

Wednesday Study, 29th July 2020

Pray: that the Holy Spirit will enlighten your mind and give you understanding as you study God's word. Pray that the Holy Spirit will help you to discern and hear any special message that God has for you this day.



Two weeks ago we examined verses 1-11 of Romans 8 in which we found that as Christians, we have been freed by Christ from the power of sin and death - and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to live in accordance with our true identity as Christians. The indwelling Spirit of God stands ready to forgive, loving us and longing to shape us into the fullness of our true identity as a beloved child of God.

Today, we learn more about the power of the Holy Spirit in helping us to pray and to connect with God. We are assured that those who have the indwelling Spirit cannot be separated from the love of God.

Read Romans 8:26-39

26 Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. 27 And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

28 We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn within a

large family. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called; and those whom he called he also justified; and those whom he justified he also glorified.

31 What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not withhold his own Son, but gave him up for all of us, will he not with him also give us everything else? 33 Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. 34 Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us. 35 Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? 36 As it is written,

"For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

*37 No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. **NRSV***

In the year 2020, we are well aware that all is not right in the world. Suffering is evident all around us through the COVID-19 virus pandemic, the impacts of drought followed by floods and unprecedented bushfires and the damage to the environment caused by global warming. Paul wrote that the whole creation has been groaning in labour pains as it waits to be set free from its bondage to decay and the damage caused by the futility of mankind. (Rom 8:19-22)

The creation, and we, wait for redemption and the future glory when Jesus Christ returns.

In the meantime, we must endure suffering with patience. But we do not have to endure on our own, or in our own strength alone. We have the Holy Spirit to help us.

In earlier verses Paul outlined the ministry of the Holy Spirit. He wrote about how the Spirit enables us to live by God's law (vv.2-8), subdues our fallen nature (vv.9-13), assures us of our adoption into God's family (vv.14-17), and assures us of our final inheritance of which the Spirit is the guarantee and foretaste (vv.18-23).

Now, in vv.26-27 Paul writes about how the Holy Spirit helps us in our prayer as we struggle in our weakness to endure, persevere and cope with the suffering in this world.

1. Re-read vv.26 & 27. Do you sometimes struggle to pray? Can you think of circumstances that made it particularly difficult to pray?

John Stott¹ claims that, '... true Christian prayer is impossible without the Holy Spirit'. It is the Spirit who connects us in

the required intimate father-child relationship when we pray.

Stott goes on to say, 'Prayer is essentially a Trinitarian exercise. It is access to the Father through the Son and by the Holy Spirit. The inspiration of the Spirit is just as necessary for our prayers as the mediation of the Son. We can approach the Father only through the Son and only by the Spirit.' (p.244)

Stott concludes, 'So three persons are involved in our praying. First, we ourselves in our weakness do not know what to pray for. Secondly, the indwelling Spirit helps us by interceding for us and

¹ The Message of Romans, BST, Inter-Varsity Press, 2003. p.244-245

through us ... according to God's will. Thirdly, God the Father, who both searches our hearts and knows the Spirit's mind, hears and answers accordingly.' (p.245)

2. How have you experienced prayer as an opening of yourself to God's Spirit rather than a petition for yourself or others?
3. What practical differences should it make in our prayer life if we truly understand the principles presented in verses 26-27? (See also verse 34.)



Verse 28 tells us that, 'We know ...' This is a certain knowing – a conviction – not just an awareness or knowledge that we might question.

4. What is it that we know? Can you list five convictions from verse 28? (suggested answers at the end of the study)

In vv.29-30, Paul elaborates on v.28. He affirms five stages, (commencing with foreknowledge and concluding with glorification) through which God works out his purpose in us.

5. Can you suggest the five stages outlined in vv.29-30? (You will find suggested answers with some explanation at the end of the study.)

6. In verse 29, Paul speaks of our becoming "conformed" to the image or likeness of Christ. From what you've seen here and elsewhere in Scripture, how exactly will we be like Him? And in what ways, if any, will we not be like Him?

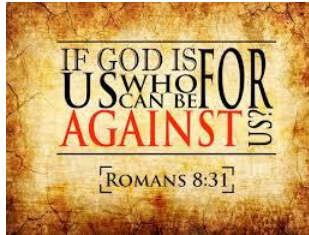
In five verses from 8:31 to 8:35, Paul draws five conclusions, expressed as questions, arising from his convictions and affirmations. These are expressed as questions.

7. Can you list the five questions in vv.31-35?
(Try to do this before looking at the suggested answer at the end of the study.)
8. Go through all the questions Paul asks in verses 31-35 (your list from Question 6) and be prepared to discuss when we come together in group what you believe is the correct answer for each one.
9. In verse 31, Paul states the assumption that God is 'for us.' In what ways, exactly, is God 'for us'?
10. Paul uses the phrase 'all things' at the end of verse 32 (as translated in the NIV; NRSV says 'everything'). Does this refer to exactly the same things as the phrase 'all things' in verse 28? Explain your answer.

Paul commenced verse 28 with the words 'We know ...' and elaborated with his conviction of the eternal unchangeability of God's purpose being worked out in the life of the Christian due to the eternal steadfastness of God's love. He concludes with his conviction that nothing '*... will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*' (v.39).

We are encouraged to know that, 'absolutely nothing can frustrate God's purpose (since he is for us), or quench his generosity (since

he has not spared his Son), or accuse or condemn his elect people (since he has justified them through Christ), or sunder us from his love (since he has revealed it in Christ).'²



Suggested Answers:

Question 3:

1. God is constantly at work in our lives
2. God works for our good – our ultimate well-being, i.e. our salvation.
3. He works in all things, including the sufferings and groanings, the injustices, the unfairnesses the evil acts – all the things that we looked at last week.
4. He does this for those who love him (not for all people, not for the bad fish), those who are called for salvation according to his plan.
5. God has a saving purpose for us and is working in accordance with it.

Question 4:

The five stages of God's purpose:

1. Foreknowledge – God watches over and cares for us with a desire to establish a personal relationship of care and affection.
2. Predestination – whilst we make a choice to accept Jesus, we can only do so because first God loved us and made it possible for us to know him.
3. Calling – God calls us through the gospel and when people respond to hearing the gospel preached, with the obedience of faith, then they know that God has chosen them.
4. Justification – God's effective call enables those who hear it to believe and those who believe are justified by faith.
5. Glorification – our destiny is to be given new bodies in a new world.

² Stott, The Message of Romans, p.259

Question 5:

1. If God is for us, who can be against us?
2. How could God not give us all things if he has given us his Son?
3. Who will (can) bring any charge against God's people?
4. Who will condemn us?
5. Who will separate us from the love of Christ?