

Automatic "Prayer" Check.

"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."

Both my computer and my cell phone have what they call, "Spell Check." When you type a word, the spell check suggests the proper spelling for that word. On my cell phone, it will automatically change the spelling. This can save you some embarrassment. When I type a text on my cell phone, my fat thumbs may not move all that well and I can have several misspellings. The spell check automatically corrects those mistakes. Yes, sometimes it is too zealous in checking my spelling. I wanted to text the word, "catechism," and the spell check, not knowing any better, changes it to "category." But overall, the spell check has saved me a lot of embarrassment.

Do you know that you have a spell check on your prayer life? Or better, I should call it a "prayer check." Because of Jesus Christ, we can pray to God the Father. And because of God the Father's love for us, we want to pray to him. But many times we don't know what to say or how to say it. But God has given us a prayer check, God the Holy Spirit.

I. In our weakness we often don't know what to say.

The first thing we learn in our text is that we need the Holy Spirit's help in our prayer life. ***"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness,"*** it says in our text. The truth is, we are weak. Look at baseball. Every player has some sort of weakness. A batter may be a good homerun hitter but also strikes a lot or is a sucker for a good curve ball. A center fielder may have speed and a good glove but is below average in hitting. All of us here would admit that we have a weakness or two. But the truth is, we are weak in everything. ***"Our bodies are sown in weakness,"*** it says in 1 Corinthians 15. ***"The Spirit is willing but the flesh is weak,"*** Jesus said about the prayer life of his disciples.

One particular weakness has to do with our prayers. ***"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."*** Let's look at some of the weak moments in our prayer life. There will be times when pain is so intense that you cannot concentrate. All you can offer God in the form of a prayer is a sigh or groan.

Maybe one's mind isn't what it should be. In my ministry I have met people suffering from drug abuse, the side effects of medication, or experiencing one or more kinds of mental illness. They can't even tell you what they want for dinner let alone formulate words in prayer. All they can offer God are sighs and groans.

Then there is the problem of minds weak with age. I think of Christians sitting in wheelchairs in the nursing home. As you walk by and say "hello," they don't respond. The problems of aging have played havoc on their minds that all they could offer God is a sigh or groan. Or what about those suffering from Alzheimer's? How can they pray?

But you don't have to grow old to experience weakness in prayer. Pressure, stress, worry, concerns, financial difficulties, a job that you do not like going to, family problems, taking one step forward and two backward, and so on weigh us down. We know we should pray. We want to pray. But the words just don't come or they come out in a meandering babble. All we do is sigh and groan.

And then we don't know what to pray for. In a restaurant they give you a choice of fifteen different entrees. Which one to have? You don't know. We pray in the Lord's Prayer, "Thy Kingdom Come, thy will be done, deliver us from evil." But when say those words, do we really know what we are praying for? We may want God to take evil completely out of our lives, but it may not occur to us that God might use temptation or trouble to test and strengthen us. We may pray that his kingdom come now so we are done with this world. But God tells us his kingdom isn't just heaven; it is when we live and share his Word now, and maybe he hasn't taken us home yet so we can help spread his kingdom here and now. Get it? We are weak. We often tailor our prayers around our immediate fears and needs and don't consider the bigger picture.

And finally, the problem of sin makes us weak. Many of our prayers tend to be selfish. "Do this, do that, or else." We think we need more money and ask God for it, but he says, "No, you need more of the gospel instead so you become less attached to this world." Often we turn to prayer as a last resort and not a first resort. We like to think we can work independent of God. Couldn't that be the reason why God let that bad thing happen, to force us to realize we need him?

II. But the Spirit prays for us.

So, we might offer God only sighs and groans.. But the Holy Spirit helps us. ***"In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express."*** Let's say you are going to court. You decided to represent yourself as you have the right to. The other side, however, hires a big time lawyer. He is experienced. He has argued hundreds of cases like this before, has all the training and law books, and he knows all the special legal terms. He just stated his case with eloquence and power. The judge asks for your

argument and all you get out is a confused, "Aaa." You need someone to represent you, one who knows the right words to say. You have that someone. He is God the Holy Spirit.

All of us can and do pray. But in our weakness we often don't know what to say or how to say it. At such a time the Holy Spirit prays for us. He intercedes for us with groans that cannot be understood or heard by us, but they are very clear to God. You see, God the Holy Spirit isn't sitting in heaven controlling us with some sort of divine remote control. He literally is living in the heart of every believer. That is why the Bible calls us the temple of the Holy Spirit. The Bible calls him our Advocate or Counselor, words which are equivalent for lawyer today. He literally is talking to us, building up the conviction that Jesus is real and so is our forgiveness, but he is also there praying for us when we don't know what or how to pray.

Why is God telling us this? We need his help. My grandmother suffered several strokes. Her speech was hampered as a result. She was afraid to talk. I still remember her sitting there with a little smile on her face because the words are not coming out. Sometimes we can guess what she is saying, other times we can't. Well, when you want to pray to God, when you need to pray to God, but all that comes out are sighs and groans, isn't it wonderful that the Holy Spirit knows exactly what we want and need and prays for us? God doesn't have to guess at it. ***"And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."***

We have a beautiful example of this in Psalm 38. In it David confessed that he was afraid of three things: physical pain; the guilt of his sin; how he was betrayed by his friends and sons. But regardless of how tormented he was, David breathed a sigh of relief. ***"All my longings lie open before you, O Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you. . . . I wait for you, O Lord; you will answer, O Lord my God."*** David didn't know what to say in his prayers. But that didn't stop God from understanding him word for word.

Why did this bring such comfort to David? Why does it bring comfort to us? First, it means that even though we can't say it, the Lord knows what torments us and how we feel. With my stroke-ridden grandmother, we had to guess at what she was saying. It would have been comforting to her if she had an interpreter, someone who could tell us exactly what she wanted so that we could do it for her. We have that in God the Holy Spirit.

The second great comfort here is that the Spirit prays and God answers in a way that is best for us. ***" . . . the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will."*** Just what exactly is God's will? We pray for it every time in the Lord's prayer, ***"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*** The devil's plan is to lead man away from God through sin. God's will that the wicked will not perish, but have eternal life.

Friends, look at what the Lord has done. You were born as ones destined for death now and forever in hell. But it was the will of our Father to send his son to be cursed in our place and to bear in himself the guilt and punishment our sins deserve. ***"While we were still God's enemies,"*** Paul proclaims in Romans 5, ***"he reconciled us to himself through the death of his son."*** We were born dead in sin, but God made us alive through the Holy Spirit. Suddenly, freely, the gates of heaven were flung wide open for us. And God wants us to go through this sinful world and end up through those gates. To this end Jesus died for us. To this end Jesus is before God interceding for us. To this end God the Holy Spirit creates, nourishes, and strengthens our faith. To this end, he prays for us when we don't know what to pray for.

During these low moments, when we groan and stagger under the pains and troubles of this world, the devil attacks us and accuses us that our faith is too weak or that God has had it with us. But he is a liar. Your groaning and sighing is proof that you are a child of God. They show you are a child of God calling to him for help. The Spirit turns your groans into an intelligible, understood prayer worthy of God's ears. So don't worry. God hears your prayer. And he will answer it according to his will. The Spirit is making sure of it. INJ Amen.