

Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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Partnership With The Holy Spirit In Prayer

by Dan Trygg

“In the same way the Spirit also helps in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as is necessary, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; ²⁷ and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to *the will of God.*” Romans 8:26,27

Any time you run across a verse beginning with “in the same way”, the first question you should ask is, “What previous statement or action is the author referring to?” “In the same way” is a comparison to something else. **What is it that Paul is referring to, here?**

Earlier in the passage, the apostle mentioned that **the Spirit co-testifies with our spirit that now we are children of God** (vs. 16). This is saying that both the Holy Spirit and our new inner spiritual person jointly-bear-witness that we are different. They both tell us that we truly *are* offspring of God, dear sons and daughters, whose inner essence cries out to God as “Daddy!” *We are no longer who we once were.* Our identity, our very self, has changed. **Our inner heart bears witness to this, as does the intentional activity of the Spirit within us.** Since we are children, then we are also heirs, co-heirs together with Christ, just as we have been called to share in Kingdom sufferings (“cross-carrying”) for the sake of Christ (Lk. 9:23). The inner activity of the Holy Spirit is the *beginning* of the fulfillment of the promise to fill us with the glory of God (I Pet. 4:12-14). As we cooperate with His leading, we become empowered by Him, and His nature is revealed in us. We are “glorified-together-with” Him (vs. 17).

Then Paul comments on how the eager expectation (lit., “watching with the head extended forward alertly”) of **the creation earnestly awaits for the full disclosure of who we will be at Christ’s return.** It has been subjected to futility and frustration since the fall of humankind in the hope that it will someday be liberated from its slavery to destruction and decay. When we are transformed, creation also will come into the freedom of the splendor that will be ours (I Jn. 3:2; I Cor. 15:35-58). In the new creation, there will be no more death, and consequently no decay (Rev. 21:4). Just as **we, having the first-fruits of the Spirit** (the down-payment of our *full* redemption – cf. II Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14), **inwardly sigh and moan because we are earnestly awaiting our complete deliverance from our inner struggles,** in a similar way the entire creation sighs-and-moans-together-with and is-in-labor-pains-together-with us. This hope of full redemption, of receiving forgiveness from our sins, of truly being made new and getting victory over our sinful self, is what was promised to us in the gospel message. **We do not see this fully accomplished here in this life.** The apostle John says that when Christ returns, then we shall come to be like Him. **Nevertheless, having this as our hope motivates us to purify ourselves, to work toward Christlikeness in the here and now, as well** (I Jn. 3:2,3). As we pursue intimacy with God, we will be progressively transformed from one degree to another (II Cor. 3:5-18; Prov. 4:18).

Now we come back to the phrase of comparison, “in the same manner” or “likewise”. Likewise what? “Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weakness.” Does the creation help us in our weakness? No. So, the primary reference for the comparison has to go back to vs 16, “The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.” What Paul is saying is that **this is another area where the Spirit operates in our lives.** There (in vs. 16), He was a co-witness. Here (vs. 26), **He is a co-helper.** The word that is translated as “helps” is a compound verb consisting of three ideas. The main verb is to “take hold of something”. To this is added a preposition meaning “over against” or “opposite of”. Finally is another preposition, meaning “jointly” or “together with”. The combined word picture is of someone taking hold of the other end of something at the same time as you do in order to accomplish whatever is required. It is like “picking up the other end of a board”, or helping someone move a couch. **It is a very vivid picture of partnership or teamwork. The action is contemporaneous (at the same time), corresponding (each person working in his respective area) and co-operative (each person has to put forth effort).** This is the kind of “help” that the Spirit has for us. **He and I have to work together at the same time, both of us putting forth effort in our corresponding areas of responsibility.** The help offered here means that He does not simply do things *for* me, apart from any involvement on my part. Nor does He expect me to do things apart from His help. **The help that He is offering here implies that He wants to work together with me, and He expects me to work together with Him.** He wants us to have an active partnership with Him.

We see this kind of partnership evident in Jesus’ ministry. In Luke 5:17 we learn that Jesus was able to heal because the power of the Lord was present for Him to do so. **God made the power available, but Jesus had to make use of it** by speaking words of declaration over people, in this case a paralytic. Jesus told us, in Jn. 5:19 that He never did anything on His own (lit., “from Himself”). A literal rendering of the verse would be, “Truly, truly, I say to

y'all, not is the Son able to do not-even-one-thing from Himself, except what He might see the Father doing; for what things that One (the Father) might do, these things the Son likewise does." In other words, **Jesus was getting His cues from the Father.** He was noticing that the Father was starting to do or prompt something, and so **Jesus actively responded to what He sensed the Father initiating. He was a true partner-with the Father.**

This is the same counsel Jesus later gave to the apostles. In Acts 1:8, as He prepared them for the coming of the Holy Spirit, "And you shall *take* power, when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be My witnesses..." In other words, **He was telling them to actively work-with the Spirit, when they sensed His presence.**

When Jesus introduced the coming ministry of the Holy Spirit, He referred to Him as the "Comforter" or "Helper" (Jn. 14:16). The Greek word behind these translations is *paraklētos*. It means, "one called alongside to help". Even here, Jesus was preparing the apostles for this notion of working-together-with the Spirit. **This title implies that we are to ask for His help. Again, the help must be cooperative.** We have a part, and so does *the Spirit*. **Part of our responsibility is to invite the Spirit to come alongside us to direct and assist us in ministry.** Then, when we can discern what He may be initiating or prompting in a situation, **we are to take action in agreement with what He is doing.** We "take hold of" the Spirit, when we sense that He is coming upon us.

Back in the passage from Romans 8, Paul focuses on a specific area of joint partnership, i.e., the work of intercession. **The thing that we need is contemporaneous, corresponding and cooperative help in is prayer. Why? Because in our weakness, we do not know how to pray as it is necessary.** Do you ever feel that way? I know I do. What Paul is saying is that the Spirit helps *us* (contemporaneous, corresponding and cooperative partnership) to pray in a way that is acceptable to God and is effective. **Note again that the contemporaneous nature of this kind of helping implies that He prays when we pray, and we are to pray as He intercedes through us.** In other words, we are not just playing tag team with the Holy Spirit. **Paul is not describing a hand off, where we give the Spirit the responsibility to pray on our behalf, and then we do something else.** In order to pick up the other end of the stick, we must be picking up our end, or the job will not get done. In other words, **we must learn to stay at prayer longer than most of us do, and we must somehow pray in conjunction with the Holy Spirit within us, which is different from our own thoughts.** If God's ways are not like our ways, nor His thoughts like our thoughts, we should not be surprised that we would need help in bringing our needs to Him (Isa. 55:8,9). We need an interpreter, an advocate on our behalf.

Note that Paul mentions how the Spirit prays in sighs, moans or expressions for which there are no words to express. People disagree about what this means. Some think it has to do with speaking in tongues. While that may be *an* outlet for yielding oneself to the free expression of the Holy Spirit, it does not fit with what Paul says here. The intercession of the Holy Spirit in this verse is in sighs and moans that are "unspeakable", the negated form of the word translated as "speak" with tongues. Most translations render this as sighs or moans "too deep for words", or "that words cannot express". **Words in another language (tongues) would be just as incapable of expressing this intercessory burden of the Spirit!** There is indeed "praying with the mind" and "praying with the spirit" (I Cor. 14:14,15). Paul says that when a person prays in a tongue, it is prayer from his spirit instead of his mind. **The intercession of the Spirit is not limited to speaking with tongues,** however. It is possible for someone who does not have this gift (and *not* every Christian is given the gift of tongues – I Cor. 12:20) to participate in this unutterable, inarticulate prayer partnership with the Holy Spirit. In my case, the ability to speak with tongues is a relatively recent experience, but I have experienced the intercessory prayer burden of the Holy Spirit on many occasions, even though I did not have this tool to utilize. It would be easy for tongue-speakers to miss this deeper level of intercession, if they do not recognize that God is calling them to something deeper than words.

The point is, we are to open ourselves up to the help of the Holy Spirit as we come to God in prayer. In fact, we are to ask Him for help. He will take the prayer burden of our hearts to a new level and bring it before the Father in a way that is acceptable to Him. The Holy Spirit prays for the saints "according to God" (Rom. 8:27). Face it, we do not know how to really approach the King of the Universe. He recognizes that, and has provided the Holy Spirit to assist us. Jesus Himself *also* intercedes for us (Rom. 8:34). He is our High Priest. He interceded for us while He was here (Isa. 53:12; cf. Lk. 22:31,32), and now "He ever lives to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25). **Apparently, prayer for us is a very significant and important thing. Both Jesus and the Holy Spirit are continually speaking to the Father on our behalf. That is mind-boggling, isn't it?** We are to be interceding for *others*, as well (I Tim. 2:1), praying in the Holy Spirit (Jude 20). In the OT, there are several instances where God indicates that disaster came upon the nation of Israel because there was no one to intercede (Isa. 59:15,16; 63:5; 64:1-7; Ezk. 22:23-31). **If we are going to be men and women of God, we must develop an active life of prayer. We must call upon the Holy Spirit for help in this, but we must actively give ourselves to a vital partnership with Him in intercession.**