The ENJOY THE BIBLE Quarterly

P.O. Box 1586, Matthews, NC 28106-1586
1.888.2TIM.215 email: info@EnjoyTheBible.org First Quarter 2003

A Brief Look at Romans 8:26-27, at Prayer in General, and at Sonship Prayer in Particular

26 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.
27 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. (Romans 8:26-27)

This doctrine about the intercessory ministry of the Spirit of God within us is something that should be especially comforting and encouraging to us. For it concerns the issue of our prayer life as God's "sons" in this present dispensation of His grace, and it teaches us about the special provision that the Spirit makes for us when we as "sons" "know not what we should pray for as we ought." And indeed those times can be upsetting and/or frustrating for us. For as "sons" prayer is something that should be very meaningful to us. Its purpose, benefit, and value should be deeply appreciated by us, because we know that it is vital to our sonship life and to our edification as God's "sons." Hence when we do recognize this, and when we do have those times when we "know not what we should pray for as we ought," the doctrine of verses 26-27 is designed by God to effectually work within us to produce unperturbed constancy and satisfaction in prayer.

This doctrine of Romans 8:26-27 is also the second in a set of three initial sonship doctrines that God gives to us in Romans 8:16-39. Taken together these doctrines are specifically designed by God to effectually work within us to produce three very fundamental Godly virtues in our lives as God's "sons." Godly virtues, which when they operate within us, establish us to face the details of our lives in this present dispensation by equipping us to respond properly to them as the "sons of God" that we are.

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"Enemies" to "Foes"

1 The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou at my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool. (Psalm 110:1)

34 For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand,
35 Until I make thy foes thy footstool. (Acts 2:34-35)

Psalm 110:1 is cited more than once in the Gospel accounts and the opening of the book of Acts. In connection with this it is interesting to note that the word "enemies" remains the same in each citation, except for when Peter quotes the verse in Acts 2. Here the King James translators saw reason to use the English word "foes" instead of "enemies." This is not only interesting but instructive. For in so doing they used the English word that properly fit the situation that then existed. By using the word "foes" it appropriately reflects and expresses the advancement that had taken place in the attitude of the Lord's "enemies" at the time of the events in the opening chapters of the book of Acts. For though a "foe" is certainly an "enemy," he is actually an advanced form of "enemy." He is one whose opposition has intensified, which is exactly the situation Israel was in following their rejection of Christ.

Both words denote the issue of someone being opposed to you, but they differ in their description of that opposition. Of the two words, "enemy" is the more basic and the less powerful of the two terms. An "enemy" is opposed to you and is not your friend, but it is possible

(see "Enemies" to "Foes" page 6)

From EBM To You

Dear Friends of EBM,

Though the new year has just begun, it is also the time when we often make plans for upcoming events such as long weekends, Spring Break, summer vacations, and the like. So it is a good time to make plans to attend one or more of the many upcoming Grace Bible conferences and camps that are conveniently scheduled throughout the year. Some are for a weekend, others for a full week. As well they can be found all over the map; on the East coast, on the West coast, and numerous places in between. A number of these conferences and camps are presently listed at GraceOnline.org under "Conferences." Be sure to check this list, as well as listings on other Grace websites, to see if there will be a conference or camp in your area that you can attend.

Keeping up with reprinting literature is a constant task for us. We always endeavor to reprint an item before we run out of it. However every once in a while a reprint schedule does not go as planned. Such is the case with our booklet, *The Gospel of God's Grace: Make It Clear! Make It Plain!* It is up for its third reprinting, and we had planned on having it completed by now. But we decided to take advantage of the situation and make a few adjustments to the booklet. This has delayed the reprinting, and as a result we have temporarily run out of stock. So for now orders for this booklet will be placed on 'back order.' We hope to have the reprinting completed in the next few weeks.

Our thanks to those who faithfully help in supporting this ministry!

Simply stated the first of these three doctrines, set forth in verses 16-25, is that of the joyful hope that we possess as God's heirs in His plan and purpose. It provides us with the proper, fundamental perspective on things that we need to have by knowing what God is doing in this present dispensation together with knowing our role in it as God's heirs and "sons." And as verses 23-25 explain, this doctrine about the greatness of what God is now doing for "the creature," (along with our role in it), effectually works within us to produce the Godly virtue of contentment and patient waiting for the realization of our hope, especially in the face of any of "the sufferings of this present time" that we will experience.[1]

As already noted, the second doctrine in verses 26-27 concerns the issue of our prayer life. As such it deals with the Godly virtue of engaging in consistent, intelligent fellowship with our Father through prayer, because we know how indispensable prayer is in view of what God wants to accomplish with us as His "sons." Again, this doctrine's effectual working within us provides for the intelligent fellowship of prayer to be undiminished, and for us to be unperturbed therein, even on those occasions when we "know not what we should pray for as we ought."

The third of the three doctrines, set forth in verses 28-39, is designed by its effectual working to produce within us the Godly virtue of confidence to boldly face, as well as to profit from, all things that we may encounter in this world. And indeed we should have such confidence, because in view of God's purpose with us as His "sons" we know that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose." Hence come what may, the Godly virtue of dauntless confidence should characterize our outlook on our sonship life.

These three Godly virtues are truly fundamental and foundational to our Christian lives. Again when they are established within us and we operate upon them, we are equipped to respond properly to the details of our lives as God's "sons." We are equipped to embark upon the journey of our sonship edification and training, and to do this not only to our Father's rejoicing and glory, but also to our own profit and benefit.

Now for the remainder of this article we want to note once again the second of these three doctrines. Yet not to examine the details of what verses 26-27 teach, but to consider something much more basic. Specifically the doctrine addresses the issue of "our infirmities" when it comes to prayer, but by so doing it also brings up the issue of prayer itself. Moreover since the doctrine occurs where it does in Romans 8, it brings up the issue of sonship prayer in particular. And this is what we want to consider.

Prayer

When it comes to the subject of prayer, and especially sonship prayer, there sometimes exists among us another kind of infirmity. One which is even more basic than those times when we "know not what we should pray for as we ought." This is the infirmity of not really understanding and appreciating prayer very well to begin with. Or maybe not appreciating it at all. Unfortunately this is a common infirmity, though not always easily or readily admitted. Indeed for many prayer has an aura of the unknown about it. There is a fogginess about it that makes it so that though they do pray, they do not do so with much solid realization for what it is they are doing. There is little or no delight to prayer. Hence often times prayer is thought of as more of a duty or obligation than anything else. It is looked upon by many as something that God-fearing people, like Christians, should do; hence they do it. Yet in their hearts there is no real understanding of what they are doing, or should be doing.

Wherefore sadly for some prayer does not extend much beyond the issue of 'saying grace,' or 'giving thanks,' when they sit down to a meal. Or saying a quick 'bedtime prayer' when they retire. Therefore prayer is not much more than a mechanical performance in the lives of many Christians. A cold, sterile, even very impersonal activ-

ity to them. Something which is based more upon the notion of what is expected of them, than upon any sound understanding and deep appreciation operating within them for what prayer is.

When this is the case, it truly is unfortunate. For prayer is designed by God to be an integral component of His relationship with His people, whether it be in His program with Israel, or with us in this present dispensation of His grace. And as such there should be a real appreciation for the privilege of prayer.

Now in view of this it is important that we understand the basics of what prayer is. Indeed this is taken for granted by Paul when he speaks of prayer in Romans 8:26-27. For he does not explain prayer to us, nor does he teach us to pray. Instead in these verses he teaches us about what to do when we do not know what we should pray for as we ought. But this he does taking it as a 'given' that we already do know what prayer is, and that we do want to pray "as we ought."

Yet more than this it is important that we should have the deep appreciation for prayer that we ought to have being the adopted "sons of God" that we are in this present dispensation of God's grace. Being "sons" prayer should take on all that much more of an important role in our lives. One that we recognize is particularly integral and vital to our sonship edification, and that we make use of accordingly. For this reason prayer is naturally spoken about by Paul in Romans 8 as soon as he begins to teach us about our sonship status. In fact it is our deep appreciation for the fellowship that we have with our Father through prayer, and for Him 'searching our hearts' thereby, that makes the intercessory ministry of the Spirit of God within us so meaningful and so comforting, when we find ourselves infirm not knowing what we should pray for as we ought.

What Is Prayer?

Very simply put, prayer is the issue of communication directed toward God. This is what the word 'prayer' denotes in its most basic sense and at its most basic level. This meaning allows for prayer to refer to any God-ward utterance. It could be a mere cry for help, or it can denote some religious and/or ritualistic performance. Hence the word can be used to refer to such things as recitations of set prayers, or the mindless chanting of repetitive phrases and the like. Indeed within the varied religious systems of this world, (both pagan and those calling themselves Christian), prayer often amounts to nothing more than this. Though such things are not the issues that ought to constitute our understanding of prayer, nonetheless they testify to the most basic meaning belonging to the word — i.e. communication directed toward God.

As Christians we should understand and appreciate prayer to be much more than simple communication directed toward God. Especially should this be so in view of the fact that we are God's adopted "sons" in this present dispensation of His grace. Prayer itself is certainly not something that is unique to us in this dispensation, nor are many of its benefits. However because we are "sons," and because of what our sonship status involves, of all of God's people we should be the ones to whom prayer is the most meaningful, as well as being the most personal and the most intimate.

Now in connection with understanding and appreciating prayer in general, it helps to understand that prayer is actually a development out of, or an extension of, the kind of relationship and fellowship that God had originally designed to take place between Himself and man. With this being so, prayer is directly connected with the issue of godliness. Moreover for ones such as ourselves, who in this present dispensation are being educated by God in godliness, prayer is an integral component of our "godly edifying" and is vital to it.

As Genesis 1-3 makes evident, in creating man to be a 'godly' creature, God created him to have direct, personal communion and close fellowship with Him. Man was created to be an help meet for God, with whom God would have 'godly fellowship' by man being taught by God to think like He does, to live like He does, and to labor with Him in His operations. In accordance with this, and especially in accordance with God educating man, this close fellowship would involve the issue of God and man communing one with another in the fellowship of mutual thinking and understanding, expressing one to another what is in the heart and on the mind of each other. In fact though it was short-lived, this is exactly what God and Adam did, face to face, before Adam sinned.

However the entrance of sin and death altered what was originally in effect. Man became an ungodly creature, making it so that the issue of mutual, personal, and direct communion and fellowship, (especially the face to face communion and intimate fellowship that was a natural part of the designed godliness), could no longer take place. Wherefore not only was man immediately removed from God's physical presence, having sinned and having become ungodly; but eventually in the process of time God even physically removed Himself from the earth as man's ungodliness evolved.

Now as stated, prayer actually developed out of this. To put it very simply, with face to face communion and fellowship no longer the case, the situation became one of God communicating to His saints through His written word, and His saints intelligently responding to His communication through the communion and fellowship of prayer. Things, therefore, that His people would commune and fellowship with God about if they actually sat down with Him face to face, they express to Him and go over with Him through prayer.

In general, therefore, prayer is the means by which God has designed for His people to intelligently and consciously commune with Him in response to, and in accordance with, His program and dealings with them. Through His word God sets forth the expressions of His own heart and mind regarding the outworking of His particular program, and through prayer His people express to Him their understanding of it and the application of it in their lives. By so doing they have personal fellowship and intelligent communion with Him in the outworking of His program with them. Such is the gist of what prayer is.

Sonship Prayer

As was stated earlier, because we are God's adopted "sons" in this present dispensation, of all of God's people we should be the ones to whom prayer is the most meaningful and the most intimate. This is not only because of the close personal nature of our sonship relationship with God, but especially because of the edification in godliness that God has for us as His "sons." In truth, our edification in godliness demands that we have close, intimate communion with our Father. So if we deeply appreciate our sonship edification, then we should also deeply appreciate prayer.

In view of this, let's briefly note a few things about our sonship edification.

In Romans 8:14 the apostle Paul states the dominant feature that characterizes and distinguishes sonship for what it is, which is the issue of being "led by the Spirit of God."

> [14] For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. (Romans 8:14)

As "sons," therefore, in this present dispensation of grace we are being "led by the Spirit of God." This is in direct contrast to the issue of being under "tutors and governors" when one is a "child," and to the issue of the elementary and limited education that one receives when he is a "child." As such being "led by the Spirit of God" has specific reference to the nature of our education as "sons" and to the advancement that it is upon the education belonging to childhood. And indeed sonship education and edification is advanced, for its course of learning provides for "sons" to actually become like their father, not just know things about him.

… being "led by the Spirit of God" is not an indefinable or indescribable matter.

In view of what "the adoption of sons" is all about, being "led by the Spirit of God" is not an indefinable or indescribable matter. It is not some mystical or mysterious activity of the Spirit that defies being put into words. Nor is it the issue of Him doing something with us that either overrides the use of our own mind and intelligence, or that bypasses it. Rather, being "led by the Spirit of God" is a clearly definable activity of the Holy Ghost in connection with the "adoption of sons."

When a father adopts his child and he becomes his "son" the father personally takes over his son's education for the purpose of his son becoming like him in mind, in lifestyle, and in occupation. Through direct, close, personal fellowship and communion, (no more "tutors and governors"), he provides for his son to emulate him and to be an help meet for him in his business. Through personal teaching, fellowship, and communion he educates his son so that the two of them are of one mind in their thinking, attitude, and viewpoint; are of one accord in their manner of living and conversation; and are one in how they spend their time and to what purpose they use their talents and skills. Sonship edification at a father's hands provides for a "son" to become one with his father, and for both of them to enjoy and delight in the fruits of the fellowship of that 'oneness.' Moreover that 'oneness' is designed to make it so that in every good sense of the expression it can said of the "son," 'like father like son.' This is the father's ultimate aim.

Now this is exactly what being "led by the Spirit of God" — "the Spirit of adoption" — is designed to do with us as God's "sons." It is the means by which God our Father provides for, and accomplishes, our sonship education and edification.

Being "led by the Spirit" is the issue of Him leading us through a curriculum for our edification that has clear purpose to it; that has known levels of edification, training, and corresponding attainments to it; and that has a definite objective and end in view.

Furthermore being "led by the Spirit of God" has the Spirit of God

intelligently utilizing our spirits/minds and hearts for the very purpose that God created them — i.e. godliness. And the Spirit does this in fulfillment of the very thing that the Lord Jesus Christ provided for Him to be able to do with us when Christ established the new testament through His blood and made us beneficiaries of it.[2]

The issue, therefore, in us being "led by the Spirit of God" — "the Spirit of adoption" — is one of Him leading us through a clearly defined course of sonship learning and edification that our Father has prepared for our "godly edifying" in this present dispensation of His grace. This course for our sonship edification is set forth for us in Paul's epistles to us. More specifically in the very order of those epistles from Romans through Philemon. They are the specific curriculum for our "godly edifying." By being so "led by the Spirit of God" we are taken through the course for our "godly edifying." We are thereby progressively taught godliness by our Father and we learn to be godly; i.e. to think like God does, to live like He does, and to occupy our time and use our acquired skills and talents with Him in the operations of His business.[3]

In a nutshell such is the basic nature of our edification as "sons." And when we understand and appreciate it for what it is, all the more it should make us not only crave the opportunities to engage in intimate communion with our Father about our "godly edifying," but also make us realize the necessity of doing so.

Wherefore as "sons" we should readily recognize that our "godly edifying" at our Father's hands demands that we be in constant and close touch with Him. It demands that we have a level of intimacy of fellowship with Him through which we can engage in direct heart-to-heart communion with Him as our Father. For as we are educated by Him we need to express to Him our understanding, appreciation, and application of what we have learned, as well as needing to have Him 'search our hearts' for the benefits thereof. As "sons" we need to have with our Father the fulness of the interchange and exchange of the father-son relationship, for we cannot do without it. And as "sons" we not only have it, but are able to avail ourselves of it, through prayer.

Specifically for us, therefore, prayer should be the issue of us intelligently, deliberately, and with great focus, communing with our Father as 'son to father and father to son.' By prayer we should have intelligent and thoughtful heart-to-heart and mind-to-mind fellowship with Him about the education we are receiving from Him and the application of it in our lives, as He educates us as His "sons." We should thoughtfully, intently, and intelligently express to our Father matters of our own minds and hearts, being ones whose very minds and hearts are being brought into conformity to His mind and heart through the effectual working of His word within us.

... our Father 'searches our hearts,' just as a father does when he communes with his son.

Indeed this is something we should do intelligently, having keen awareness for what is taking place through prayer, along with having great desire for it taking place. We should understand and appreciate that through prayer, as we express our hearts to our Father, He 'searches our hearts,' just as a father does when he communes with his son. He 'searches our hearts' with the pure delight that it is for a father, who when he is educating his son, looks for and wants to find in his son's heart the effectual working of that education, and to hear from his son's mouth the fruits of it. Indeed in the same way that Proverbs 23:15-16 expresses this particular delight for a father who is educating his son, so also is it with our Father and us.

> [15] My son, if thine heart be wise, my heart shall rejoice, even mine.
> [16] Yea, my reins shall rejoice, when thy lips speak right things. (Proverbs 23:15-16)

Moreover our Father 'searches our hearts' desiring not only to have such a level of intimate fellowship and communion with our own hearts and minds and to rejoice therein, but also to monitor and to gauge the progress of our edification in godliness and to respond to it accordingly. He 'searches our hearts' to know them and thereby to be able to give to us what our edification merits.

By the same token we also should engage in this intimate communion through prayer, because as "sons" we likewise should possess the eager desire to express to our Father what is on our minds or in our hearts. As "sons" whom He is educating, we should want to prove to Him the effectual working of His word within us; tell Him what our mind is with regards to the issues of our lives and how precious His thoughts and His doctrines are to us. Moreover we should want to benefit from Him 'searching our hearts.'

Wherefore as "sons" prayer should be a most natural and indispensable part of our personal sonship

relationship with God in this present dispensation. By it we should eagerly take the time in our daily lives to intelligently commune with our Father, both to enjoy and to profit from the benefits thereof. We should be "instant" in prayer at the best of times, and at all others it should be an autoresponse on our part. Engaging in it should be close to, if not, instinctive to us as "sons," as we desire intimacy of communion with our Father and His searching of our hearts thereby.

Such is the basic understanding and appreciation that we as "sons" should have for prayer. Indeed the fundamental effectual working within us of the knowledge of our adoption as "sons," (which ought to have us "crying, Abba, Father" in the first place), should initially produce within us the eager desire for having such a level of engaging communion and fellowship with God our Father. The lack of such communion, or desire for it, is just plain unnatural for us as "sons."

So then we should not only crave being edified by our Father through His word to us, we should also crave intelligently communing with Him about it through prayer. Such fellowship and communion is virtuous to Him, and He desires it with us being our "Father." We too, being His "sons," should possess the same Godly virtue of engaging in consistent, intelligent fellowship with Him.

— K.R. Blades

1. For a basic survey of the doctrinal design of Romans 8:18-25 and its effectual working within us, see the Second Quarter 2002 issue of *The Enjoy The Bible Quarterly*.

2. See, for example, II Corinthians 3:1-18.

3. As such we are also being trained for that which is yet to come in the future operations of God's business when we are manifested as God's "sons."

("Enemies" to "Foes" from page 1)

for an "enemy" to leave you alone. An "enemy," for example, does not have to attack you, or harass you, or actively trouble you, or set himself in determined opposition to you. He just may want nothing to do with you. He can just make it known to you that he is opposed to you, and pretty much leave it at that. Or he can simply resist any attempts that you make to be friendly to him, even expressing his disdain for you, but doing so without actively turning against you with the determination to harm you or get rid of you.

However when someone is your "foe" his attitude toward you is different, and because of this he is in active opposition to you. A "foe's" enmity towards you is very strong. In fact a "foe's" attitude is one of hatred toward you. A "foe" has usually been your "enemy" for sometime previous to becoming your "foe." But then certain things occur or take place that make it so that his attitude towards you worsens. His disdain for you grows into hatred, and his former less active opposition to you grows into the determination to be actively hostile to you.

Simply put, this is the basic difference between an "enemy" and a "foe." A "foe" is an "enemy," but when someone is your "foe" he is specifically hostile towards you, being motivated by hatred for you and the determination to vent that hatred upon you and to rid himself of you.

Now this is the very thing that is being conveyed in Acts 2. The people of Israel had gone from being God's "enemies" to His "foes." In view of apostate Israel's opposition to the Lord and His ministry over the previous 3 years, their attitude toward Him had worsened. They had been His "enemies" right from the start, but with the worsening of their attitude their disdain grew into hatred. And when it grew into hatred, so also did the determination grow within them to become actively hostile towards the Lord and eventually to get rid of Him.

The Lord explained the reality of this to His apostles in John 15:18-25. In view of their hatred, the leaders of Israel's apostate religious system, along with their followers, went from being "enemies" to being "foes." As such they killed the Lord, which was their first act, so to speak, as "foes." But just as the Lord told His apostles, their hatred would not stop there. It would continue on. Hence their status as "foes" would be the issue as God's program with Israel continued on following the cross and the Lord's return to the Father.

For this reason the word changes from "enemies" to "foes" in Acts 2. God now looked upon the people of Israel as His "foes," as Peter's message to them makes clear. In view of this they were just 'one step away,' so to speak, from being accounted worthy of destruction. They were now part of "this untoward generation," as Peter said, being God's "foes." Therefore if they did not 'save themselves from this untoward generation,' they would be destroyed from among the people in the day of the Lord's wrath. The fact that they were now God's "foes" was not lost on many of them. For as verse 37 relates, they were "pricked in their heart" and they said, "Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?"

Changing the word from "enemies" to "foes" is significant and accurate. "Foes" is our English word that perfectly reflects the historical context as well as the designed impact of Peter's message, conveying as it does the advancement that had occurred in apostate Israel's opposition to God. — K.R. Blades

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"rightly dividing the word of truth" II Timothy 2:15

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