

THE IMAGE OF HIS SON

Read Romans 8:26-30

All of us have seen the cartoons where one of the characters climbs up to the top of a mountain peak to ask some bearded elder "What is the meaning of life?" People have been trying to answer that question since there have been people. Philosophers have written volumes on the subject. Religions have grown out of such philosophies and yet most people do not know the meaning or purpose of life. Why do we get up every morning, why do we do what we do? "What is the purpose of life?" "Why are we here?" The bottom line on this significant question is partially answered in a conversation God had with Himself as He was creating man.

Genesis 1:26 "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness . . ."

Things did not go so well with the entrance of sin on the scene and man still falls short of being like God in His character. God's Plan of Salvation is to restore that which was lost and that involves restoring us to the purpose for which He created us – to be like Himself. It is a job that we are not capable of accomplishing in our own strength and so He brings it about for those who put their trust in Him.

Paul had written (Rom 8:19-22) about those ("the creature") who wished to be liberated from their bondage of corruption (natural order of a fallen world) and groaned in anticipation of seeing some evidence that liberation was possible. This evidence that gives hope is the revealing (manifestation) of the sons of God (Christians) who display freedom in Christ. Paul pointed out that the groaning is a result of hope of what can be – being justified and having our sins forgiven, etc. The hope for those who have been justified does not end. For we see that our ultimate hope is being glorified with Christ at the time of the resurrection of the body. So as long as we are alive in the physical world we have anticipation of something better that will not be achieved in this realm. This anticipation (hope) causes us to groan within ourselves as we contemplate how great it will be "when Jesus we shall see."

Between "being liberated from the corruption that is in the world system" and "being in our resurrected bodies" is an on-going process of transformation. We know where we have been (lost and undone without God or His Son) and we know where we are headed (our home in heaven). However, how to carry out the journey is somewhat uncertain. We know we need help, but we are not sure what we need to ask for.

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. (Romans 8:26)

Infirmities: What is the nature of these infirmities or weaknesses for which we receive help? This is not weakness related to lack of faith or spiritual strength. Also, Paul is not writing about physical weakness. This infirmity is directly related to our not knowing how to get from "justification" to "glorification." (Very much tied to the fact that we are still in fleshly bodies.)
What to pray for: If we ask the questions "Who to pray to? Who to pray for? What to pray about? What to pray for? When? Where? Why? and How?" then we can pretty well answer most of these except the "What to pray for?" question and the "How?" question. Even in this, we know (in general) that we should pray for God's will to be done.

Do we need to be more specific in our praying regarding *What to pray for*?

Why do we not know what to ask for? We are not very good judges of our condition as Solomon suggested in Eccl. 6:12 where he ask "For who knoweth what is good for man in this

life?” There is a good possibility that the subject of these prayers (about which we know not what to pray) is the afflictions or sufferings of this present life mentioned in Romans 8, verse 18.

1. Short term perspective rather than an eternal one. “Short-range decisions have a greater and opposite reaction on the long-range results.”
2. Biased in terms of physical reality rather than spiritual reality. We have a mind set that “seeing leads to believing” rather than “believing leads to seeing.”
3. We tend to separate the method from the goal. A lady once remarked to Van Cliburn, “I would give anything to be able to play the piano as well as you do.” His reply was “No, you wouldn’t. If you would give anything, then you would be practicing 10 hours a day for 20 years.” This is what Jesus was talking about when He told the mother of James and John, “You know not what you ask.” (Matt 20:22)

What about the manner of our prayer, the *How to pray*?

What prevents us from praying in the proper manner? Distractions, wandering mind, not caring enough, lack of commitment to prayer as a way of life, unconfessed sin, failure to sense the need for God’s help.

What kind of assistance does the Spirit give us? He helps our infirmities. In what way?

Notice that Paul does **not** say that the Spirit does all this for us. He helps us! We must not sit still, and expect that the Spirit should do it all. There is a saying, “We cannot without God, and He will not without us.” The help He gives is “intercession.” **Christ** intercedes in our behalf in heaven. The **Spirit** intercedes in our hearts.

From Isaiah 11:2, we see the description of the seven-fold Spirit of God.

Enlightenment or Knowledge: The Spirit takes the word of God and teaches us what to pray for.

Wisdom: Helps us to see what is happening in terms of the overall grand scheme of things.

Understanding: An appreciation of how specific events are used to lead us to finding God’s will.

Counsel: Encouragement for us when things are not going well and restraint when things are going well.

Reverence for God: Helps us to appreciate the relationship we have with the Creator of the Universe.

Might: Realization that God is in control and that He strengthens us. (No need to fear.)

Lordship of Christ: Puts our priorities in perspective.

What about these groanings? Does it cause you any concern that God the Holy Spirit cannot express what He wants to except in groans in sound that are beyond his ability to express in words?

Ro 8:26 wsautwv <5615> de <1161> kai <2532> to <3588> pneuma <4151> sunantil ambanetai <4878> (5736) taiv <3588> asyeneiaiv <769> hmwn <2257> to <3588> gar <1063> ti <5101> proseuxomeya <4336> (5695) kayo <2526> dei <1163> (5904) ouk <3756> oidamen <1492> (5758) al l <235> auto <846> to <3588> pneuma <4151> uperentugcanei <5241> (5719) uper <5228> hmwn <2257> stenagmoiv <4726> al al htoiv <215>

In the same way, the Spirit takes hold with us (helps) our weakness of which “for what to pray we do not know” “in so far as ought” but Himself the Spirit makes intercession over, beyond and

more than our groanings which cannot be put into words (by us).

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. (Rom 8:27)

The Spirit in the heart never contradicts the Spirit in the word. It is always in agreement with the will of God. Therefore, we are assured of success regarding the intercessions of the Spirit of God on our behalf. We may not be able to articulate a prayer that is beyond our innate ability. We may not be able to articulate the intercession of the Spirit on our behalf. On the other hand, some may be able to pray eloquent prayers that say the right things but are just repeated words that they've heard someone else say. What Paul is telling us is that God can tell the difference because He searches the hearts. The desire which the Holy Spirit helps us in praying about is already in our hearts. We just can't find the words to express it in our own ability.

If we are praying according to the intercession of the Spirit then we have the assurance "Whatever you ask the Father according to his will he will give it you." And, as the Father always hears the Son interceding for us, so He always hears the Spirit interceding in us, because his intercession is according to the will of God. What could be more comforting for God's children than that?

The things that come upon us - the afflictions and the trials and the test - are such that we (in our own weakness of not knowing) are at a loss regarding what to pray with respect to these events. However, because the Spirit is in us and is teaching us, encouraging us, counseling us, helping us to put things into proper perspective we are then able to pray in accordance with God's will in these matters. God's will for us (His children) is always for our good. Therefore, Roman 8:28 follows naturally:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are [the] called (invited) according to [his] purpose.

Things - whatever happens will work out for our good IF we respond to them according to God's intent. The only way we can respond properly is by the intercession of the Holy Spirit. If we are not in fellowship with the Holy Spirit (if we are not following Him), then we are demonstrating a lack of love for God (we are not keeping Christ's commands), then the things that happen to us will be to bring us back into a right fellowship with God.

What does the phrase "work together" suggest to you?

There may be several events (none of which individually accomplish much) that create a synergistic effect of benefit.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. 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. (Rom 8:29-30)

Two schools of thought are prevalent regarding the Sovereignty of God and the Free Will of Man. These doctrines are commonly referred to as Calvinism and Arminianism. In Calvinism, God's predestination sets everything, including our choices. In Arminianism (or Free Will Theism) we have free will and God does not have complete control over our decisions.

In the Sovereign Grace view, only some are chosen or elected for salvation. These are regenerated (born again) and then comes repentance. The thought being that unregenerate mankind has no desire for the things of the Spirit and are incapable of taking a step of repentance.

The free will view says that as God the Holy Spirit sovereignly draws people to Jesus, that people respond of their free will as an act of repentance and then they trust in the work of the cross which results in regeneration.

The SG view believes that the elect will be saved and that they will make the right choices (eventually) and will be transformed into the image of Christ to which they were predestined to do.

The FW view believes that all those who are “in Christ” are predestined to be conformed to His image. However, there is not a predetermination of who will be in Christ. Some FW believe that it is possible (by an act of your will) to denounce your faith, to commit apostasy and thus lose your salvation.

If you look at the order of events in verse 30 we see the following order: predestinate, calling (inviting), justifying , glorifying. This order would seem to definitely favor the SG view.

However, the argument can be made that the predestinating is related to those who are “in Christ.” If you are in Christ, then you are predestined to all the benefits that accrue to those who are in Christ. It is as if you get on the bus going to Knoxville, then you are predestined to go to Knoxville. This does not mean that you were predestined to get on the bus – for this you had a choice.

From Ephesians 1:4-6

It is in Christ we are seen (in His sight - v. 4) to be holy and blameless. The plan to restore “lost mankind” was worked out before the creation. In His foreknowledge, God knew that mankind would fail and require help so that we could be restored to a right relationship with Him. The predestined plan was that all who were in Christ would be adopted as His sons. This was and is the means (the way) whereby salvation would occur. All who put their trust in the completed work of atonement on the cross are “chosen” because all who are in Christ are chosen and God predestined that all who are in Christ would be holy and blameless (in right relationship) in His sight.

All of this was done based on God’s merit and not our merit. It is not something we can purchase and then enjoy the benefit of it without being in Christ. “No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for him -- the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough--” Psa 49:7-8. Though we cannot buy our redemption we can receive it as a gift from God IF we are in Christ. If we are in Christ, then we are aligned with God’s will and it is His will that gives Him pleasure.