

“We Are More Than Conquerors”

Ecclesiastes 8:12-13; Romans 8:26-39

By Rev. Nollie Malabuyo • September 12, 2021 (BSCC)

Dear Congregation of Christ: When I was in college, there was a controversy in our home church in the Phil. Some of our college students heard about the doctrine popularly known as “once saved, always saved.” Though this is true, this is an aberration of the doctrine of the perseverance or preservation of the saints. It will encourage a Christian to continue living a life of disobedience to God’s word and still remain a Christian. He is “always saved,” even while he continues to rebel against God.

On the other hand, there are others who say that a Christian may lose his salvation, may fall into rebellion and disobedience until his death. This teaching gives no assurance and comfort to a Christian, who might be a true Christian today and then an unbeliever tomorrow.

Our text today contradicts both errors, as the Apostle Paul affirms that all believers are “more than conquerors” in our Lord Jesus Christ. And that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from God’s love in Christ. So, we will meditate on the last of a three-part series on Romans Chapter 8: verses 1-17, verses 18-25, and verses 26-39. Our theme is, **“We are More Than Conquerors,”** under three points: first, **Because the Spirit Works All Things for Our Good** (verses 26-30); second, **Because Nothing Can Separate Us from Christ's Love** (verses 31-36); and third, **Because Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love** (verses 37-39).

Because the Spirit Works All Things for Our Good

Previously, we learned that the Holy Spirit is the give of life, particularly the giver of eternal life to those who believe. He is the one who gives new life to the hearts of God’s chosen people in order that they may repent of their sins and believe in Christ as Savior and Lord. And those who believe are enabled by the Spirit to set their minds on eternal things in heaven, not on things on earth that pass away.

The Apostle Paul also assures us that believers are counted as adopted children of God who have a heavenly inheritance when Christ returns from heaven in power and glory. This inheritance includes glorious, resurrection bodies, eternal life with Jesus in heaven, and a glorious existence in heaven forever. This future glory is our hope in our present time of sufferings. Our sufferings will be nothing compared with this glory that is still to be revealed to us. This promise includes not only the perfect redemption of our bodies, but also the restoration of the earth to its perfect state as the new heaven and new earth.

But how are we supposed to know how God will fulfill these promises of future glory? Our text begins with Paul assuring us that the Holy Spirit is our Helper and Comforter. He prays for us in our sufferings and afflictions. Our comfort is that through the indwelling Spirit, *“we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose”* (v

28). This is a hard saying, especially for those who are in deep darkness of sin and suffering. What if you are in such a depression that you feel like David pleading desperately to God in Psalm 69:1–3? *“Save me, O God! For the waters have come up to my neck. I sink in deep mire, where there is no foothold; I have come into deep waters, and the flood sweeps over me. I am weary with my crying out; my throat is parched. My eyes grow dim with waiting for my God.”* How would anyone so despondent be comforted and assured by the Spirit?

Paul often uses “we know,” “you know,” and “I know,” twelve times in the book of Romans alone. When he says this, he is stating a truth that every Christian knows or must know. This truth is not a hunch, or wishful thinking, or a feeling; it is the objective truth. In Romans 6:9, Paul affirms, *“We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again.”* Christ’s resurrection is undeniable, and if you do not know, or doubt, or do not accept this historical fact, you have no business calling yourself a Christian. In Romans 7:18, Paul confesses, *“For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh.”* All of us are sinful by nature, and in the same way, if you do not know, or doubt, or do not accept this spiritual fact, you have no business calling yourself a Christian.

Therefore, when he says, *“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose,”* he is giving full assurance and comfort to us that God works all things for our good. But what does he mean by these words? Who are those “who love God”? What are “all things”? What is “good” for us?

Paul says that *“those who love God”* are the recipients of the benefits of God working all things for good. Many people say they love God, even Muslims who shout, “Allahu Akbar!” or “God is greater!” while committing acts of terrorism. Or politicians who do not know Christ but end their speech with, “God bless you.” Those who truly love God are not mere hearers of the word, but doers also (Jas 1:22). We read in 1 John 5:3, *“For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.”* Loving God means obeying his word. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself said, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). So we know who truly love God: those who do his will as revealed in his word.

And how are they able to obey his word? No, not through their own will and ability, but through the Spirit of God. The Spirit is the one *“who [called] them according to God’s purpose.”* God chose them—predestined them—from out of the whole human race to save them from sin. The Spirit called them, or gave them new, regenerated souls in order that they would believe, repent, and obey God’s will. From the moment they are “born again” by the Spirit, they begin “to be conformed to the image of his Son.” This image of Christ in them will then be perfected at this Second Coming.

Paul says, “all things,” good and bad, are God’s instruments for our good. He is able to do this because he is the Absolute Sovereign over all his creation, down to the most basic unit of matter. He is the fountain of all good: life, health, family, job, house, cars, safety and long life. But he also sends bad things: sickness, death, broken relationships, joblessness, homelessness,

accidents and natural calamities. He is both the Smiling Providence and Frowning Providence. We do not understand these things until the cloud of darkness gives way to light when Christ returns to reveal to us all that God had planned for us from eternity.

Therefore, the best we can do is to pray David’s prayer in Psalm 90:14–15, *“Satisfy us in the morning with your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, and for as many years as we have seen evil.”* Our days are just a mist in eternity, and for most of us, it feels as if most of them are full of mourning rather than gladness.

This takes us to the well-known verse 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.”* Our salvation—from predestination, to calling, to justification, to finally, glorification—is all God’s work. Not 99 percent God’s, and one percent ours, but one hundred percent God’s work. Our salvation began in eternity past when God chose us for salvation. For he knew beforehand that Adam will fall into sin, dragging all mankind into slavery to sin.

In the fulness of time, he sent his Son into the world to assume human flesh and blood, Jesus, who was born to save God’s chosen ones from their sins. He accomplished his mission by his sacrificial death on the cross. And on the appointed date for each one of his chosen people, the Spirit calls them by giving them regenerated souls. These “born again” ones will then repent and believe in Jesus as their Savior. At that moment, God declares them justified or acquitted of all their sins. Finally, on the last day, Jesus will return, taking all of God’s chosen, forgiven people to eternal glory in heaven. Therefore, God predestined, called, justified, and glorified, all in the past tense, as if the whole chain of salvation is already accomplished, finished and done.

“We are more than conquerors” because God works all things out for the good of his people.

Because Nothing Can Separate Us from Christ's Love

Secondly, “we are more than conquerors” because nothing can separate us from Christ’s love for us. Paul then asks has six questions in verses 31-35. The first is an introductory question, *“What then shall we say to these things?”* If God works all things out for our good, what else is there to say? He answers his own question with five other questions.

His second question is, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* He answers this question with another question, *“He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”* If our gracious God was able to sacrifice his own Son for us, there is nothing that he will not do for us. Hostility against us will continue, but he will protect us from all our enemies—sin, death and Satan. The fourth question is *“Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect?”* No one, because God is the one who acquits and justifies us from all our sins. Satan the “Accuser” is not able to condemn us, because all our sins have been paid for by our Lord’s sacrificial death on the cross. This is the answer to the fifth question, *“Who is to condemn?”* Here, Paul explains further what he means in verse one, *“There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.”*

He who conquered sin, death and Satan made us also conquerors of sin, death and Satan. In Christ, we have conquered all these evil elements because he accomplished four things. First, he willingly sacrificed his own body and blood as our Substitute for all our sins. Second, since God raised him from the dead, we too will be raised to life on the last day. Third, he ascended into heaven where he is now seated at God's right hand with all authority over all in heaven and on earth and in hell. And fourth, while seated on his heavenly throne, Christ pleads to God for our cause, relief from sufferings, and preservation.

The sixth and last question is the climax of his assurance and comfort for us, *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?"* This list of sufferings is Paul's own experience. He suffered all of these difficulties himself (2 Cor 11:26-27; 12:10), but our Lord conquered all of them for him. If Paul overcame all these things through Christ, then why would there be a reason for us not to conquer all our sufferings as well? Even the last suffering, "sword" or death, is conquered by Christ's resurrection and our own resurrection. We think of our brothers and sisters in Afghanistan who are now being hunted, imprisoned, tortured and martyred by Christ's enemies. They too are suffering all these things, including death, but they are *"more than conquerors through Christ"* who loved them to death (verse 37). They can then conclude their lives with Paul's assurance, *"For to me, to live is Christ, but to die is gain"* (Phil 1:21), and that nothing can separate them from Christ's love.

What assurance and comfort for us who suffer every day for our Lord! If we scan Paul's list of his sufferings, we can relate to most of them, even in our affluence and safety in our nation, compared to Afghanistan, Iran, China, Cuba, Venezuela or Haiti. In our nation, we also have tribulation, distress, persecution and even danger. As of January 2020, California has at least 160,000 homeless people, or over one-fourth of 550,000 in all of the United States. Many of them are children. It is almost unbelievable that in 2019, over 22,000 people, many of them young girls, are victims of human trafficking here in our country. For these who suffer persecution, deprivation and abuse, their only hope is in Christians or Christian organizations who are active in rescuing them from their hellish existence. They do these because they know Christ loves his creation, especially his people.

"We are more than conquerors" because nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Because Nothing Can Separate Us from God's Love

Third and last, "we are more than conquerors" because nothing can separate us from God's love. Paul is sure and convinced that there is nothing that would separate him from the love of God. Why? Because God accomplished everything to preserve and protect his people from sin, death and Satan through Christ.

In verses 38 and 39, Paul has another list, not of sufferings in life, but a list of things in life. He lists them in contrasting pairs: death or life, angels or rulers, things present or things to come. The only single listing is "powers." Death or life refer to our states of existence; we are either dead or

alive. In either existence, we are more than conquerors in Christ. Since his listing is in contrasting pairs, what are “angels” and “rulers”? We cannot be sure, because Paul uses both words elsewhere to refer to good or evil angels or rulers. Powers can also refer to good or evil powers. In any case, his point is that none of these things, even death and demonic powers, can separate us from God’s love in Christ, because he has conquered both death and the devil.

As well, we must not fear the present or the future. Present sufferings are part of life in general, and as Christians, part of our Christian life. And the future? We do not and we can never know the future. God reveals the future for us only in his word, and that future is a glorious future, as Paul explained earlier in verses 18-25. This glorious future of eternal life in heaven, face to face with Christ, is our hope and comfort.

What about “height and depth”? Height and depth may be referring to earth and hell, or heaven and earth, or heaven and hell. It is not possible to be sure, but the last term, *“anything else in all creation,”* may confirm that height and depth may refer to the whole created universe. Paul wants to cover all bases, like the Greeks who has an altar with the inscription, “To the Unknown God,” to make sure they have an altar for all their gods. Since we know that there is only one God the Creator and Redeemer and Sovereign King of the universe, we need not “cover all bases.” And the promise of this one God is that nothing in the universe can separate us from his love for us through Christ who loved us all the way to his death.

Beloved brothers and sisters in Christ, the love of God and Christ for us is our only assurance, comfort and hope in this life of sufferings. When we are in despair, or in sadness or grief or loneliness, this comfort may be hard to accept or to fathom. We may think it’s easier said than done. Even Christians can go into depression.

But God’s word assures us that nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ. And “all creation” includes you, your sinful self. When Satan tempts you to sin, God forgives you because of Christ’s sacrifice. When Satan accuses you that you are not a believer because you sin, God acquits you in Christ. When God sends you the most difficult trials, he comforts you with the Holy Spirit. When death overcomes you, he will give you a new and glorious body like Christ’s resurrection body. God overcomes even your sinful self.

In Christ, you are truly “more than conquerors” in life and in death.