

# The Spirit's Strength in Our Weakness

Thomas Robinson, *Embraced by a God of Love* 5, October 25, 2015

## Romans 8:22-28

<sup>22</sup> For **we know** that **the whole creation** is **groaning** together and together suffering **the pains of childbirth** until this moment. <sup>23</sup> And not only the creation, but **we ourselves**, who have **the first taste of life created by the Spirit**, we ourselves **groan** in ourselves as we **wait eagerly** for **full realization as God's children**, the **deliverance of our bodies** from slavery.

<sup>24</sup> For **in this hope we were saved**. Now a hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what they already see? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we cannot yet see, **we wait eagerly for it, yet with patience**.

<sup>26</sup> In the same way **the Spirit is helping us just where we are weak**. For **we do not know** what we should pray for – what is really needed – but **the Spirit himself intercedes on our behalf with groans that can't be put in words**.

<sup>27</sup> And **he who searches the hearts knows the way of thinking that belongs to the Spirit**, because he intercedes for the **saints** according to **God's reality**. <sup>28</sup> And **we know** that **for those who love God**, he works together in all things **for good**, for those who are **called** according to God's purpose.

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## Romans 5:5-6

<sup>5</sup> This hope does not put us to shame, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. <sup>6</sup> For while we were still weak, at the right time the Messiah died for the ungodly.

## Romans 8:6

<sup>6</sup> For the way of thinking limited to the flesh is death itself, but the way of thinking open to the Spirit is life and peace.

## Romans 8:15-16

<sup>15</sup> For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a Spirit who declares us to be God's children, in whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" <sup>16</sup> The Spirit himself is bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God ...

## Romans 8:33-34

<sup>33</sup> Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. <sup>34</sup> Who is to condemn? Messiah Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

## 1 Corinthians 2:9-10

<sup>9</sup> But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him" – <sup>10</sup> these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God.

## Ephesians 1:13b-14

<sup>13</sup> ... in Jesus also, when you believed, you were sealed with the Spirit of the promise, the Holy Spirit, <sup>14</sup> who is the first installment that guarantees our inheritance until our redemption as God's own possession, to the praise of his glory.

## Jeremiah 17:10

"I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give to each man according to his ways, according to the results of his deeds."

## **Groaning in Pain, First Taste of Hope vv 22-25**

Paul is helping us to learn a way of thinking – seeing / knowing the world, ourselves, and God.

It's shaped by the reality of what God has done in Jesus & the Spirit. A transforming vision.

Paul tells how in Jesus God did what was impossible for humans, even with the best guidance.

He broke the power of our imprisonment by sin and of the fear of death's futility, by taking them on himself. By giving his Spirit, he empowers a new level of life – still deeply meshed with this world, but with the first taste of a world to come seen in Jesus' resurrection.

Paul in no way forgets the pain of this world. He experiences it. The whole physical creation including human society groans in it. But it is a sign not of despair but incompleteness, anticipating a future that the creator will give, the birth of a new world, a world set right.

We don't withdraw from the world's suffering and need. We emphatically share its groans.

Like Jesus we're called to serve people with self-giving love in daily life. But the Spirit lets us experience more. That love is not a futile gesture but is linked to God's eternal life.

When we see Jesus' love & live with the Spirit, we come to know (8:22) a reality beyond what we can now see. That is Hope. We're children of God, but that's an open-ended reality.

Physically, spiritually, we see where God is going. Death itself will be swallowed by life.

But what will that mean? We live patiently, serving in love, eagerly awaiting the surprise!

## **Our Weakness Empowered by God's Spirit v 26**

We can learn to know the world in relation to God, but we don't become especially smart.

We're limited by flesh, but not limited to flesh. We are weak, self-deceived. Paul cites the example of prayer. Even when we want to express our best about what's most important to us, we face our ignorance. We don't know so much! We don't know what is really needed in so many situations. We may easily find ourselves praying for something that turns out to be harmful. It is precisely in that weakness the Spirit gives aid. Our weaknesses, of course are not limited to prayer. The Spirit brings God's presence into our broken reality.

The Spirit of God, now incarnate in us praying for the suffering world, shares in our groans.

We are both in the world and its brokenness and part of the life of God. Our ignorant petitions become the Spirit's groans along with us – groans beyond the reach of words.

## **The Heart Searcher and the Spirit v 27**

In the OT scriptures God is often described as searching hearts, judging the hidden truth about people (Jer 17:10; 1Chr 28:9; Psa 139:1). But now something new: The Searcher of Hearts knows/recognizes in us a new way of thinking (*phronema*), a way of thinking that belongs to the Spirit, shaped by that Spirit, open to the reality of God brought by that Spirit.

When we are open to the Spirit's work everything about us to the very deepest level gets affected. We are in the Messiah and the Messiah in us. The Spirit is working/interceding in us, helping us to be shaped to the reality of God – love embodied in Jesus' life and death.

## **Life Seeking the Shape of God's Love v 28**

In Rom 1:7 Paul addressed the believers as "beloved of God" and "called as saints." Here he echoes those words. The Spirit shapes people who "love God" – fulfilling the great core calling of God's law (Deut 6:5). He works with us in all that we experience, all the limitations and sufferings we undergo and share, shaping us to the ultimate good seen in Jesus.

God calls us to his self-giving love, embodied in Jesus, and being created in us by his Spirit.