

The Encouraging Truth Of The Mind Of The Spirit

By: Keith Keyser

The human heart craves sympathetic understanding – someone who can perceive its deepest sorrows and urgent needs. Characterized as this life is by rigorous trials and pervasive pain, “a shoulder to cry on” is required gear for journeying in this fallen world. Christians are not exempt from this natural desire for comfort and encouragement. So it is with great joy that one reads of the magnificent work of “the mind of the Spirit” in Romans 8:27, for it tells of the Spirit’s ministry on behalf of suffering saints. All three persons of the trinity are mentioned in this beautiful passage. How blessed it is to know that the triune God is vitally interested in the saints’ well-being! What is more, He will faithfully and adeptly conform them to the glorious image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-29).

The Comforter’s Credentials

The Holy Spirit is a person with the same attributes as the other members of the Godhead. Like the Father and the Son, He possesses all of the characteristics of divine personality, including omniscience. His intellect not only encompasses all knowledge, but also is in full agreement with the other persons of the Trinity. As 1 Corinthians 2:10 expresses it: “But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God”.

When the Lord Jesus was preparing to leave the world in order to go back to the Father, He told His disciples that He would send “another Comforter” (Jn. 14:16). Just as He had looked out for all of their needs and instructed them in the things of God, so the Holy Spirit would also reveal the things of Christ to them (Jn.14:16-18, 26; 15:26; 16:13-15). Like the Old Testament servant showing tokens of Isaac’s wealth to Rebekah, so He woos and instructs the saints by manifesting the inheritance that they share with Christ (Rom. 8:23; 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14). Just as the Lord Jesus showed love and grace to His own while on earth, even so the Spirit of God faithfully ministers to them throughout the vicissitudes of their pathway.

Divine Prayer Brings Eternal Security

With its monumental teaching on the unshakeable security of the believer for time and eternity the eighth chapter of Romans is one of the most encouraging passages in the New Testament. It begins with “no condemnation” and ends with no separation (v. 1 and v. 39). Nonetheless, in a world where suffering and pain are endemic, how may one be sure of joining Christ in glory? After all, the creation is groaning under the weight of the consequences of man’s fall (Gen. 3). Natural disasters and diseases plague this cursed planet. The poet Tennyson graphically described the animal kingdom as “nature, red in tooth and claw”ⁱ. The saints are not exempt from the deficiencies and pains inherent in fallen creation. The believer also groans, awaiting “the adoption...the redemption of the body” which will transform our bodies of humiliation into glorious bodies like that of the Lord Jesus (Phil. 3:21, JND).

Integral to the Almighty's sovereign plan is the intercession of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:26). He aids believers in their "infirmities", ministering to them in the weakness and pain that accompany life in the sin-afflicted world. The creation groans, and the believer also groans, but most surprisingly of all, the Holy Spirit groans (v. 26)! Such is the depth of His sympathy with suffering saints.

Some balk at the idea of such unvarnished emotion coming from God, but this verse fully agrees with the other emotions that the Scriptures attribute to the Almighty: for example, perfect love, unparalleled mercy, matchless grace, and ineffable holiness. The true and living God is not impassive; nor is He cold and austere. Certain Greek philosophers – such as Plato – imagined that deity has no emotions. Throughout the Scriptures, the Lord describes Himself in emotional terms. He is not fickle, capricious, or mutable like human attitudes; nevertheless, He thinks, feels, and wills – all in a perfect way. He hates sin, yet loves sinners (Rom. 1:18; Jn. 3:16). He loves righteousness and hates iniquity (Heb. 1:9). Rather than cling to a neo-Platonic conception of God, one must adhere to the explicit teaching of the Bible.

Instead of being an undignified expression of garish emotion, the groaning of the Spirit encourages one that He understands and empathizes with human sufferings. He is not aloof from the rough and tumble trials of this world. He enters into the deepest human thoughts, desires, and pleadings, and ministers accordingly in the way that best suits each need. What is more, though these groanings are unutterable (v. 26), the Father understands what the Spirit is saying, for "...He [the Spirit] maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (v.27). The Holy Spirit always prays for the believers in complete harmony with the Father's will; moreover, there is no possibility of misunderstanding within the Godhead – put simply, the divine persons understand One another perfectly.

Minding God's Business

Verse 27 speaks of "the mind of the Spirit"; well-known Greek scholars define the word "mind" in this passage as "'aim, aspiration or striving".ⁱⁱ Another explains it as the "...intention of the Spirit, what He means by these unutterable groanings".ⁱⁱⁱ Thus, what the Spirit wants is clear to the Father and the intercession is effective. The Spirit's omniscient mind knows how to pray for the suffering saints in their necessity, and therefore brings incomparable power to the process of working out the divine will in the lives of Christians.

The famous "All things work together for good..." would be impossible, but for the will of the Father and the intercession of the Spirit and the Son (v. 26-27, 34). One person of the Trinity intercedes for us in heaven (v. 34), the other on earth (v. 27). Each of them perceives the exact requirement of the moment, and uses all the circumstances of life to bring about God's purpose of glorifying the saints with Christ (v. 29). Every experience, every trial, every tear is all masterfully employed to conform us to the altogether lovely image of Christ, God's ideal "second man" (1 Cor. 15:47) – "the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom. 8:29). Like a brilliant

surgeon skillfully wielding the scalpel to cut away extraneous flesh, or the genius sculptor applying the mallet and chisel to a piece of granite, so God employs “all things” to bring about His purpose for His glory and believers’ eternal blessing. In his classic hymn Darby rhetorically asked “And is it so, I shall be like Thy Son?” According to Romans 8:28-29 the answer to this interrogative is a definite and resounding “yes”!

David’s claim: “For He knoweth our frame; He remembereth that we are dust” (Psa. 103:14) accurately describes the mind of the Spirit. In the saints’ weakness, He demonstrates sympathetic understanding and compassionate strength. The Spirit of God is mindful of Christians. His exhaustless intellect and omnipotence tirelessly and inalterably work to bring about the divine will. This results in the eternal well-being of the saints, who will always dwell in glory with the ascended Christ. The mind of the Spirit agrees with the will of the Father and knows how to pray and work for His people. Such incomparably massive mental powers are marshaled on behalf of Christians. Indeed, one could not ask for more effective labor to bring about the most good for God and man.

ⁱ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*, canto 56.

ⁱⁱ Arndt and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 866

ⁱⁱⁱ Charles Hodge, *Commentary on Romans*, electronic edition, comment on v. 27.