**Lesson 17**

**The Spirit Assisting and Interceding**

God’s children are often oppressed and suffer persecution. God’s children often live in times and locations of great poverty and need.

As Arthur Pink states, “an object of the Father’s everlasting love and distinguishing favor tossed up and down upon a sea of trouble, with every apparentprospect of his frail boat capsizing— what a perplexity! The fact that those who have regenerated and are now indwelt by the Holy Spirit will daily be harassed by Satan and frequently overcome by indwelling sin is an enigma.

* We are loved by the Father, redeemed by the Son, and our bodies are made the temple of the Holy Spirit, yet we are left in this world year after year to suffer affliction and persecution, to mourn and groan over innumerable failures, to encounter one trial after another, often to be placed in far less favorable circumstances than the wicked.”
* So many of our Christian brethren have felt the force of such trials and afflictions, and we are often left baffled, left trying to comprehend God’s purpose for such suffering.

“It was to cast light upon this pressing problem of the sorely afflicted believer that the eighth chapter of Romans was written. The Apostle was moved to show that ***the sufferings of the present time*** (v. 18) are not inconsistent with the special favor and infinite love which God bears unto His people.

**1.** Because by those sufferings the Christian is brought into personal and experiential fellowship with the sufferings of Christ (v. 17; cf. Phi 3:10).

**2.** Severe and protracted as our afflictions may be, yet there is an immeasurable disproportion between our present sufferings and the future Glory (vv. 18-23).

**3.** Our very sufferings provide occasion for the exercise of hope and the development of patience (vv. 24-25).

**4.** Divine aids and supports are furnished us under our afflictions (vv. 26-27).

The apostle Paul singles out one particular ***weakness*** that besets all Christians, and in which the Holy Spirit graciously helps: ***Romans 8:26— In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.***

**Question:** Why is it that this “weakness” of not knowing how to pray besets all Christians?

**Reply:** “So depraved is the saint that, in the hour of need, he is incapable of asking God aright to minister unto him. Sin has so corrupted his heart and darkened his understanding that, left to himself, he cannot even discern what he should ask God for. Alas, that pride should so blind us to our real condition and our deep, deep need.”

* Despite our regeneration, we are still so totally corrupted by our sin nature that we don’t have the capacity to even know our own corrupt heart or our true need.

“One had thought that if ever there were a time when the Christian would really pray, earnestly and perseveringly, and would know what to ask for, it should be when he is sorely tried and oppressed. Alas, how little we really know ourselves. Even a beast will cry out when suffering severe pain, and it is natural (not spiritual) that we should do the same.”

* When in the fire of affliction, our consuming desire is relief from our suffering.
* “So long as we are left to ourselves, when the pressure of severe trials come upon us, we are concerned only with deliverance from them, and not that God may be glorified or that the trial may used for the sanctification of our souls.”
* Left to ourselves, we ask God for what would turn out to be curses rather than blessings . . . for what would prove to be snares rather than helps to us spiritually.

“Why is it, my afflicted brother, my distressed sister, that you have not made shipwreck of your profession long before this? What has kept you from heeding that repeated temptation of Satan’s to totally abandon the good fight of faith? Why have not your manifold ***weaknesses*** annihilated your faith, extinguished your hope, and cast a pall of unrelieved gloom upon the future? The answer is because the blessed Spirit silently, invisibly, yet sympathetically and effectually, helped you.”

**Question:** But how do you know, with all certainty, that the Spirit is sustaining and helping you? How do you know you are not simply enduring by your own strength? And how do you know that someday you will not grow weary and depart from the faith?

**Reply:** For the suffering Christian, this question is a vexing one. For all our professions of faith and strivings in the faith we are reminded that 2 of the 3 seeds that grew in the various soils withered and died. It is this knowledge that many will fall away that keeps us persistent in prayer that the Holy Spirit will sustain us through all trials. But when the day comes that you no longer seek the Spirit’s help and strength in your trial, you are in grave danger. It should be this fear . . . fear of turning away from the Spirit . . . that keeps us totally dependent upon the leading and assisting from the Holy Spirit.

How is the gracious help of the Spirit manifested?

* Seeing the Christian bowed down by oppression and depression, His compassion is called forth, and He strengthens with His might in the inner man. Every Christian is a living witness to the truth of this, though he may not be conscious of the divine process.

The ***weaknesses*** of Christians are as varied as they are numerous.

* Some are weak in faith, and constantly questioning their interest in Christ.
* Some are imperfectly instructed in the truth, and therefore ill-prepared to meet the lies of Satan.
* Some are slow travelers along the path of obedience, frequently lagging in the rear.
* Others groan under the burden of physical afflictions.
* Some are harassed with a nervous temperament, which produces a state of perpetual pessimism, causing them to look only upon the dark side of the cloud.
* Others are weighed down with the cares of this life, so that they are constantly depressed.
* Others are maligned and slandered, persecuted and boycotted, which to those of a sensitive disposition is well-nigh unbearable.
* ***Our weakness*** includes all that cause us to groan and render us the objects of divine compassion.

But ***the Spirit also helps our weakness***. Here is a divine revelation, for we had known nothing about it apart from the Scriptures. We are not left alone to endure our infirmities: we have a ***helper***, a divine Helper; One not far off, but with us.

* The Greek word here for ***helps*** (Gr: *sunantilambanomai*) is a striking one; it signifies to “take part with” or to “take hold with one.” It occurs in only one other passage, namely, ***bid Mary therefore that she help me*** (Luke 10:40), where the obvious thought is that Martha was asking for her sister’s assistance, to share the burden of the kitchen, that she might be eased.
* The Spirit ***helps*** the Christian’s infirmities not only by a sympathetic regard, but by personal participation, supporting him beneath them, like a mother “helps” her child when learning to walk, or a friend gives his arm to an aged person to lean upon.
* In his comments on this clause, Calvin says, “The Spirit takes on Himself a part of the burden by which our weakness is oppressed, so that He not only gives us support, but lifts us up, as though He is bearing the weight of the burden with us.”

The Spirit does not remove our ***weakness*** any more than the Lord took away Paul’s thorn in the flesh. But He enables us to bear up under them.

* Possessing a love that no thought can conceive, moved by a tenderness no tongue can describe, He places His mighty arm beneath the weight of our affliction and sustains us.
* Though He has been slighted and grieved by us a thousand times, receiving at our hands the ingratitude and refusal of His tenderness and grace, when a sword of affliction enters our soul or some oppressive affliction bows us down to the ground, He again places beneath us the arms of His everlasting love and prevents us from sinking into hopeless despair.

Here is a question every Christian asks: **how do we harmonize the suffering of God’s children with the love of God for them?**

* Some Christians fear that in their suffering that God has ceased to care for them, that He has deserted them and left them to themselves.
* Very far from this, though, is the actual case. The divine Comforter is given to help our ***weakness*** (Rom 8:26).

With Paul’s statement in Romans 8:26 is the answer to the objection. How can we who are so weak in ourselves, so inferior in power to the enemies confronting us, bear up under our trials, which are so numerous, so protracted, so crushing?

* The answer is, we can not. And though we, in ourselves, are unable, God’s grace has provided our all-sufficient Helper who is able.
  + Without His aid we would have long since succumbed, overcome by our trials.
  + Our Christian hope . . . our confident expectation of God’s fulfillment of His promises . . . looks forward to the glory to come.
  + In the weary interval of waiting, the Spirit supports our poor hearts and keeps grace alive within us.

***Romans 8:26— In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.***

In examining Romans 8:26, Arthur Pink gives three reasons for why Christians ***do not know how to pray as we should***

**First**, because we are so blinded by self-love that we are unable to discern what will be most for God’s glory, what will best promote the good of our brethren (through some of the dross being purged out of us), and what will advance our own spiritual growth.

* “We are guided and governed by self-interests.”
* “Alas, how often we attempt to make God the servant of our carnal desires. Shall we ask our heavenly Father for worldly success! Shall we come to Him Who was born in a stable and ask Him for temporal luxuries or even comforts!

**Second**, because our minds are so troubled by our trial and the suffering it brings, we are brought to the point that we agree with the Psalmist in Psalm 77:4 . . . ***I am so troubled that I cannot speak***.

* So, you see, dear ***brother, and companion in tribulation*** (Rev 1:9), that you are not the first to experience spiritual dumbness!
* But it is most blessed to link with this such a promise as, ***for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.*** (Luke 12:12).

**Third**, because oftentimes our tongues are tied as the result of leanness of our souls.

* It is ***out of the abundance of the heart that the mouth speaks*** (Mat 12:34), and if the Word of Christ be not dwelling in us ***richly*** (Col 3:16), how can we expect to have the right petition to present to God in the hour of our need!

It is a great infirmity or weakness for the Christian to faint in the day of adversity, yet such is often the case. It is a sad thing when, like Rachel of old weeping for her children, a Christian ***refuses to be comforted*** (Jer. 31:15). But thank God that though we are feeble and fickle believers, we are not left to ourselves. ***The Spirit helps our weakness***. That ***help*** is as manifold as our varied needs, but the Apostle singles out one particular ***weakness*** that besets all Christians . . . ***we do not know how to pray as we should.***

* How this divine declaration should humble us into the dust. So depraved is the saint that, in the hour of need, he is incapable of asking God how to minister to him.
* Sin has so corrupted his heart and darkened his understanding that, left to himself, he cannot even discern what he should ask God for.

In Romans 8:26, when the apostle Paul states that ***the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words***, what do we learn about how the Spirit intercedes for us?

* To begin with, He does so silently and secretly, so that we are not conscious of His assistance at the time He renders it.
* Second, the gracious and effectual help of the Spirit is manifested to us **by the effects which are produced in us**.
  + Because our hearts are so perverse and because our pride is so great, we often attribute the effects of the Spirits intervention to our own will-power or resolution.
  + Have we suddenly, or even gradually, emerged from the slough of despond? Was it because we had “come to our senses” or “regained our poise”? No! Rather, is was solely due to the Spirit’s intercession and renewing us in the inner man.
  + The very fact that you emerge from the slough of despond with your faith intact is evidence of the Spirit working in you. You have no ability to work in yourself. It is the Spirit, alone, who intercedes and brings you safely through the darkness of the valley of despair.
* How have the storms within us, which God ordained, been calmed? It was because the Spirit graciously chose to subdue them.
* How has the voice of true prayer again come forth from us? It was because the Spirit had made intercession for us.

Regarding prayer, Arthur Pink states that “at no one point is the Christian made more conscious of his ***weakness*** than in connection with his prayer-life. The effects of indwelling corruption are such that often prayer becomes an irksome task, rather than the felt delight of a precious privilege. And strive as he may, he cannot always overcome this fearful spirit. Even when he endeavors to pray, he is handicapped by wanderings of mind, coldness of heart, the intrusion of carnal cares, while he is painfully conscious of the unreality of his petitions and unfelt confessions.”

What is the solution to such a situation?

**1.** Only the Holy Spirit is able to instill in our hearts a desire to pray. That is one of His gifts to us. In ourselves we are incapable of desiring communion with God.

**2.** It is particularly the help which the blessed Comforter gives the Christian in his prayer-life, in the counteracting of his ***weakness***.

**3.** The Holy Spirit is the Author of every spiritual desire, every holy aspiration, every outgoing of the heart toward God.

**4.** As the Person, work and intercession of Christ are the foundation of all our confidence in approaching the Father, so every spiritual exercise in prayer is the fruit of the Spirit’s operations and intercession.

Regarding the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit in Christians, Arthur Pink details **four** ways in which the Holy Spirit intercedes in and for us.

“**First**, when the believer is most oppressed by outward trials and is most depressed by a sense of his inward vileness, when he is at his wit’s end and ready to wring his hands in despair or is most conscious of his spiritual deadness and inability to express the sinfulness of his case . . . it is then that the Spirit stirs him in the depths of his being: ***the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words***

* “As it is the Spirit Who illumines and gives us to see the exceeding sinfulness of sin and the depravity of our hearts, so He is the One Who causes us to groan over the same.
* The conscious realization of “the plague of our hearts” (1Ki 8:38) and its “putrifying sores” (Isa 1:6), produces unutterable anguish.
* The painful realization of our remaining enmity against God, the rebellion of our wills, the woeful lack of heart-conformity to His holy Law, so casts down the soul that it is temporarily paralyzed.
* Then it is that the Spirit puts forth His quickening operations, and we “groan” so deeply that we cannot express our feelings, articulate our woe, or unburden our hearts. All that we can do is to sigh and sob inwardly.”

“**Second**, when the soul is so sorely oppressed and deeply distressed, it is the Spirit who reveals to the mind *what* should be prayed for.

* He it is Who pours oil on the troubled waters, quiets in some measure the storm within.
* The Spirit helps our ***weakness*** by subduing our fears, increasing our faith, strengthening our hope, and drawing out our hearts unto God.”

“**Third**, the Spirit reveals to cast-down saints that the supplies of gracefor their varied needs are all expressed in the promisesof God.

* But at this point also the help of the Spirit is imperative, “that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God” (1 Cor. 2:12).
* It is thus that the Spirit bears up the distressed minds of Christians by directing their thoughts to those promises most suited to their present case, by impressing a sense of them upon their hearts, by giving them to discern that those precious promises contain in them the fruits of Christ’s mediation, by renewing their faith.”

“**Fourth**, the Spirit helps the Christian to direct his petitions unto right ends.

* Many prayers remain unanswered because of our failure at this point: ***You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.*** (Jam 4:3).
* Only three ends are permissible: **1)** that God may be glorified, **2)** that our spirituality may be promoted, **3)** that our brethren may be blessed.
* It is by the Spirit the sin-troubled Christian is helped to apprehend God as his Father, and his heart is emboldened to approach Him as such. It is by the Spirit we are granted a conscious access to the Throne of Grace.”

Arthur Pink makes it a point to correct some wrong thinking about prayer. He says, “let it be pointed out that the motions of the Spirit in the saint are a “help” to prayer, but not the rule or reason of prayer.

* There are some who say that they never attempt to pray unless conscious that the Spirit moves them to do so. But this is wrong: the Spirit is given to help us in the performance of duty, and not in the neglect of it! God commands us to pray. That is our “rule”: “***always to pray***” (Luke 18:1), “***in everything by prayer and supplication***” (Phi 4:6).
* Do not conclude that lack of words and suitable expressions is a proof that the Spirit is withholding His help.”

**Question:** Why is this statement by Pink important? What error(s) is he trying to correct?

**Reply:** So many people are controlled by the way they feel or by what they perceive the Holy Spirit is making them feel. And because they feel that the Holy Spirit is the One who compels them or motivates them to do whatever they do, they often fail to act because they don’t perceive the Holy Spirit moving them to act. But as we have learned throughout this book, the Holy Spirit works mysteriously and without our ability to perceive Him or even His presence in us. Therefore we instructed to do as we know we should, without having to be moved by what we mistakenly believe is the Spirit moving us to.

***Romans 8:26-27— 26 In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, 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.***

“God’s Word is designed to have a twofold effect upon the Christian: a distressing and a comforting.” Romans 8:26-27 produces both these effects upon us. In regard to prayer, what is the “distressing and comforting” produced in Romans 8:26-27?

**Distressing**

“In the passage before us, for next we read ***we do not know how to pray as we should.***  What a pride-withering word is that! One which is in direct variance with what is commonly supposed. The general belief is that men do knowwell enough what they should pray for, but they are so careless and wicked they do not discharge this duty; but God says, they ***do not know***.

* “It is one thing to have scriptural words upon our lips, but it is quite another for the soul to feelhis dire need of what he asks for.”
* “Sin has so perverted our judgments, self-love has so blinded our eyes, worldliness has so corrupted our affections, that even with a divine manual of prayer in our hands, we are quite incapable (of ourselves) of discerning whatwe should ask for.”

**Comforting**

“But now on the other side: lest we should be utterly cast down by a sense of our excuseless and guilty ignorance, we are divinely informed ***the Spirit Himself intercedes for us.***  Wondrous indeed, unspeakably blessed, is this! Instead of turning away from us in disgust because of our culpable ignorance, God has not only provided us with an Intercessor at His right hand (Heb 7:25), but what is to the writer even more remarkable, God has given His needy people a divine Intercessor at their right hand, even the Holy Spirit.”

**Important Point:** “If it be asked, Why has God provided **two** Intercessors for His people, the answer is: to bridge the entire gulf between Him and us.

* One to represent God to us, the Other to represent us before God.
* The One to prompt our prayers, the Other to present them to the Father.
* The One to ask blessings for us, the Other to convey blessings unto us!

In Romans 8:26 the apostle Paul describes how ***the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words***. What does the word ***groanings*** refer to? What is the purpose of these ***groanings***?

“This, as we have seen, refers to **the inward anguish that the Spirit produces in the believer**.

* Here, then, is further ground for self-abasement: even when a sense of need has been communicated to us, so foolish are we that **our poor hearts are overwhelmed, and all we can do is to sigh and groan**.
* Even when the Spirit has convicted us of our corruptions and imparted a deep yearning for divine grace, we are incapable of articulating our wants or expressing our longings. If left to ourselves, the distress occasioned by our felt sinfulness would quite disable us to pray.

**Objection:** Some people object to the idea of “meaningless groaning” as being prayer at all. Such objectors ask, “to what purpose is it that the Spirit should stir up such “groanings,” which the Christian can neither understand nor express?”

**Reply:** “God knows what those ***groanings*** mean, for He discerns the very thoughts and intents of our hearts. How comforting is this, to realize in prayer we are coming to One Who thoroughly understands us! How blessed to be assured that God will rightly interpret every motion the Spirit prompts within us. As Romans 8:27 states, God ***knows what the mind of the Spirit is***—His intention in producing our anguish. God is able to distinguish between the moanings of mere nature and the ***groanings*** of which the Spirit is the Author.”

* **In other words**, because God knows our hearts better than we do, He knows what the groanings of our spirit are, even when we don’t.

Pink makes a very insightful observation regarding our motivations in prayer. He refers to “a fourfold ‘spirit’ that works in prayer.”

* Now God discerns between **1)** the motions of nature, **2)** the lustings of the flesh, **3)** the longings of grace, and **4)** the desires wrought by the Spirit.

**1. First**, the natural spirit of man, which seeks his own welfare and preservation.

* This is not sinful, as may be seen from the case of Christ in Gethsemane: the innocent desire of human nature to be delivered from the awful pressure upon Him, and then subjecting His will to the Father’s.

**2. Second**, a carnal and sinful spirit: “***your brethren that hated you, that cast you out for my name’s sake, said, Let the LORD be glorified***” (Isa 66:5), but God did not answer them in the way they meant.

**3. Third**, the new nature in the believer, which has holy aspirations, but is powerless of itself to express them.

**4. Fourth**, “praying in the Holy Spirit” (Jude 20)— by His prompting and power.

What does this “fourfold spirit” teach us about how God answers our prayers?

* God knows which of the above fourfold spirits is at work in our prayers. And knowing what is in accordance with His will, the Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf. None but God is able to thus distinguish and interpret the “groanings” of the Spirit in the saint.

That which the Spirit produces in the saint is . . .

* **First**, in accord with God’s *nature*—spiritual and holy.
* **Second**, it is according to God’s Word, for the Spirit ever prompts us to ask for what has been revealed or promised.
* **Third**, it is according to God’s *purpose*, for the Spirit is fully cognizant of all the divine counsels.
* **Fourth**, it is according to God’s *glory*, for the Spirit teaches us to make *that* our end in asking.