

The Helping Hand of the Holy Spirit (Romans 8:26)

“And, in the same way also, the Spirit continually gives a helping hand with regard to our weakness; for the thing, what we should pray for according to what is necessary in the nature of the case, we do not know with absolute knowledge; but the Spirit Himself comes to our rescue interceding with groanings inexpressible.” (my rendition)

In the epistle of Romans the apostle Paul, as he does in other epistles, deals with doctrinal and practical issues: the doctrinal beginning at 1:1 and ending at 11:36, concluding with statements on the majesty and glory of God and His plan. Then starting with 12:1, he moves to the behavioral implications flowing out of the doctrinal section. The apostle Paul moves methodically through various – yet very interconnected – topics: sin (1:1-3:20); salvation (3:21-5:21); sanctification (6:1-8:39); sovereignty (9:1-11:36); and finally service (12:1-16:27).

In the section on sanctification the apostle deals with [1] the basis of sanctification – dead to sin and alive to Christ (6:1-4), [2] the attitudes of mind and action for sanctification (6:5-23), [3] the conflict in sanctification (7:1-25), [4] the power for sanctification (8:1-17), [5] the goal of sanctification (8:18-27), and finally [6] the certainty of sanctification (8:28-39) – ending with a hymnic expression of security (vv. 31-39). Starting in 8:1, he reveals several things about sanctification and the Spirit: the Spirit delivers from the power of the flesh (8:1-11); the Spirit establishes Sonship (8:12-17); the Spirit assures future glory (8:18-30). It is in this final section that I desire to look at verse 26.

Here we see that the Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness. “Weakness” (ἀσθένεια) is from alpha-negative (ἀ) which negates the second part of the word and “sthenos” (σθένος) meaning “strength.” It reflects a state of incapacity, frailty, weakness, or impotence. Literally it is used of a physical ailment: sickness, disease, infirmity, or of physical inability: weakness the opposite of “dunamis” δύναμις (might, strength). Here the apostle Paul gives us the type of weakness he is speaking of and it is that which pertains to prayer. One of our weaknesses in the process of sanctification is in the area of prayer. It is not merely knowing how to pray but what to pray for (cf. translation above). We often think that we know what we need spiritually but in reality we are not always the best judges of that.

The apostle goes on to say that the Holy Spirit “helps” our weakness. “Helps” is a rather lengthy word in the Greek (συναντιλαμβάνεται). It consists of two prepositions and a verb. The verb is “lambanō” (λαμβάνω) meaning “to take, to lay hold of.” The first preposition “syn” (συν) means “together with” and the second “anti” (ἀντί) means at its root “face to face.” So the Holy Spirit lays hold of (λαμβάνω) our weakness as regards to

prayer in the process of our sanctification and together with (σύν) us carries the burden face to face (ἀντί) with us. Reflect with me on an illustration of the imagery expressed in the term. When I was younger I lifted weights to build up my strength and to keep in shape. One day my father needed help moving a piano asked for a *helping hand*. So we together laid hold of the piano at opposite ends facing one another – each carrying our part of the burden – and moved the piano.

What is awesome in this truth from the text is that the Holy Spirit continually lends a *helping hand*. We are not in the process alone. The indwelling Holy Spirit is always ready in time of need, not removing the weakness nor removing the responsibility of our part, but giving a *helping hand* in the process.

