
THE HOLY SPIRIT'S
INTERCESSION

CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

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THE HOLY SPIRIT'S INTERCESSION

“Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself 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 will of God.”—Romans 8:26-27

The Apostle Paul was writing to a tried and afflicted people, and one of his objects was to remind them of the rivers of comfort which were flowing near at hand. He first of all stirred up their pure minds by way of remembrance as to their sonship; for, saith he, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God” (Rom 8:14). They were, therefore, encouraged to take part and lot with Christ, the Elder Brother, with whom they had become joint heirs; and they were exhorted to suffer with Him, that they might afterwards be glorified with Him. All that they endured came from a Father’s hand, and this should comfort them. A thousand sources of joy are opened in that one blessing of adoption. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by Whom we have been begotten into the family of grace.

When Paul had alluded¹ to that consoling subject he turned to the next ground of comfort—namely, that we are to be sustained under present trial by hope. There is an amazing glory in reserve for us, and though as yet we cannot enter upon it, but in harmony with the whole creation must continue to groan and travail,² yet the hope itself should minister strength to us, and enable us patiently to bear “our light affliction, which is but for a moment” (2Co 4:17). This also is a truth full of sacred refreshment: hope sees a crown in reserve, mansions in readiness, and Jesus Himself preparing a place for us, and by the rapturous sight she sustains the soul under the sorrows of the hour. Hope is the grand anchor by whose means we ride out the present storm.

The apostle then turns to a third source of comfort, namely, the abiding of the Holy Spirit in and with the Lord’s people. He uses the word “likewise” to intimate that in the same manner as hope sustains the soul, so does the Holy Spirit strengthen us under trial. Hope operates spiritually upon our spiritual faculties, and so does the Holy Spirit, in some mysterious way, divinely operate upon the new-born faculties of the believer, so that he is sustained under his infirmities. In His light shall we see light. I pray, therefore, that we may be helped of the Spirit while we consider His mysterious opera-

¹ **alluded** – referred to in an indirect way.

² **travail** – suffer the pains of childbirth; to suffer greatly.

tions, so that we may not fall into error or miss precious truth through blindness of heart.

The text speaks of “our infirmities,” or, as many translators put it, in the singular—of “our infirmity.” By this is intended our affliction, and the weakness which trouble discovers in us. The Holy Spirit helps us to bear the infirmity of our body and of our mind; He helps us to bear our cross, whether it be physical pain, or mental depression, or spiritual conflict, or slander, or poverty, or persecution. He helps our infirmity; and with a Helper so divinely strong we need not fear for the result. God’s grace will be sufficient for us; His strength will be made perfect in weakness.

I think, dear friends, you will all admit that if a man can pray, his trouble is at once lightened. When we feel that we have power with God and can obtain anything we ask for at His hands, then our difficulties cease to oppress us. We take our burden to our heavenly Father and tell it out in the accents of childlike confidence, and we come away quite content to bear whatever His holy will may lay upon us. Prayer is a great outlet for grief; it draws up the sluices,³ and abates the swelling flood, which else might be too strong for us. We bathe our wound in the lotion of prayer, and the pain is lulled, the fever is removed. We may be brought into such perturbation⁴ of mind, and perplexity⁵ of heart, that we do not know how to pray. We see the mercy-seat, and we perceive that God will hear us: we have no doubt about that, for we know that we are His own favored children, and yet we hardly know what to desire. We fall into such heaviness of spirit, and entanglement of thought, that the one remedy of prayer, which we have always found to be unfailing, appears to be taken from us. Here, then in the nick of time, as a very present help in time of trouble, comes in the Holy Spirit. He draws near to teach us how to pray; and in this way He helps our infirmity, relieves our suffering, and enables us to bear the heavy burden without fainting under the load.

At this time our subjects for consideration shall be, firstly, *the help which the Holy Spirit gives*; secondly, *the prayers which He inspires*; and thirdly, *the success which such prayers are certain to obtain*.

1. The Help which the Holy Ghost Gives

The help which the Holy Ghost renders to us meets the weakness which we deplore. As I have already said, if in time of trouble a man can pray, his burden loses its weight. If the believer can take anything and everything to God, then he learns to glory in infirmity, and to rejoice in tribulation; but sometimes we are in such confusion of mind that we know not what we should pray for as we ought. In a measure, through our ignorance, we never know what we should pray for until we are taught of the Spirit of God, but there are times when this beclouding of the soul is dense indeed, and we do

³ **sluices** – flood-gates.

⁴ **perturbation** – state of being disturbed or troubled greatly.

⁵ **perplexity** – bewilderment; confusion.

not even know what would help us out of our trouble if we could obtain it. We see the disease, but the name of the medicine is not known to us. We look over the many things which we might ask for of the Lord, and we feel that each of them would be helpful, but that none of them would precisely meet our case. For spiritual blessings which we know to be according to the divine will we could ask with confidence, but perhaps these would not meet our peculiar circumstances. There are other things for which we are allowed to ask, but we scarcely know whether, if we had them, they would really serve our turn, and we also feel a diffidence⁶ as to praying for them. In praying for temporal things we plead with measured voices, ever referring our petition for revision to the will of the Lord. Moses prayed that he might enter Canaan, but God denied him; and the man that was healed asked our Lord that he might be with Him, but he received for answer, "Go home to thy friends" (Mar 5:19). We pray evermore on such matters with this reserve: "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Mat 26:39). At times this very spirit of resignation appears to increase our mental difficulty, for we do not wish to ask for anything that would be contrary to the mind of God, and yet we must ask for something. We are reduced to such straits⁷ that we must pray, but what shall be the particular subject of prayer we cannot for a while make out. Even when ignorance and perplexity are removed, we know not what we should pray for "as we ought." When we know the matter of prayer, we yet fail to pray in a right manner. We ask; but we are afraid that we shall not have because we do not exercise the thought or the faith, which we judge to be essential to prayer. We cannot at times command even the earnestness which is the life of supplication. A torpor⁸ steals over us, our heart is chilled, our hand is numbed, and we cannot wrestle with the angel. We know what to pray for as to objects, but we do not know what to pray for "*as we ought*." It is the manner of the prayer which perplexes us, even when the matter is decided upon. How can I pray? My mind wanders: I chatter like a crane; I roar like a beast in pain; I moan in the brokenness of my heart, but O my God, I know not what it is my inmost spirit needs; or if I know it, I know not how to frame my petition aright before Thee. I know not how to open my lips in Thy majestic presence: I am so troubled that I cannot speak. My spiritual distress robs me of the power to pour out my heart before my God. Now, beloved, it is in such a plight as this that the Holy Ghost aids us with His divine help, and hence He is "a very present help in trouble" (Psa 46:1).

Coming to our aid in our bewilderment *He instructs us*. This is one of His frequent operations upon the mind of the believer: "he shall teach you all things" (Joh 14:26). He instructs us as to our need and as to the promises of God which refer to that need. He shows us where our deficiencies are, what our sins are, and what our necessities are. He sheds a light upon our condition, and makes us feel deeply our helplessness, sinfulness, and dire poverty. And then He casts the same light upon the promises of the

⁶ **diffidence** – lack of confidence in oneself; shyness.

⁷ **straits** – difficulties; distresses.

⁸ **torpor** – dullness; apathy.

Word, and lays home to the heart that very text which was intended to meet the occasion—the precise promise which was framed with foresight of our present distress. In that light He makes the promise shine in all its truthfulness, certainty, sweetness, and suitability, so that we, poor trembling sons of men, dare take that word into our mouth which first came out of God’s mouth, and then come with it as an argument, and plead it before the throne of the heavenly grace. Our prevalence in prayer lies in the plea, “Lord, do as thou hast said.” How greatly we ought to value the Holy Spirit, because when we are in the dark He gives us light. And when our perplexed spirit is so befogged and beclouded that it cannot see its own need, and cannot find out the appropriate promise in the Scriptures, the Spirit of God comes in and teaches us all things, and brings all things to our remembrance whatsoever our Lord has told us. He guides us in prayer, and thus He helps our infirmity.

But the blessed Spirit does more than this. He will often *direct the mind to the special subject of prayer*. He dwells within us as a counselor, and points out to us what it is we should seek at the hands of God. We do not know why it is so, but we sometimes find our minds carried as by a strong under current into a particular line of prayer for some one definite object. It is not merely that our judgment leads us in that direction, though usually the Spirit of God acts upon us by enlightening our judgment, but we often feel an unaccountable and irresistible desire rising again and again within our heart. And this so presses upon us, that we not only utter the desire before God at our ordinary times for prayer, but we feel it crying in our hearts all the day long, almost to the supplanting⁹ of all other considerations. At such times we should thank God for direction and give our desire a clear road: the Holy Spirit is granting us inward direction as to how we should reckon upon good success in our pleadings. Such guidance will the Spirit give to each of you if you will ask Him to illuminate you. He will guide you both negatively and positively. Negatively, He will forbid you to pray for such and such a thing, even as Paul “assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not” (Act 16:7). And, on other hand, He will cause you to hear a cry within your soul which shall guide your petitions, even as He made Paul hear the cry from Macedonia, saying, “Come over...and help us” (Act 16:9). The Spirit teaches wisely, as no other teacher can do. Those who obey His promptings shall not walk in darkness. He leads the spiritual eye to take good and steady aim at the very center of the target, and thus we hit the mark in our pleadings.

Nor is this all, for the Spirit of God is not sent merely to guide and help our devotion, but He himself “*maketh intercession for us*” according to the will of God. By this expression it cannot be meant that the Holy Spirit ever groans or personally prays; but that *He excites intense desire and creates unutterable groanings in us*, and these are ascribed to Him. Even as Solomon built the temple because he superintended and ordained all, and yet I know not that he ever fashioned a timber or prepared a stone, so

⁹ **supplanting** – removing in order to replace with something else.

doth the Holy Spirit pray and plead within us by leading us to pray and plead. This He does by arousing our desires. The Holy Spirit has a wonderful power over renewed hearts, as much power as the skillful minstrel¹⁰ hath over the strings among which he lays his accustomed hand. The influences of the Holy Ghost at times pass through the soul like winds through an aeolian harp,¹¹ creating and inspiring sweet notes of gratitude and tones of desire, to which we should have been strangers if it had not been for His divine visitation. He can arouse us from our lethargy; He can warm us out of our lukewarmness; He can enable us when we are on our knees to rise above the ordinary routine of prayer into that victorious importunity¹² against which nothing can stand. He can lay certain desires so pressingly upon our hearts that we can never rest till they are fulfilled. He can make the zeal for God's house to eat us up, and the passion for God's glory to be like a fire within our bones; and this is one part of that process by which in inspiring our prayers He helps our infirmity. True Advocate is He, and Comforter most effectual. Blessed be His name!

The Holy Spirit also divinely operates *in the strengthening of the faith of believers*. That faith is at first of His creating, and afterwards it is of His sustaining and increasing: and O brothers and sisters, have you not often felt your faith rise in proportion to your trials? Have you not, like Noah's ark, mounted towards heaven as the flood deepened around you? You have felt as sure about the promise as you felt about the trial. The affliction was, as it were, in your very bones, but the promise was also in your very heart. You could not doubt the affliction, for you smarted under it, but you might almost as soon have doubted the divine help, for your confidence was firm and unmoved. The greatest faith is only what God has a right to expect from us, yet do we never exhibit it except as the Holy Ghost strengthens our confidence, and opens up before us the covenant with all its seals and securities. He it is that leads our soul to cry, "Although my house be not so with God, yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (2Sa 23:5). Blessed be the divine Spirit then, that since faith is essential to prevailing prayer, He helps us in supplication by increasing our faith. Without faith, prayer cannot speed, "for he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed," and such an one may not expect anything of the Lord (Jam 1:6, 7). Happy are we when the Holy Spirit removes our wavering, and enables us like Abraham to believe without staggering, knowing full well that He Who has promised is "able also to perform" (Rom 4:21).

By three figures I will endeavor to describe the work of the Spirit of God in this matter, though they all fall short, and indeed all that I can say must fall infinitely short of the glory of His work. The actual mode of His working upon the mind we may not attempt to explain; it remains a mystery, and it would be an unholy intrusion to attempt to remove the veil. There is no difficulty in our believing that as one human

¹⁰ **minstrel** – a singer and musical performer on instruments.

¹¹ **aeolian harp** – stringed device through which wind produces tones.

¹² **importunity** – persistence in requesting or prayer.

mind operates upon another mind, so does the Holy Spirit influence our spirits. We are forced to use words if we would influence our fellow-men, but the Spirit of God can operate upon the human mind more directly, and communicate with it in silence. Into that matter, however, we will not dive lest we intrude where our knowledge would be drowned by our presumption.

My illustrations do not touch the mystery, but set forth the grace. The Holy Spirit acts to His people somewhat as *a prompter to a reciter*. A man has to deliver a piece which he has learned; but his memory is treacherous, and therefore somewhere out of sight there is a prompter, so that when the speaker is at a loss and might use a wrong word, a whisper is heard, which suggests the right one. When the speaker has almost lost the thread of his discourse he turns his ear, and the prompter gives him the catchword and aids his memory. If I may be allowed the simile,¹³ I would say that this represents in part the work of the Spirit of God in us—suggesting to us the right desire, and bringing all things to our remembrance whatsoever Christ has told us. In prayer we should often come to a dead stand, but He incites, suggests, and inspires, and so we go onward. In prayer we might grow weary, but the Comforter encourages and refreshes us with cheering thoughts. When, indeed, we are in our bewilderment almost driven to give up prayer, the whisper of His love drops a live coal from off the altar into our soul, and our hearts glow with greater ardor¹⁴ than before. Regard the Holy Spirit as your prompter, and let your ear be opened to His voice.

But He is much more than this. Let me attempt a second simile: He is as an advocate to one in peril at law. Suppose that a poor man had a great law-suit, touching his whole estate, and he was forced personally to go into court and plead his own cause, and speak up for his rights. If he were an uneducated man he would be in a poor plight.¹⁵ An adversary in the court might plead against him, and overthrow him, for he could not answer him. This poor man knows very little about law, and is quite unable to meet his cunning opponent. Suppose one who was perfect in the law should take up his cause warmly, and come and live with him, and use all his knowledge so as to prepare his case for him, draw up his petitions for him, and fill his mouth with arguments—would not that be a grand relief? This counselor would suggest the line of pleading, arrange the arguments, and put them into right courtly language. When the poor man was baffled by a question asked in court, he would run home and ask his adviser, and he would tell him exactly how to meet the objector. Suppose, too, that when he had to plead with the judge himself, this advocate at home should teach him how to behave and what to urge, and encourage him to hope that he would prevail—would not

¹³ **simile** – a comparison of two things which, however different in other respects, have some strong point or points of resemblance; by which comparison, the character or qualities of a thing are illustrated or presented in an impressive light.

¹⁴ **ardour** – emotional warmth; passion.

¹⁵ **plight** – a condition, state, or situation, especially an unfavorable or unfortunate one.

this be a great boon?¹⁶ Who would be the pleader in such a case? The poor client would plead, but still, when he won the suit, he would trace it all to the advocate who lived at home, and gave him counsel; indeed, it would be the advocate pleading for him, even while he pleaded himself. This is an instructive emblem of a great fact. Within this narrow house of my body, this tenement of clay, if I be a true believer, there dwells the Holy Ghost, and when I desire to pray I may ask Him what I should pray for as I ought, and He will help me. He will write the prayers which I ought to offer upon the tablets of my heart, and I shall see them there, and so I shall be taught how to plead. It will be the Spirit's own self pleading in me, and by me, and through me, before the throne of grace. What a happy man in his law-suit would such a poor man be, and how happy are you and I that we have the Holy Ghost to be our Counselor!

Yet one more illustration: it is that of *a father aiding his boy*. Suppose it to be a time of war centuries back. Old English warfare was then conducted by bowmen to a great extent. Here is a youth who is to be initiated in the art of archery, and therefore he carries a bow. It is a strong bow, and therefore very hard to draw; indeed, it requires more strength than the urchin can summon to bend it. See how his father teaches him. "Put your right hand here, my boy, and place your left hand so. Now pull"; and as the youth pulls, his father's hands are on his hands, and the bow is drawn. The lad draws the bow: ay, but it is quite as much his father, too. We cannot draw the bow of prayer alone. Sometimes a bow of steel is not broken by our hands, for we cannot even bend it; and then the Holy Ghost puts His mighty hand over ours, and covers our weakness so that we draw; and lo, what splendid drawing of the bow it is then! The bow bends so easily we wonder how it is! Away flies the arrow, and it pierces the very center of the target, for He who giveth the strength directeth the aim. We rejoice to think that we have won the day, but it was His secret might that made us strong, and to Him be the glory of it!

Thus have I tried to set forth the cheering fact that the Spirit helps the people of God.

2. The Prayer that the Holy Spirit Inspires

Our second subject is that part of prayer which is especially and peculiarly the work of the Spirit of God. The text says, "The Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." It is not the Spirit that groans, but we that groan; but as I have shown you, the Spirit excited the emotion which causes us to groan.

It is clear then the prayers which are indited¹⁷ in us by the Spirit of God are *those which arise from our inmost soul*. A man's *heart* is moved when he groans. A groan is a matter about which there is no hypocrisy. A groan cometh not from the lips, but from the heart. A groan then is a part of prayer which we owe to the Holy Ghost, and the

¹⁶ **boon** – welcome benefit; blessing.

¹⁷ **indited** – composed and written.

same is true of all the prayer which wells up from the deep fountains of our inner life. The prophet cried, “My bowels, my bowels, I am pained at my very heart; my heart maketh a noise in me” (Jer 4:19). This deep ground-swell of desire, this tidal motion of the life-floods is caused by the Holy Spirit. His work is never superficial, but always deep and inward.

Such prayers will rise within us when the mind is far too troubled to let us speak. We know not what we should pray for as we ought, and then it is that we groan, or utter some other inarticulate sound. Hezekiah said, “Like a crane or a swallow did I chatter” (Isa 38:14). The psalmist said, “I am so troubled that I cannot speak” (Psa 77:4). In another place he said, “I am feeble and sore broken: I have roared by reason of the disquietness¹⁸ of my heart”; but he added, “Lord, all my desire is before thee; and my groaning is not hid from thee” (Psa 38:8-9). The sighing of the prisoner surely cometh up into the ears of the Lord. There is real prayer in these “groanings that cannot be uttered.” It is the power of the Holy Ghost in us which creates all real prayer, even that which takes the form of a groan because the mind is incapable, by reason of its bewilderment and grief, of clothing its emotion in words. I pray you never think lightly of the supplications of your anguish. Rather judge that such prayers are like Jabez, of whom it is written, that “he was more honourable than his brethren” (1Ch 4:9), because his mother bare him with sorrow. That which is thrown up from the depth of the soul, when it is stirred with a terrible tempest, is more precious than pearl or coral, for it is the intercession of the Holy Spirit.

These prayers are sometimes “groanings that cannot be uttered,” because *they concern such great things that they cannot be spoken.* “I want, my Lord! I want, I want; I cannot tell thee what I want; but I seem to want all things. If it were some little thing, my narrow capacity could comprehend and describe it, but I need all covenant blessings. Thou knowest what I have need of before I ask Thee, and though I cannot go into each item of my need, I know it to be very great, and such as I myself can never estimate. I groan, for I can do no more.” Prayers which are the offspring of great desires, sublime¹⁹ aspirations, and elevated designs are surely the work of the Holy Spirit, and their power within a man is frequently so great that he cannot find expression for them. Words fail, and even the sighs which try to embody them cannot be uttered.

But it may be, beloved, that we *groan because we are conscious of the littleness of our desire, and the narrowness of our faith.* The trial, too, may seem too mean²⁰ to pray about. I have known what it is to feel as if I could not pray about a certain matter, and yet I have been obliged to groan about it. A thorn in the flesh may be as painful a thing as a sword in the bones, and yet we may go and beseech the Lord thrice about it, and getting no answer we may feel that we know not what to pray for as we ought; and yet

¹⁸ **disquietness** – a disturbed or uneasy condition; anxiety.

¹⁹ **sublime** – noble; exalted; majestic.

²⁰ **mean** – of little value; low in worth or estimation.

it makes us groan. Yes, and with that natural groan there may go up an unutterable groaning of the Holy Spirit. Beloved, what a different view of prayer God has from that which men think to be the correct one. You may have seen very beautiful prayers in print, and you may have heard very charming compositions from the pulpit, but I trust you have not fallen in love with them. Judge these things rightly. I pray you never think well of *fine* prayers, for before the thrice holy God it ill becomes a sinful suppliant²¹ to play the orator.²² We heard of a certain clergyman who was said to have given forth “the finest prayer ever offered to a Boston audience.” Just so! The Boston audience received the prayer, and there it ended. We want the mind of the Spirit in prayer, and not the mind of the flesh. The tail feathers of pride should be pulled out of our prayers, for they need only the wing feathers of faith; the peacock feathers of poetical expression are out of place before the throne of God. “Dear me, what remarkably beautiful language he used in prayer!” “What an intellectual treat his prayer was!” Yes, yes; but God looks at the heart. To him fine language is as sounding brass or tinkling cymbal, but a groan has music in it. *We* do not like groans: our ears are much too delicate to tolerate such dreary sounds; but not so the great Father of spirits. A Methodist brother cries, “Amen,” and you say, “I cannot bear such Methodistic noise”; no, but if it comes from the man’s heart God can bear it. When you get upstairs into your chamber this evening to pray, and find you cannot pray, but have to moan out, “Lord, I am too full of anguish and too perplexed to pray, hear thou the voice of my roaring,” though you reach to nothing else you will be really praying. When like David we can say, “I opened my mouth, and panted” (Psa 119:131), we are by no means in an ill state of mind. All fine language in prayer, and especially all intoning²³ or performing of prayers, must be abhorrent²⁴ to God; it is little short of profanity to offer solemn supplication to God after the manner called “intoning.” The sighing of a true heart is infinitely more acceptable, for it is the work of the Spirit of God. We may say of the prayers which the Holy Spirit works in us that they are *prayers of knowledge*. Notice, our difficulty is that we know not what we should pray for; but the Holy Spirit does know, and therefore He helps us by enabling us to pray intelligently, knowing what we are asking for, so far as this knowledge is needful to valid prayer. The text speaks “of the mind of the Spirit.” What a mind that must be—the mind of that Spirit who arranged all the order of that beautiful arrangement which we so admire in the visible creation. What a mind His must be! The Holy Spirit’s mind is seen in our intercessions when under His sacred influence we order our case before the Lord, and plead with holy wisdom for things convenient²⁵ and necessary. What wise and admirable desires must those be which the Spirit of Wisdom Himself works in us!

²¹ **suppliant** – one asking humbly or entreating.

²² **orator** – a vividly expressive public speaker.

²³ **intoning** – reciting in a singing tone or a monotone.

²⁴ **abhorrent** – causing disgust; detestable.

²⁵ **convenient** – (older meaning) appropriate; suitable.

Moreover, the Holy Spirit's intercession creates *prayers offered in a proper manner*. I showed you that the difficulty is that we know not what we should pray for "as we ought," and the Spirit meets that difficulty by making intercession for us in a right manner. The Holy Spirit works in us humility, earnestness, intensity, importunity, faith, and resignation, and all else that is acceptable to God in our supplications. We know not how to mingle these sacred spices in the incense of prayer. We, if left to ourselves, at our very best get too much of one ingredient or another, and spoil the sacred compound, but the Holy Spirit's intercessions have in them such a blessed blending of all that is good that they come up as a sweet perfume before the Lord. Spirit-taught prayers are offered as they ought to be. They are His own intercession in some respects, for we read that the Holy Spirit not only helps us to intercede but "maketh intercession." It is twice over declared in our text that He maketh intercession for us; and the meaning of this I tried to show when I described a father as putting his hands upon his child's hands. This is something more than helping us to pray, something more than encouraging us or directing us. But I venture no further, except to say that He puts such force of His own mind into our poor weak thoughts and desires and hopes, that He himself maketh intercession for us, working in us to will and to pray according to His good pleasure.

I want you to notice, however, that *these intercessions of the Spirit are only in the saints*. He "maketh intercession *for us*," and "he maketh intercession *for the saints*." Does He do nothing for sinners, then? Yes, He quickens sinners into spiritual life, and He strives with them to overcome their sinfulness and turn them into the right way; but in the saints He works with us and enables us to pray after His mind and according to the will of God. His intercession is not in or for the unregenerate. O unbelievers you must first be made saints or you cannot feel the Spirit's intercession within you. What need we have to go to Christ for the blessing of the Holy Ghost, which is Jesus! "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (Joh 1:12); and to the sons of God alone cometh the Spirit of adoption, and all His helping grace. Unless we are the sons of God the Holy Spirit's indwelling shall not be ours: we are shut out from the intercession of the Holy Ghost, ay, and from the intercession of Jesus too, for He hath said, "I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me" (Joh 17:9).

Thus I have tried to show you the kind of prayer which the Spirit inspires.

3. The Sure Success of All Such Prayers

All the prayers which the Spirit of God inspires in us must succeed, because, first, *there is a meaning in them which God reads and approves*. When the Spirit of God writes a prayer upon a man's heart, the man himself may be in such a state of mind that he does not altogether know what it is. His interpretation of it is a groan, and that is all. Perhaps he does not even get so far as that in expressing the mind of the Spirit, but he feels groanings which he cannot utter, he cannot find a door of utterance for his

inward grief. Yet our heavenly Father, who looks immediately upon the heart, reads what the Spirit of God has indited there, and does not need even our groans to explain the meaning. He reads the heart itself. “He knoweth,” says the text, “what is the mind of the Spirit.” The Spirit is one with the Father, and the Father knows what the Spirit means. The desires which the Spirit prompts may be too spiritual for such babes in grace as we are actually to describe or to express, and yet the Spirit writes the desire on the renewed mind, and the Father sees it. Now that which God reads in the heart and approves of—for the word to “know” in this case includes approval as well as the mere act of omniscience²⁶—what God sees and approves of in the heart must succeed. Did not Jesus say, “Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things” (Mat 6:32) before you ask Him? Did he not tell us this as an encouragement to believe that we shall receive all needful blessings? So it is with those prayers which are all broken up, wet with tears, and discordant²⁷ with those sighs and inarticulate expressions²⁸ and heavings of the bosom, and sobbings of the heart and anguish and bitterness of spirit—our gracious Lord reads them as a man reads a book, and they are written in a character which He fully understands. To give a simple figure: if I were to come into your house I might find there a little child that cannot yet speak plainly. It cries for something, and it makes very odd and objectionable noises, combined with signs and movements, which are almost meaningless to a stranger, but his mother understands him, and attends to his little pleadings. A mother can translate baby-talk: she comprehends incomprehensible noises. Even so doth our Father in heaven know all about our poor baby-talk, for our prayer is not much better. He knows and comprehends the cryings, and moanings, and sighings, and chatterings of His bewildered children. Yea, a tender mother knows her child’s needs before the child knows what it wants. Perhaps the little one stutters, stammers, and cannot get its words out, but the mother sees what he would say, and takes the meaning. Even so we know concerning our great Father:

*“He knows the thoughts we mean to speak,
Ere from our opening lips they break.”*

Do you therefore rejoice in this, that because the prayers of the Spirit are known and understood of God, therefore they will be sure to speed.

The next argument for making us sure that they will speed is this—that *they are “the mind of the Spirit.”* God the ever blessed is One, and there can be no division between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost. These divine Persons always work together, and there is a common desire for the glory of each blessed Person of the Divine

²⁶ **omniscience** – having infinite knowledge; knowing all things.

²⁷ **discordant** – not in harmony; clashing.

²⁸ **inarticulate expressions** – not spoken understandably.

Unity, and therefore it cannot be conceived without profanity that anything could be the mind of the Holy Spirit and not be the mind of the Father and the mind of the Son. The mind of God is one and harmonious; if, therefore, the Holy Spirit dwells in you and He moves you to any desire, then His mind is in your prayer, and it is not possible that the eternal Father should reject your petitions. That prayer which came from heaven will certainly go back to heaven. If the Holy Ghost prompts it, the Father must and will accept it, for it is not possible that He should put a slight upon the ever-blessed and adorable Spirit.

But one more word, and that closes the argument, namely, that *the work of the Spirit in the heart is not only the mind of the Spirit which God knows, but it is also according to the will or mind of God*, for He never maketh intercession in us other than is consistent with the divine will. Now, the divine will or mind may be viewed two ways. First, there is the will declared in the proclamations of holiness by the Ten Commandments. The Spirit of God never prompts us to ask for anything that is unholy or inconsistent with the precepts of the Lord. Then secondly, there is the secret mind of God, the will of His eternal predestination and decree, of which we know nothing; but we do know this, that the Spirit of God never prompts us to ask anything which is contrary to the eternal purpose of God. Reflect for a moment: the Holy Spirit knows all the purposes of God, and when they are about to be fulfilled. He moves the children of God to pray about them, and so their prayers keep touch and tally with the divine decrees. Oh, would you not pray confidently if you knew that your prayer corresponded with the sealed book of destiny? We may safely entreat the Lord to do what He has ordained to do. A carnal man draws the inference that if God has ordained an event we need not pray about it; but faith obediently draws the inference that the God who secretly ordained to give the blessing has openly commanded that we should pray for it, and therefore faith obediently prays. Coming events cast their shadows before them, and when God is about to bless His people, His coming favor casts the shadow of prayer over the church. When He is about to favor an individual He casts the shadow of hopeful expectation over his soul. Our prayers—let men laugh at them as they will, and say there is no power in them—are the indicators of the movement of the wheels of Providence. Believing supplications are forecasts of the future. He who prayeth in faith is like the seer of old; he sees that which is to be. His holy expectancy, like a telescope, brings distant objects near to him. He is bold to declare that he has the petition which he has asked of God, and he therefore begins to rejoice and to praise God, even before the blessing has actually arrived. So it is: prayer prompted by the Holy Spirit is the footfall of the divine decree.

I conclude by saying: see, my dear hearers, the absolute necessity of the Holy Spirit, for if the saints know not what they should pray for as they ought; if consecrated men and women, with Christ suffering in them, still feel their need of the instruction of the Holy Spirit, how much more do you who are not saints, and have never given yourselves up to God, require divine teaching! Oh, that you would know and feel your de-

pendence upon the Holy Ghost that He may prompt you this day to look to Jesus Christ for salvation. It is through the once crucified but now ascended Redeemer that this gift of the Spirit, this promise of the Father, is shed abroad upon men. May He who comes from Jesus lead you to Jesus!

And, then O ye people of God, let this last thought abide with you—what condescension is this, that this Divine Person should dwell in you forever, and that He should be with you to help your prayers. Listen to me for a moment. If I read in the Scriptures that in the most heroic acts of faith God the Holy Ghost helpeth His people, I can understand it. If I read that in the sweetest music of their songs when they worship best, and chant their loftiest strains before the Most High God, the Spirit helpeth them, I can understand it. And even if I hear that in their wrestling prayers and prevalent intercessions God the Holy Spirit helpeth them, I can understand it. But I bow with reverent amazement, my heart sinking into the dust with adoration, when I reflect that God the Holy Ghost helps us when we cannot speak, but only groan. Yea, and when we cannot even utter our groanings, He doth not only help us but He claims as His own particular creation the “groanings which cannot be uttered.” This is condescension indeed! In deigning²⁹ to help us in the grief that cannot even vent itself in groaning, He proves himself to be a true Comforter. O God, my God, Thou hast not forsaken me: Thou art not far from me, nor from the voice of my roaring. Thou didst for awhile leave the Firstborn when He was made a curse for us, so that He cried in agony, “Why hast thou forsaken me?” (Mat 27:46), but Thou wilt not leave one of the “many brethren” for whom He died. The Spirit shall be with them, and when they cannot so much as groan, He will make intercession for them “with groanings which cannot be uttered.” God bless you, my beloved brethren, and may you feel the Spirit of the Lord thus working in you and with you. Amen and amen.



²⁹ **deigning** – condescending; stooping.