

Romans
The Spirit's Intercession
Romans 8:26-27
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Well I invite you to take your Bibles and turn with me to Romans 8. The passage that we'll study this morning is an incredibly rich one, and I know that you're going to find it incredibly encouraging as well. This passage has been important to me personally for a long time. Sheila reminded me this week about something that happened while we were dating, now many years ago. In fact, our first date which we still celebrate annually, was on February 10, 1984. By summer of that year, we were dating only each other. At the end of my summer responsibilities on the summer of '84 I was able to join Sheila and her family as they traveled in a ministry trip in New England. Her dad was preaching in a variety of churches. They were obviously seeing some of the sites, and I got to be with them for the end of that trip and really enjoyed their company. We had a great time together.

But after that trip when we got back to school in the fall, I went through, I think it was one or two weeks, I'm not sure the length of time, but it was fairly short, a period of indecision and of uncertainty about whether we should continue our relationship. Now, those who know me know that that's very uncharacteristic of me, and let me say by the way, that if I had ended our relationship then, that would have been by far the worst and the stupidest decision I would've ever made in my life. I know I am not supposed to use that word, parents, but that's the only word that works. During that time of uncertainty, Sheila reminded me this week that we were sitting in my old Chevrolet Impala in front of her house one evening, and I led us in prayer about the future of our relationship, and I prayed for wisdom and direction for us both, and I told the Lord honestly, "Lord I don't know what to pray. I don't know what to pray for because I don't know Your will and purpose for us." But at the same time in that prayer, I expressed to the Lord that we were grateful that the Spirit would be praying with us at the same time and for us, asking the Father to work out His sovereign purpose in both of our lives for our good and for His glory. And He did, and I'm eternally grateful for that.

It's my hope this morning that this passage will become a great comfort and an encouragement for every true believer here because that's exactly how the Apostle Paul and ultimately the Spirit Himself, when He inspired this text, it's what He intended it to be for all of us.

Now, you'll remember obviously, that the theme of Romans 8 is the absolute security of the Christian. Nothing can change our relationship to God through Jesus Christ, and everything in

this chapter is here to prove that to us. In fact, there's not a single command. Instead, Paul lines up a series of reasons that salvation, for every genuine Christian, is, in fact, absolutely secure. We've looked now at several of these reasons together. God has redeemed us from all condemnation; therefore we are secure. God has changed and empowered us by His Spirit; therefore, we are secure. God has adopted us as His children; therefore, we are secure. And the last paragraph that we've studied together, verses 18 – 25: our salvation is secure because God has destined us for glory.

Now today, we learn a fifth great lesson, a fifth great reason that we are, in fact, secure in Christ, and it's this: God has given us His Spirit as an intercessor. God has given us His Spirit as an intercessor. This is the message of the very brief paragraph, two verses, Romans 8:26 and 27. Let's read them together:

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; 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*.

Now before we examine those two verses more closely, I first want you to see how those verses connect to the previous context. Notice how verse 26 begins, "In the same way...." Clearly, Paul intended that these two verses would connect back with what he had already said. The question is, with what? What's the link? Well, there are actually three possibilities that you'll see if you read commentaries or you read study Bibles. There are three possibilities.

One link between this paragraph and what comes before might be our Christian hope. Those who take this view would say something like this, "Our hope of future glory sustains us"; that's the message of the previous paragraph. "In the same way, the Spirit also sustains us during this life," the message of the paragraph we just read together.

Another possible link isn't our Christian hope, but rather praying. If you look back in verse 15, Paul tells us that when we were adopted, we "received [the] spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, [by which we pray,] 'Abba! Father!'" So, we pray, and they would say in verse 26, in the same way the Spirit prays as well.

A third possible link between those two verses we read and what came before is the word "groaning", and I really think this is the link. You'll notice back in verse 22, "the ... creation

groans” for its redemption; in verse 23, the believer “groans ... for the redemption of his body;” and in verse 26, “In the same way the Spirit groans” on our behalf. I think Paul intends a kind of combination; we can’t be absolutely certain, but I think this idea of groaning and groaning in prayer is what he intends. In this time period, in our lives here, we groan often in prayer to God. In this time between our salvation and our ultimate glorification, in the same way, the Holy Spirit who indwells us also groans with us and prays for us to the Father. I think that’s what he means by, “in the same way”.

So, let’s look then at this work of the Spirit together. Paul begins by first stating the work of the Spirit in a general way in the first part of verse 26, and then he describes that work specifically in the rest of the two verses. So, let’s look at it together. First of all, generally, at the beginning in verse 26, Paul says the Spirit comes to our aid. He begins by simply stating the reality. Notice verse 26, “In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness;” the Spirit also helps our weakness.

Now what does Paul mean by our weakness, singular? Well, I think it’s an inclusive term. Clearly, in the context, he means our lack of spiritual strength. He has just talked about that in the preceding section. Our lack of spiritual strength as we continue to live in bodies that are unredeemed, as we continue to struggle with sin. It’s the same sort of thing that the writer of Hebrews meant in Hebrews 4:15, when he says, “we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses,” plural. Our spiritual weaknesses, “but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin.” So, it certainly includes our lack of spiritual strength.

But it also includes, this weakness, includes our lack of spiritual insight, specifically into God’s will. Notice in this verse, it’s linked to not knowing what to pray for. And I think if you step back, when Paul says our weakness, and he uses the singular, he’s describing the totality of our human condition. Yes, we’re redeemed; yes, we have new souls that have been redeemed and

made in the likeness of Christ in one sense, but we are still incarcerated in fallen flesh, our humanness, our weakness.

Now notice the Spirit helps our weakness. That is a most unusual word. The word “help”, like many Greek words, is made up of a combination of words, in this case, three separate Greek words that have been combined to make this unique word that you translated ‘help.’

I don’t normally give you Greek words, but I want you to see the relationships here. The three words are these, “sun”, which in Greek means “with”. “Anti”, which means “on behalf of”. And “lambanemai”, which means “to take up, to bear, or to carry”. So you crush those words together and literally this word translated “help” means, “to take up, to bear with and on behalf of another”. The leading Greek Lexicon says it means “to come to the aid of, to be of assistance to”. I think we can gain insight into this word “help” if we look back in the Old Testament and how it was used in the Septuagint.

For example, in Exodus 18, you remember Moses is getting some advice about how to relieve the legal workload on him since he’s the only judge, and this is what he’s told, Exodus 18:22, “let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you.” Moses you’re going to be like the Supreme Court. “But every minor dispute [these judges I’m suggesting] they ... will judge. So, it will be easier for you, [Here it is] and they will bear the burden.” That’s our word “help”. “They will bear the burden with you.”

This word occurs only one other time in the New Testament, and it’s in Luke 10:40, a very familiar story; you remember it. Martha, you remember, was distracted with all of her preparations, and she came to Jesus and she said, “Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to [what?] help me.” Tell her to help me; that’s the word. So, Paul wants us to understand that when we lack spiritual strength, and when we lack spiritual insight, and when we don’t know what to pray for, and when we are demonstrating our basic human weakness, the Spirit comes to our aid; the Spirit helps us; He bears our burden with us and on our behalf.

Now I find this such a great encouragement. Why is that? Because I want you to step away from this passage for just a moment and think with me, what are the greatest temptations you face in your life from Satan? What are the greatest temptations you face in your life from Satan? I would suggest they’re not the specific temptations you battle with, but rather they are more

overarching. In fact, here's a clue, they're the same temptations that Satan used in Genesis 3 in the garden.

Here are the three great temptations that you and I face in our Christian lives. Number one, to doubt the Word of God, "Has God said, really?" That's a temptation that is sadly becoming more common in the Christian church.

Secondly, to doubt the holiness or justice of God. In other words, to say, "Yes, God said it, but He's going to act toward me differently. He's going to treat me as kind of His special one. It's not going to happen with me like it happens with everybody else. This is what Satan said, right? "You will not surely die, not you."

And the third temptation that came in the garden is to doubt the goodness or the generosity of God. And I think, you remember that's what Satan did with Eve. He said, "Is it true God has said, 'You can't eat from any tree in this garden?' Would He be so restrictive as that?" It was to accentuate the negative, accentuate the command God had given and make it look like God was an ogre; make it look like God was everything but generous and gracious. Satan still does that! In fact, I am convinced that in my life and I believe in most Christians' lives, this is the greatest temptation we face, to doubt the goodness and the generosity and the benevolence of God.

And this chapter sets us straight because this chapter reminds us in verse 31 that the Father is for us. We'll get there; I love that expression, "He is for us." And in fact, verse 39 says, "He loves us," talks about the love of God. In verses 34 and 35, the Son loves us and is for us. And here in verse 26, Paul wants us to know the Spirit; the Spirit is for us. He comes to our aid. He bears the burden in our weakness. In the same way, the Spirit also helps our weakness. That's the reality.

He goes on in verse 26 to describe the reason, "for we do not know how to pray as we should." Here's a specific manifestation of our weakness, our state of weakness, a very specific manifestation. By the way, this expression is a most unusual expression in the original language. Some commentators sort of stumble with it and stumble over it. Literally, let me read to you as it reads exactly from the Greek text and even the word order. Of course, you know I think that English requires word order to get meaning. Greek is an inflected language which means you

can put the word anywhere as long as you put the right ending on it, and you know how it's functioning in the sentence, but you move words around to create emphasis.

Listen to this one; this is what verse 26 says in the original language, "For what we should pray, as far as it is necessary, we are not knowing. For what we should pray, as far as it is necessary, we are not knowing." What I want you to see is Paul is not talking in verse 26 about the style of our prayers; he's not talking about the structure of our prayers; he's not talking about the approach of our prayers; rather he's talking about the content of our prayers, the aim or the object of our prayers. We don't know what to pray for.

I love the fact that Paul includes himself here; did you see that? When Paul writes this letter to the Romans, he has been a believer in Jesus Christ and an apostle for over thirty years, and yet notice what he says, "we do not know how to pray as we should." The Apostle Paul still needed the help of the Spirit just as you and I do.

Now it's not always true that we don't know what to pray for. I mean there are definitely times that we know because Scripture commands us as all Christians to pray for certain things. For example, Matthew 6, our Lord says in the Lord's prayer, "Pray like this, ask the Lord for these things." So, we know that's how we ought to pray. Or, there is 1 Timothy 2 where he says we're to pray for the salvation of all people including our political leaders. We don't have to wonder about that; we know what to pray for. There are often times like that.

For example, this morning, as I get up early on Sunday morning; I go to my study at home, and I pray and I mark my notes and go back over the truths in my own heart; and on the way to church, I'm praying as well, and I was praying as I always pray on Sundays, "Lord use the spiritual gift of teaching that you've given me, and use your Word for the benefit of your people, and use it to bring those who don't know Christ to know you." Now when I pray that, I know I'm praying according to God's will because that's why he said he gave gifts and gifted people, gifted men, to the church. And so, I'm praying what I know. So, there are times when we do know what to pray for; we are directed by the Scripture to pray for those things.

But, often it's true that we really don't know what to pray. Why? Because we don't know what we really need spiritually and because we don't know what God's sovereign will for our lives is

until after it happens. So how do you pray? I know if you're a Christian, you've experienced this often.

I will tell you, the Lord often does this to me; He preaches the sermon; He kind of arranges the circumstances in my life so that that text is preaching at me all week before I preach it to you. That happened this week. Several times this week, I found myself in this very situation saying, "God, I don't know, I don't know what to ask You to do in this situation; I'm fresh out of ideas about how to pray for this." And I think we all experience that pretty routinely. This is why we so often pray and then add, "If it's Your will?" Why? Because we don't have a clue.

So, Paul here, when he talks in verse 26 about not knowing how to pray as we should, I think he's talking about two specific situations. And I haven't mentioned this one yet, but I'll start with it. It's when we think we know what to pray for, but we don't. There are a lot of times we really do think we know what God ought to do. "God, this is very clear to me; here's what You need to do," and we sort of dictate in our prayers to God, "This is the right plan," and yet it's really not.

This happened to people in Scripture. In fact, let me give you a couple of examples. It happened to Moses; yes, great Moses! Listen to Deuteronomy 3:23, "I also pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying," and this is verses 25 and 26 of the 3rd chapter of Deuteronomy:

"Let me, I pray, cross over and see the fair land that is beyond the Jordan, that good hill country and Lebanon." [Lord, let me into the Promised Land; that's what You need to do; that's what I'm asking You to do.] 'But the LORD was angry with me on your account,' [You remember how all of that unfolded.] and [He] would not listen to me; and the LORD said to me, "Enough! Speak to Me no more of this matter."

Why? Because there are times that we think we know what God ought to do, and we ask Him to do it, and it's absolutely the wrong thing. It was in Moses' case; it often is in ours.

Or take Matthew 20:22, you remember the disciples, they thought they were ready, they were ready to join the Lord and drink the cup and Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what

you are asking.” You’re clueless. “Are you able to drink the cup that [I’m] about to drink?” Of course, at that point, they were not, and He makes that clear.

Or there’s the Apostle Paul, that famous example in 2 Corinthians 12, beginning in verse 7. He says, “Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations ... there was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me--to keep me from exalting myself!” So, it was a messenger of Satan, but it was also a messenger that God allowed in order to keep him from exalting himself. There’s a lot of debate about what this messenger of Satan was. Some say it was a physical problem even with his eyes perhaps. Others would say, “No, it was a person. It was a false teacher in the Corinthian church that was attacking him in the church.” We can’t be sure, but listen to what he says, “Concerning this [whatever it was] Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me.” Why did Paul ask three times? Because he was convinced that was the best thing for him. “And He said to me, [No!] ‘My grace is sufficient for you.’” God had a better plan.

There’s James 4:3, “You ask and do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures.” Sometimes we pray, and it’s all about us and what we want; it has nothing to do with God and His glory and what would be best for us spiritually, and God says, “No!” So, sometimes we think we know what to pray for, but we don’t.

But then there are those other times, and I think this is the thrust of this passage, when we know that we don’t know what we should pray for. Like me in that car in 1984, sitting there with Sheila. We just don’t know. If that’s your regular experience, if you find yourself in either of these situations, then be encouraged because Paul says that’s when the Spirit comes to your aid; that’s when He comes to your aid. God doesn’t promise your spiritual weakness will go away, but he does promise that the Spirit will constantly come to your aid. Now generally then, Paul reminds us that the Spirit comes to our aid. He helps us; He bears our burden with us and for us.

But then he gets specific. So, notice secondly, specifically, the Spirit prays for our needs. In the rest of these two verses, Paul explains the nature of the Spirit’s help, the nature of how He comes to our aid. And in this section, He focuses first and very briefly on our Intercessor; we want to see that as well, and then on His intercession.

So, let’s look first at our Intercessor. Verse 26 says, “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.” Now it is interesting to me that some commentators debate who it is that’s interceding or

who it is that's praying in this verse. Some argue that it is the prayer of believers aided by the Spirit. In other words, the groaning here is the groaning of believers, and the Spirit sort of energizes and directs that. But that's not what the text says.

There are some of our charismatic friends who will argue that the groans here are the believer's prayer language inspired by the Spirit. But that can't be true for two reasons. First of all, because there's no biblical support for a private prayer language. First Corinthians 14 has to be misinterpreted to arrive at that conclusion; that's a different message for a different time. But even if there were a prayer language, that can't be what Paul is describing here because according to 1 Corinthians 12 - 14, the gift of tongues was only for some Christians, and here he's talking about all believers.

So, the third view, and frankly the most likely, is that the intercession in verse 26 is solely the intercession of the Spirit for us. This third view best reflects what Paul actually says here. Look at verse 26, notice he does not say the Spirit intercedes for us through our groanings, which is how some people interpret it. It's not what he says. He says, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words."

In addition, in the original language, in an inflected language, you know that pronouns often don't have to be used. Pronouns can kind of just be hidden in the ending of the verb. You know what it is because of the ending; that's often true in Greek. When the pronoun is actually used, when it appears, it's there for emphasis and that's exactly what Paul does here. And the New American Standard captures it beautifully. Paul says, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us." Now, this is one of those truths that I think we just get used to; you know it just sort of "Yeah, yeah, the Spirit intercedes."

Think about this for a moment; think about everyone who prays for you. Obviously, you pray for yourself and your own spiritual needs. Those that love you in your life, if they're in Christ, they pray for you. Your Christian brothers and sisters in this church, they pray for you. The leaders of this church, we pray for you. According to verse 34, Jesus prays for you, and here in verse 26, we learn that the Holy Spirit prays for you as well. What an incredible intercessor we have, the Spirit Himself!

Now Paul goes on to explain His intercession. Let's look at it. He makes several points here about this intercession. First of all, the nature of the Spirit's work is captured in that word "intercedes". He intercedes for us; "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us." The word "intercedes"

means “to intervene on behalf of another, to plead or petition for the benefit of someone else.” If you want to know what this looks like, think about the last time you prayed for someone other than yourself, right? You came before God; and on their behalf, you petitioned God to do something for them, something for their good. That is exactly what Paul is describing here. That is intercession, and that’s exactly what the Holy Spirit does for you. He comes to God on your behalf to plead on your behalf. “The Spirit Himself intercedes for us.” By the way, you’ll notice it says “intercedes”; in the original language, it’s the present tense, “is interceding”. The idea is a constancy; this is the Spirit’s constant pattern. He is constantly pleading with God for your benefit and on your behalf. That’s incredible! That’s the nature of His work.

But Paul takes us a little farther. I want you to notice also the depth of the Spirit’s concern. It’s captured in that word “groanings”. The word “groanings” refers to, according to the leading Greek lexicon, involuntary expressions, involuntary expressions of great concern or stress.

Now if you want to see what this looks like, keep your finger here in Romans 8, and go back to Exodus 2. Here the word ‘groaning’ appears in the Septuagint, in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament here in this passage, Exodus 2, look at verse 23. You remember the context; Joseph has died, and things have gotten really bad for the people of Israel in Egypt. Verse 23 says:

Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, [the slavery] and they cried out; and their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God. So, God heard [Look, here it is.] God heard their groaning, [That’s a way of capturing their cry and their sighing and the desperateness of their condition, and that caused them to groan out their prayer to God.] and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God saw the sons of Israel, and God took notice of them.

Now go back to Romans 8. That statement in verse 26, “the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings,” is so shocking that some commentators say, “Wait a minute. Paul can’t be saying that about the Spirit.”

In fact, some men I respect, you know I love the Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones. He says this in his commentary, “The Godhead does not groan. It is inconceivable for every reason.” Now it is true, I’ll agree with him in this way, it is true that the creation groans back earlier in this text

because of the curse to which God subjects it. And believers groan because of our present circumstances, our human weakness and our sin, and obviously the Spirit has never been subjected to the curse, and obviously He doesn't groan because of His present suffering or His own weakness or His sin; He has none of those. So, why does Paul clearly say here that He intercedes, the Spirit intercedes with (it doesn't say our groanings), but with groanings, His groanings? Why does the Spirit groan? It is because of compassion for us; it is because of His depth of concern for you. You groan; He knows you groan, and He groans with you.

I like the way one writer puts it, "The Holy Spirit identifies with our groans with the pain of the world and the church and shares in the longing for the final freedom of both; we and He groan together. You want to know the reality of your situation? The Holy Spirit loves you; He understands the pain and struggle of life in a fallen world still contained in a fallen body with the flesh; He understands the battle with sin that we engage in every day, and He groans with us. That's the depth of His concern.

But Paul goes on to describe the means of the Spirit's intercession, the means. Notice he says, "the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words," too deep for words. Those four English words translate one Greek word, and it's found only here in the New Testament. It means "wordless or unexpressed". The Spirit ... intercedes for us with groanings" that are wordless. The Spirit's prayers for our needs are communicated to God without words.

I like the way John MacArthur explains it here. He says, "These are divine articulations within the Trinity that cannot be expressed in words, but carry profound appeals for the welfare of every believer." Again, this is something that we just let go right over the top of our heads, but I want you think about this for a moment, and I want you to think about you. Paul is saying here that the members of the Trinity, the members of the Godhead, regularly communicate with each other about you and your needs. That is astounding! You see, we don't just have a God who is the God of "the group". Yes, we are part of the family of God, but God doesn't know us as "The Family". He knows us as Tom, Sheila, Bob, Jane; that's the point here. The Spirit's communication with the Father is about individuals, but the Spirit's communication with the Father and the Son is done in such communion and with such oneness of mind and purpose that it doesn't even require words. The Holy Spirit (think about this), I love this passage because Paul tells us here that the Holy Spirit groans when we groan; He helps when we are weak; He

knows what we don't, and He prays as we can't. What an amazing helper! Now that's His intercession in terms of how He accomplishes the means of His intercession.

But we move on to verse 27, and here in verse 27, Paul goes on to explain the effectiveness of the Spirit's prayers. Paul provides us, in verse 27, with several arguments for the effectiveness of the Spirit's intercession on our behalf. We can be confident that the Father will hear and answer the Spirit's prayers for us for three reasons. First of all, because God already knows your heart. Notice what he says in verse 27, "and He who searches the hearts." That can only be describing one person; that's God. He's going to talk about the Spirit in a moment so it's not the Spirit. Specifically, this is the Father; He searches the hearts; this, by the way, is a frequent biblical description of God in the tri-unity of His person.

In fact, I can multiply references, and I have them in my notes, and I cut a bunch of them, let me just give you a few to think about. Psalm 44:21, speaking of God, "He knows the secrets of the heart." You think you've got secrets? You don't have secrets; God knows. Jeremiah 17:10, "I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds."

You know, man often judges externally and without sufficient evidence, if you doubt that, just go on the internet and read all the comments. People are clueless, and they're making determinations. God isn't like that. God has the evidence because He knows the heart. Jeremiah 20: 12, "Oh LORD of hosts, You ... test the righteous, (You) see the mind and the heart." Here he's talking about believers, "You ... test the righteous;" you know their mind and heart; you know what's going on. In John 21:17, Peter says to Jesus, "Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You." 1 Thessalonians 2:4, Paul says, "just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts." God knows, Paul says, what my motive is in my ministry; He knows. Or there's Revelation 2:23, where Jesus is talking about bringing chastening on a church, and he says this, I'm going to do it so that "all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts." He's talking about believers here, "and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds."

So, let this sink into your mind; this comment here that He searches the hearts. Here it's meant for our encouragement. If you're a believer, this is for your encouragement. He knows your thoughts; He knows your desires; He knows your affections, what you love; He knows your aspirations; He knows what you need before you pray, and He knows what you need before the

Spirit prays. He knows if you love Him; He knows if you desire to please Him; He knows if you long to be holy, and He knows if you are genuinely, from your heart, fighting your sin every day, seeking to put it to death; He knows it all. And here for us who are believers, this is meant to be an encouragement.

But let me change just for a moment and speak to you if you're here this morning, and you're not a Christian. Listen, what I just shared ought to be the most sobering truth you have ever heard in your life because God knows not only every act you have ever committed, whether it was done in secret or whether it was done in public, whether it was done in an attempt to hide it or whether it was done for the world to see, He knows every act; He knows every single word that has ever left your mouth, and He remembers them. You may not, I don't, but He does. But even more sobering is, He knows every thought, every thought, every desire, He knows what you love; and if you don't seek the solution of forgiveness in Christ that He is offering, He will be compelled, by His justice, to give you exactly what every act and every word and every thought deserves.

And I can promise you this, if that's the standard of God's judgment, and it will be, you have no hope, neither do I. Your only hope is Jesus Christ, and I plead with you, today, turn from your sin and accept the solution that God Himself has offered. He takes no delight in the death of the wicked; He takes no delight in condemning sinners like they deserve. He has made a legitimate offer of the gospel to you. Repent and believe and you will be forgiven; you will be changed; you will be made His own. I plead with you to do that today.

But for believers whose hearts have been changed, this truth that God knows your heart is a comfort. He knows! He knows you love His Son. He knows you want to obey. He knows you're striving to please Him. He knows all of those things, and He knows what you need.

There's a second argument for the effectiveness of the Spirit's prayers. It's: God already knows the Spirit's mind; God already knows the Spirit's mind. Verse 27, "He who searches [your] hearts [My heart. He also knows] what the mind of the Spirit [Capital "S"] ... what the mind of the [Holy] Spirit is." God knows the thinking of the Spirit about what you really need, whatever it is you may be thinking and praying, and the Father is one with the Spirit. He's one in being and in mind and purpose, so He will absolutely answer the Spirit's prayer. God the Father knows what the Spirit knows about you before the Spirit ever expresses it in these wordless

groans. He knows the mind of the Spirit and He will answer. If it's what the Spirit wants for you, it's what the Father will do.

And that brings us to a third argument of the effectiveness of the Spirit's prayers; the Spirit already knows God's will. Verse 27 says, "He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He [that is the Spirit] intercedes for the saints according to the will of God." The Spirit knows God's will. The Spirit knows God's moral will, that is His revealed will; He knows the Scripture, of course the Spirit knows the Scripture, right? He inspired it. This is His book, so He knows what God expects and demands and requires of you. But the Spirit also knows God's sovereign will, what God has determined about the outworking of the details and circumstances of your life in the future which God has not revealed and which you can never know until it happens. So, the Spirit, knowing both God's moral or revealed will and God's sovereign or secret will, prays for God's will to be done in your life and in your circumstances. That's an amazing truth!

I love the way Douglas Moo puts it in his excellent commentary on Romans; listen to this. He says:

Our failure to know God's will and consequent inability to petition God specifically and confidently, [In other words, we don't know what God wants, and we don't know what to ask for. He says,] that is met by God's Spirit who Himself expresses to God those intercessory petitions that perfectly match the will of God. When we do not know what to pray for, yes, even when we pray for things that are not best for us, we need not despair for we can depend on the Spirit's ministry of perfect intercession on our behalf. [You're praying and the Spirit's praying, and He is praying according to the will of God. Moo goes on to say:]

There is one in heaven, the Son of God, who intercedes on our behalf, defending us from all charges that might be brought against us guaranteeing salvation in the Day of Judgment. [That's verse 34, we'll get there.] But there is also an intercessor in the heart, the Spirit of God who effectively prays to the Father on our behalf throughout the difficulties and uncertainties of our lives here on earth.

Christian, do you understand what this means? It means you have a helper; you have a helper in your heart, someone who bears your burden with you. When you groan about your circumstances, when you groan about your weakness as a human being, when you groan about

your sin, the Spirit groans with you. He takes those prayers and perfects them and prays what you should be praying to God. And the Father always hears, and the Father always answers.

Now, how did the great truths we just studied together add to or fit into the theme of this chapter? How does the Spirit's intercession for us guarantee our security in Christ? That's the point of the chapter. How does this fit? Well, think about it this way. If you are in Christ, you don't need to be distressed about all the difficulties you encounter in this life. You don't need to be distressed about your human weakness. You don't need to be distressed about even your constant, relentless, daily struggle with sin. You need to keep that struggle up. You need to put sin to death as we've learned. But you don't need to be distressed about that because God's own Spirit is constantly helping you through this time of weakness, this life of weakness. He knows exactly what you need, and He knows what the Father wants for you, and He is constantly asking the Father to do it. And He and the Father are of the same mind and the same purpose concerning everything pertaining to you and your life.

The point is, if the Spirit and the Father are in perfect agreement about what ought to happen to you and in your life, there's no way you don't make it. He will hold you fast. I love the way Jude puts it at the end of his little letter, our Lord's half-brother, in Jude 24; we read this, he's talking about God:

Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, *be* glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time now and forever. Amen.

Let's pray together.

Father, forgive us for ever doubting Your goodness, for ever doubting Your generosity, Your kindness toward us. What more could you do than You've done? We thank you, oh, God, that You have given us Your Spirit as an Intercessor; the One who, in our weakness, constantly comes to our aid, bears the burden with us and for us. We thank you that He does that by overcoming our inherent lack of knowledge and insight into how to pray, what to ask You. And He Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words, wordless groans, sharing our grief, sharing our hurt, our sorrow, our struggle, and asking You for exactly what we need according to Your eternal will. Father, thank you for how You have equipped us to live in this

world. Forgive us for thinking poorly of You, and help us to be encouraged and to be strengthened by these great truths.

I pray for those here this morning who are not in Christ. Oh, God, help them to see that You know everything; and that someday, if they will not take Your gracious offer of forgiveness in Christ, You will judge them on the basis of everything. We pray that they would come to Christ even today.

In Jesus's name, Amen.