowledge. God is omniscient.

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Therefore God the Holy Spirit has nothing to groan about. The Holy Spirit knows the mind of God. The Holy Spirit knows that God will bring good out of evil. The Holy Spirit inspired verse 28, so the Holy Spirit is not groaning.

But did not Jesus ‘sigh’ and did not Jesus ‘weep’? As true Man the incarnate Son of God experienced everything that a man could suffer, yet without sin. But as true God, Jesus was never anxious or in doubt.

The **other thing** that caused me to change my view is the word **‘helps.’**

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.

sunantilambanomai (soon-an-tee-lam-ban'-om-ahee;
to take hold of opposite together, i.e. co-operate (assist):

The word picture of ‘helps’ is that of a man trying to carry a large heavy object, perhaps a timber, and he is struggling with it. Along comes another man and takes one end of the object and ‘helps’ the man carry it. The helper is not carrying the object but he is helping to carry it.

So ‘Likewise the Spirit helps in our weaknesses.’

John Calvin on this verse:

“That the faithful may not make this objection – that they are so weak as not to be able to bear so many and so heavy burdens, he brings before them the aid of the Spirit, which is abundantly sufficient to overcome all difficulties. There is then no reason for any one to complain, that the bearing of the cross is beyond their own strength, since we are sustained by a celestial power. And there is great force in the Greek word, which means that the Spirit takes on Himself **a part of the burden**, by which our weakness is oppressed; so that He not only helps and succours us, but lifts us up; as though He went under the burden with us....”

And so verse 26 tells us one more thing that the Holy Spirit is doing for the children of God. Remember that much of this chapter has been about how the Holy Spirit operates in the children of God.

As I said, it is my belief that the Charismatics have hijacked the Holy Spirit by their abuse and ignorance of who He is and what He does. To hear them talk you would think that they control the Holy Spirit.

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We don't speak much about the Holy Spirit because we are intimidated by the abuse of the Charismatics. But we should follow Paul who doesn't shy away from talking about what the Holy Spirit is doing in and for the saints of God. Paul tells us how important the work of the Spirit is.

As children of God what do we know about the work of the Holy Spirit?

Recall what we have learned in Chapter Eight:

The Holy Spirit has made you free from the law of sin and death {2}.

The Holy Spirit guides the believer as he lives under the influence of the Holy Spirit {4-5}.

The Holy Spirit dwells in you if you belong to Christ {9, 11}.

By the Holy Spirit we put to death the deeds of the flesh {13}.

The children of God receive the Spirit of adoption whereby we cry out. "Abba Father!" {15}.

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God {16}.

And now in verse 26 we are told something else that the Holy Spirit is doing for the children of God.

26 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.

After all that the Spirit does for the child of God,

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses.

We are told that the reason the Spirit makes intercession for us is because we need help in our weakness. We know that we are weak and limited. As we grow older it is more and more apparent to us just how weak this **body** is.

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But mostly we are weak in our **spirit**.

We strive against sin and the infirmities of the flesh. **We groan!**

But the child of God is not alone.

The Holy Spirit ministers to the child of God as he is praying.

For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought,

Inability in prayer is not only an illustration of the weakness of the believer but it helps us to recognize our weakness.

Perhaps we are closer to praying aright when we praise God than when we pray for other people and matters of personal concern.

It may surprise us for the apostle to confess weakness in prayer. Some of the richest passages of Scripture are the prayers of Paul. E.g., Ephesians 3:14-21

For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height --19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

Paul was mighty in prayer, yet Paul prayed three times for God to remove “the thorn in the flesh.” It must have seemed to Paul that he would be more effective in his ministry if God would relieve him of whatever that affliction was. But God’s answer was:

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness”

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.⁹ And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

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You don't need for me to tell you that we simply don't know how to pray for certain situations. Only a man full of pride thinks he knows how to pray.

In fact, I really do not like to pray in public because I don't know how to pray with any degree of assurance that I know what to pray for.

A friend of mine who is a pastor in Canada offers what I consider to be the best public prayers. I love to hear him pray because about all he does is to quote Scripture in praise of God. I have heard him quote entire chapters of the Bible in prayer. He was not showing off, he was simply praying God's word in praise.

So there is the need for the Spirit to take the supervision of our prayers.

...but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

So I believe that the Holy Spirit 'helps' us to pray by taking one end of our heavy load and carrying it with us. He does not take over and do the praying for us, He helps us. **But if you don't pray He is not helping you.**

There is an illustration of a man who went to heaven and was being given a tour by an angel. They came to a room lined with file cabinets and the man asked what was in them. The angel told him they were the prayers of the saints. "Do you have any of my prayers?" "Yes, right here under your name, "A sinner saved by grace." "Yes, that's me all right!"

"Could I read some of them?" "Sure, here's two or three."

As the man read his own prayers he was overwhelmed with joy and said, "There is no way I could have prayed anything this beautiful."

"Oh, you see, the Holy Spirit helped your prayers and cleaned them up before they reached the throne."

The children of God are weak but not without help. We have **two advocates**.

The risen and glorified Savior who is in heaven makes intercession for us {8:34}. And the Comforter who dwells within our heart pleads for us.

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John 14:15-18

"If you love Me, keep My commandments. 16 And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever -- 17 the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. 18 I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you.

John 14:25-27

"These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. 26 But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.

John 15:26

"But when the Helper comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who proceeds from the Father, He will testify of Me.

Hebrews 7:25

Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.

1 John 2:1

My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.

We might ask this question, **“If the Spirit is interceding for us and Christ makes intercession for us, why should we pray at all?”**

Part of the answer is that the child of God wants to cry out “Abba Father” and he wants to pour out praise and thanksgiving as well as to petition God for specific things.

Besides we are commanded to “pray without ceasing” and we should never argue with a commandment.

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Our Lord taught His disciples how to pray and so we are expected to pray.

Matthew 6:5-13

"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.6 But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. 7 And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words.

8 "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him.9 In this manner, therefore, pray:

Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name.10 Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.11 Give us this day our daily bread.12 And forgive us our debts, As we forgive our debtors.13 And do not lead us into temptation, But deliver us from the evil one. For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.

God who ordains the results also ordains the means. This is a great mystery but it is the truth. Take the example of the farmer. If he is to harvest a crop he must prepare the ground and plant seed. That is the means to an end.

It is the same with our praying. When a matter is put on our heart and we pray about it we must be ready to be the answer to that prayer.

James 2:14-17

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food,16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

Let's take up some practical applications of prayer.

My next comment could easily be misunderstood.

In fact, what I am about to say absolutely cannot be understood by anyone who has bought into the **pluralism** of our culture. Pluralism, if you do not know, is the idea that all religions are equal and are simply optional ways to get to God. Read the papers and see all of the prayers being offered about anything. How many of these prayers are heard by God?

Be careful how you answer that question.

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Have you been seduced by pluralism? If you think that any and all prayers have equal access to God you have bought into pluralism.

That is the reason why I am not a strong proponent of prayer in public school is because most of those prayers are not going to be heard by God.

The same goes for a 'moment of silence' for people to pray to the 'god of their choice.'

Does the Holy Spirit in the matter of prayer guide us?

What does the Bible say about how we obtain an entrance into the presence of God?

Job understood the difficulty of getting to God.

Job 9:32-33

**32 "For He is not a man, as I am,
That I may answer Him,
And that we should go to court together.
33 Nor is there any mediator between us,
Who may lay his hand on us both.**

Job understood that he needed a mediator who knew the mind of God and yet knew what was in man. The only person that qualifies is Jesus Christ!

The message of the Gospel is that there is only one way to God and that is through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:14-18

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, 15 having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, 16 and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. 17 And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. 18 For through Him we both have access by one Spirit to the Father.

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Another Scripture:

Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, 21 and having a High Priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.23 Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

So it is my belief that any prayer made through Jesus alone would not be allowed in a public school. And God will hear no other prayer.

Let me offer to you some guidelines on prayer.

I don't pretend to be an expert on "How to Pray," but I can tell you what the Bible says on how we have access to God.

We must first understand that our access to God is through the Lord Jesus Christ and only through Him.

The next thing is to recognize the majesty of God. We dare not be overly familiar with God so as to not reverence Him.

We should offer praise and thanksgiving.

We should be very careful about purely personal requests. We simply don't know how to pray in most specific circumstances.

A very instructive passage is in Numbers where the people complained about the manna and asked for quail. Well, God answered that prayer and they had to eat quail for a month until it came out of their nostrils and they loathed it.

Psalm 106 is a commentary on the rebellions of the Israelites as they wandered in the wilderness. As to this episode about the quail:

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Psalm 106:13-15

**13 They soon forgot His works;
They did not wait for His counsel,
14 But lusted exceedingly in the wilderness,
And tested God in the desert.
15 And He gave them their request,
But sent leanness into their soul.**

So we must be very careful not to complain that God does not purpose what is best for us and find ourselves trying to tell God what He should do for us. We dare not accuse God of mismanagement of our life.

A current popular manifestation of this error is the so-called 'name it and claim it' crowd. If you listen to the preachers in the "Word – Faith" movement you will hear them say if you have enough faith that God is obligated to answer your prayer. You just 'name it and claim it.' "Seed-faith" they call it; the "seed" being money that you send to them.

Let me return to a more positive theme.

It is possible that not all of our prayers require the intercession of the Spirit. When we are truly in the Spirit in worship our prayers may be acceptable.

So child of God as you groan you can be comforted in the sure hope that the Savior is praying for you and the Spirit is making your weaknesses whole and pure before God.

27 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.

God knows our hearts and He knows what the mind of the Spirit is.

The Spirit knows the perfect will of God and He makes whatever adjustment is needed in our weaknesses so that the prayers of the child of God are not offensive to Him.

Not only does God know everything He knows His own will. There is perfect harmony with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. There is one God in three persons. So any prayer that the Spirit makes intercession for must necessarily be according to the will of God.

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Personally I have been encouraged as I studied this passage. Even though we are weak and ignorant the Holy Spirit makes intercession for us.

26 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. 27 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.

Do you have this absolute assurance that Jesus is your Savior?