

The Spirit's Groans for Glory

Scripture: Romans 8:26–27

Code: 45-63

INTRODUCTION

A. The Power That Keeps Us Secure

One of the most thrilling and hopeful verses in Scripture is 1 Peter 1:5, which says we "are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." As we've been learning in our study of Romans 8, our source of confidence, joy, and peace is our hope of eternal glory. We have the confidence that if we know Christ, we are kept by God's power.

First Peter 1:5 reminds us of something else we've been studying in Romans 8: our salvation is not yet complete. Romans 13:11 says, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed." There is a future dimension of salvation that will not be complete until we are glorified. Romans 8:29-30 says, "Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son....

Moreover, whom he did predestinate, them he also called; and whom he called, them he also justified; and whom he justified, them he also glorified." We who have been justified are waiting to be glorified.

Our being kept by God's power is known as the doctrine of eternal security or the perseverance of the saints." It's the reality behind the vernacular expression, "Once saved, always saved." A more complete way of saying that is, "Once having entered salvation, we wait to see salvation complete." The apostle Paul put it this way: "He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6; NIV).

The Puritan Thomas Watson said, "The exercise of grace may be hindered; as when the course of water is stopped.... Instead of grace working in the godly, corruption may work; instead of patience, murmuring; instead of heavenliness, earthliness.... Thus lively and vigorous may corruption be in the regenerate; they may fall into enormous sins. But though their grace may be drawn low, yet it is not drawn dry; though grace may be abated, it is not abolished.... Grace may suffer an eclipse, not a dissolution A believer may fall from some degrees of grace, but not from the state of grace" (A Body of Divinity [Carlisle, Penn.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1986], pp. 280, 284-85).

B. The Persons Who Keep Us Secure

Why did Jesus say, "Of all that [the Father] hath given me I should lose nothing" (John 6:39)?

Because when a person comes to Christ, He secures his salvation for all eternity. In fact, the entire Trinity is involved in securing believers.

1. The Father

a) 2 Corinthians 1:21-22--"He who establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God, who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts." The One who has established, anointed, and sealed us is God the Father. We are secure because He secures us. b) 2 Timothy 2:19--"The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." Whoever belongs to God belongs to Him forever.

2. The Son

First Corinthians 1:6-7 says, "The testimony of Christ was confirmed in you; so that ye come behind in no gift, waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." We have received the testimony of Christ; now we wait His second coming. We have already been justified; now we are waiting to be glorified. In fact, Christ "shall ... confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord

Jesus Christ" (v. 8; cf. Col. 1:22; 1 Thess. 3:13). Christ Himself will confirm we are blameless because we have trusted in Him as our Savior from sin.

3. The Holy Spirit

Ephesians 1:13 says, "Ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise." God guarantees our security by the work of the Holy Spirit. In 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Paul says, "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." We can be confident of God's ability to finish what He starts.

The teaching that a person can lose his or her salvation is foreign to Scripture. It disregards the work of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Father established that you are His forever. The Son confirms that and keeps you blameless. And the Spirit keeps you secure, stamping you with the divine seal. Those who have been saved are being kept saved (1 Pet. 1:5).

C. The Promise to Keep Us Secure

Hebrews 6:16 says, "Men verily swear by the greater, and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife." When people make an oath, they swear by something greater than themselves. The Hebrew tradition was to swear by the Temple, God's name, or heaven. If two men had an argument and one took an oath, that would end the debate.

What's most impressive is when God Himself makes a vow: "God, willing more abundantly to show unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath" (v. 17). God wanted to show "the heirs of promise" that He would never change His mind about their salvation. He confirmed His promise with an oath: "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope before us, which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil" (vv. 18-19). When God promised salvation, He made an oath that bound Him. He cannot lie. We have strong consolation regarding our salvation because our anchor is the steadfast Word of God.

REVIEW

The Holy Spirit frees us from sin, enables us to fulfill God's law, changes our nature, empowers us for victory, confirms our adoption, and guarantees our glory.

I. THE INCOMPARABLE GAIN OF GLORY (vv. 17-18)

II. THE INEXPRESSIBLE GROANS FOR GLORY (vv. 19-27)

A. The Groan of Creation (vv. 19-22)

B. The Groan of Believers (vv. 23-25)

LESSON

C. The Groan of the Holy Spirit (vv. 26-27)

"Likewise, the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God."

He joins creation and believers in sighing over the fallen state of mankind and the universe. He longs for "the glorious liberty of the children of God" (v. 21) and "the manifestation of the sons of God" (v. 19).

It's difficult to understand the concept of the Holy Spirit's groanings, but it does offer immediate encouragement: we who groan under the weight of our fallenness and wait for our bodies to be redeemed are not alone--the Holy Spirit groans over the same thing. When we lament with Paul, "Oh, wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Rom. 7:24), the Holy Spirit groans with us because He understands.

The Spirit Doesn't Groan in Tongues

Charismatics say that when Paul talked about "groanings which cannot be uttered," he was referring to speaking in tongues. However, it is the Holy Spirit who is speaking in Romans 8:26--not people. Moreover, the Spirit doesn't really speak, for the groanings He emits "cannot be uttered." Finally, nothing in the context of Romans 8:26-27 is related to the issue of speaking in tongues.

Romans 8:26 begins with "likewise." Just as creation and believers groan, the Spirit also groans. God is on our side. Some Christians go through life expecting to be punished by God for every little thing they do wrong. While it's true that God chastens His own (Heb. 12:6), our humanness is as much a concern of the Spirit as it is to us. The Holy Spirit wants us to get rid of our sin as much as we do. That's a comforting thought. The only time we should expect God's discipline is when we are happy with our sin and don't repent of it. But as long as we groan for our deliverance, the God's Spirit will groan with us. He wants us to be set free from the flesh and given full salvation.

1. His intercession for believers (v. 26)

Our security is a result of God's plan, Christ's gift, and the Holy Spirit's ongoing work in us. We know our salvation is eternal, but we have to be kept saved (1 Pet. 1:5). That is a divine work of the Spirit and the Lord Jesus Christ.

a) It's in conjunction with Christ. In Luke 22:31 Jesus says to Peter, "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." On the surface it might appear as if Jesus wasn't trusting in God's sovereign plan of salvation. While it's true salvation is eternal, it is still carried out by the Son's intercession. You can't separate God's plan from the work of Christ and the Spirit. The Lord said He would pray that Peter's faith would remain. Would God answer that prayer? Jesus predicted He would, saying to Peter, "When thou art converted [when you overcome the trial], strengthen thy brethren" (v. 32). God planned the believer's security; the Son and the Spirit carry it out. If they didn't, God's plan would be nullified. If for one moment Jesus stopped cleansing you from your sin, you would go to hell--even if you had already put your faith in Christ. That's why 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." There must be constant intercession on our behalf by the Son and the Spirit. Romans 8:26 says, "The Spirit also helpeth our infirmity." We can't keep ourselves saved--we are too weak. Can't we pray for ourselves? We could try, but the problem is we don't know precisely what to pray for. We struggle with sin and the weakness of our flesh, and we don't know what the future holds. Only the Lord knows when something will happen to us, just as He knew that Peter was about to be tested (Luke 22:31). Peter didn't know what was going to happen; he could have walked blindly into the trial and been overcome by it. So the Lord prayed for Peter even before the trial occurred. The Savior and Spirit intercede for us because we can't maintain our redemption. The Spirit helps our weaknesses. He doesn't just help us in our weak prayers; He helps us in our mortal, sinful state. While many acknowledge that believers are secure forever because of God's sovereign plan, they miss the corresponding truth that eternal security rests also on the intercessory work of the Son and the Spirit. Peter was safe because Christ prayed for him. We should be grateful that Christ also helps us in our weaknesses. Hebrews 7:25 says, "[Christ] is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." What does it mean to be saved "to the uttermost"? To be saved to the limit--from the moment of salvation to our glorification. Verse 26 continues, "For such a high priest was fitting for us." Without the intercessory work of Christ, we would never get to heaven. Not only does Christ intercede for us, but the Holy Spirit intercedes for us as well. We have a faithful High Priest in heaven, and a faithful High Priest in our hearts: "The Spirit Himself maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8:26). The Greek word translated "intercession" is the same one used in Hebrews 7:25 in reference to Christ. We can't pray for ourselves effectively

because we don't know how to protect ourselves in the midst of spiritual conflict. We need help from the Savior in heaven and the Spirit on earth.

In God We Trust

According to 2 Corinthians 12 Paul prayed three times for the Lord to remove "a thorn in the flesh" (v. 7). But the Lord didn't remove it. In Philippians 4:11 Paul says, "I have learned, in whatever state I am ... to be content." He learned what all of us should know: we really don't know how to pray for ourselves. When we suffer, we pray, "Lord, get rid of my suffering. I've learned my lesson. I don't need to suffer any more." We fail to consider a worse fate might befall us if it weren't for the suffering God allows us to endure. Trust the Lord. We don't know what's best for us, but God does.

b) It's a divine rescue mission How does the Spirit intercede for us? The Greek word translated "intercession" is a multiple compound word: two prepositions attached to a verb. It speaks of rescuing someone in trouble who has no resources to escape. Satan knows we are kept by the power of Christ and the Spirit. He wars against their power with all the hosts of hell in an attempt to debilitate their work of keeping believers. Christ isn't in heaven watching everything fall into place; He is continuously working to uphold all things. The Spirit of God isn't finished, either. He didn't stop working when the age of miracles ended after the apostolic era. He continues in marvelous, supernatural ways to uphold believers. The Holy Spirit intercedes by rescuing us when we have no resource for rescuing ourselves. Notice the emphasis in verse 26: "the Spirit himself [Gk., autos]." It is His work.

The Content of the Spirit's Groans

The Spirit groans "with groanings which cannot be uttered" (v. 26). Those are divine sighs by the Spirit as He prays to the Father for the glorification of fallen creatures who would never be glorified if it weren't for His intercession. The Spirit understands our weaknesses: He knows that we sin and that we don't know how to pray to defend ourselves. He yearns for us to be like Christ.

The intertrinitarian groanings of the Holy Spirit have content, but they transcend language. They are "groanings which cannot be uttered." We don't know what He is saying, but we can be sure He is praying for us.

c) It brings sure results No believer will ever be lost to God. The only thing that could keep you from glorification would be if Christ could no longer sit at the right hand of God and intercede for you, or if the Spirit could no longer cry out before God on your behalf. But that won't happen since God is eternal. Paul said "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:12-13). The Spirit works in you to bring about God's perfect will. Paul called that "the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:19). God supplies you with all you need to endure life and make it to glory. d) It's an ongoing ministry The Holy Spirit seals us by His constant intercession on our behalf. In the Bible a seal is a sign of authenticity. If someone wanted to prove something was real, he would put a seal on it. A seal was also used to signify a completed transaction. When someone sold a plot of land, a seal confirmed the agreement between the buyer and the seller (e.g., Jer. 32:7-15). That's similar to pink slips that verify car ownership. Scripture also refers to a seal as a sign of authority. When someone acted as a representative for a monarch, he would carry the monarch's seal with him. That proved he represented the monarch's authority. Primarily, though, Scripture uses the seal as a sign of security. When it says we are sealed with the Spirit (Eph. 1:13), that means we are secure. The best Old Testament illustration of that appears in Daniel 6: "The king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spoke and said unto Daniel, Thy God, whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the

den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords, that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel" (vv. 16-17). When you are sealed with the Spirit, that means God's purpose in salvation can never be changed. The seal of our security is the Holy Spirit Himself, who assures us by His ongoing intercessory work. That is why He is called the "Holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). He is the reason the promise of ultimate redemption is fulfilled.

2. His interaction with God (v. 27)

a) God listens to the Holy Spirit (v. 27a) Romans 8:27 says, "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." Do you know who searches our hearts?(1) 1 Samuel 16:7--"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."(2) 1 Kings 8:39--"Thou, even thou only, knowest the hearts of all the children of men."(3) 1 Chronicles 28:9--"The Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts."(4) Psalm 139:1-2--"O Lord, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; thou understandest my thought afar off."(5) Proverbs 15:11--"Sheol [the grave] and destruction are before the Lord; how much more, then, the hearts of the children of men!"(6) Acts 1:24--"Thou, Lord,... knowest the hearts of all men."(7) 1 Corinthians 4:5--"[The Lord] will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts."(8) Hebrews 4:13--"Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight, but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." God searches our hearts. Romans 8:26 says that the Holy Spirit prays for us, and verse 27 says that God hears: "He that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit." In the intertrinitarian communion taking place amidst the Spirit's groanings, God hears the Holy Spirit's prayers.b) The Holy Spirit prays for God's will (v. 27b) God knows "what is the mind of the Spirit, because [the Spirit] maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God" (v. 27). You may not know the precise will of God or exactly how to pray, but the Spirit knows. Jude says we are to pray in the Spirit (v. 20). That doesn't mean we become ecstatic but that we pray according to the will of God. The Lord knows what the Spirit is praying because everything He prays for is in accord with God's will. There is perfect harmony within the Trinity. The Holy Spirit and the Son intercede for us according to God's will. God hears and understands their intercession, and responds to it. We are kept by the Spirit and the Son's interceding ministries. Anyone who believes a Christian can lose his or her salvation is questioning the power of the Spirit and the Savior.

CONCLUSION

Romans 8:28 tells us what happens as a result of the Spirit's intercessory work: we have the assurance "that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose." God's purpose is to bring us to glory and conform us to Christ. Everything works toward that end because of the intercessory work of the Spirit. All things work together for our good not because we are wonderful and have the ability to make things work out that way but because God leads us to glory and the Spirit keeps us on that path by His intercessory work in our hearts. That is the guarantee of glory.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What is more accurate way of saying, "Once saved, always saved"?
2. What does God do in securing Christians (2 Cor. 1:21-22; 2 Tim. 2:19)?
3. What does 1 Corinthians 1:8 indicate about Christ's involvement in securing our salvation?
4. What does 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 say in regard to the security of our salvation?
5. What significant promise appears in Hebrews 6:16-19?
6. How can the concept of the Spirit's groanings encourage us?
7. How do we know the Holy Spirit's groanings aren't a reference to speaking in tongues?
8. Even though God planned that salvation be eternal, why are we dependent on intercessory prayer (cf. Luke 22:31-32)?

9. Why can't we pray to keep ourselves saved?
10. What corresponding truth do people often miss about eternal security?
11. What does "intercession" mean in Romans 8:26?
12. Discuss the content of the Holy Spirit's groans.
13. What kind of interaction do we see among the Trinity in Romans 8:27?
14. What happens as a result of the Spirit's intercessory work (Rom. 8:28)?

Pondering the Principles

1. Believers have two intercessors: Christ and the Holy Spirit. Christ is our High Priest in heaven (Heb. 8:1), and the Holy Spirit intercedes for us in our hearts (Rom. 8:26-27). The intercessory ministries of the Savior and the Spirit reveal the genuine concern they have for all believers. Do you show the same kind of concern for other Christians in your prayers? Have you ever prayed earnestly for another believer on a regular basis? Pick one Christian you know, and pray for him or her every day for the next two weeks. Seek to minister to fellow believers in that way on a regular basis.
2. Romans 8 says that the Holy Spirit prays for us "according to the will of God" (v. 27). That is a marvelous ministry, especially when considering we don't always know what is best for us. Meditate on this: When you pray for yourself, do you pray in accord with the will of God? Write a list of the things you have prayed for recently. If God were to pray for you, would He pray for the same things? Write a list of what you think He would pray for. What can you learn about your prayer life when you compare the two lists? Begin to cultivate a regular habit of praying in accord with God's will.

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