

# CCLEB SERMON NOTES



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ROMANS 8:31-39

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## THE VICTORY LAP BEFORE THE RACE



Imagine you're a first-century sports fanatic in Athens at the Olympic stadium. You love watching sports in person. You love the atmosphere: the big crowds, the cheering and booing, the singing, the waving banners. The groans over missed opportunities, the yells of elation, the fist pumps, the high fives with complete strangers—you are all in. Oh, and the food: loaded hot dogs (yes, with onions), stadium fries with cheese, and soft pretzels with mustard... Yeah, baby! Or as they say in Greek, "Opa!"



One day you arrive at the stadium with great seats—first level, mid-stadium—where you can see everything. The contestants come out of the tunnels and start warming up, all except one athlete.

That athlete is running around the track with a huge smile, pumping both fists in the air. As they pass, you see tears of joy streaming down their face as they look up at the crowd, and you notice they're wearing the victor's wreath on their head.



Amazed, you and everyone else in the stadium ask the same question: What are they doing?

Then, almost at the same moment, you and all the stunned onlookers realize what's happening. The athlete is celebrating victory before the event is over... before it has even started. They are running a victory lap. They have assumed the victor's posture.

What questions or thoughts would go through your head?

Why are they doing that?

Are they nuts?

Who would think they're the victor before the contest is over—or has even started?

What would cause someone to take the victor's posture?

Who has the audacity to do that?

In today's passage, Paul urges the believers in Rome to do that very thing: assume the victor's posture—a posture of mind, heart, and body.

Last week we saw that believers in Christ Jesus are secure: there is "no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus," and nothing "can ever separate us from God's love." But in this present season, believers are eagerly waiting for Christ's return, and there is hardship and suffering. Paul tells us in **verse 17** that as heirs of Christ's glory, we also share in His suffering.

While we wait, God has given us all we need. He has equipped us by giving us His Holy Spirit. **Romans 8:11** says that the same Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead lives in us, and that power produces the supernatural fruit of the Spirit we need when things are hard: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

God has also prepared us for this season of suffering and waiting by giving us His truth. His truth shows us the big picture of what is really happening and what has already happened. This is about perspective—seeing things through God's Word, which is seeing things from God's perspective. This is God preparing our minds.

How important is it to see things from God's perspective? It is crucial—not just for spiritual survival, but for thriving, being fruitful, and multiplying.

Of course, the radical victor's posture Paul wants these suffering persecuted first-century believers to take would be met with resistance and questions, just as the onlookers in the stadium had questions. Questions, after all, are a natural part of coming to accept and believe.

They may have asked, "Wait, Paul—you want me to celebrate my victory now? You want me to take the victor's posture of mind, heart, and body before I cross the finish line?" Yes!

Paul anticipates that resistance and answers it with seven questions. Why is Paul doing this? He is preparing believers' minds with the truth of God's Word—God's perspective on our lives while we eagerly wait.

The first question Paul asks is in **verse 31**: "What shall we say about such wonderful things as these?"

His question calls for a response to what he has just told us in the previous passage. Not just an acknowledgement, a response!

In **verse 18**, Paul told us that what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory He will reveal to us later. He also told us that all creation is eagerly waiting to be set free from death and decay, just as we are.

When Jesus is revealed—when He comes back for us—we will receive our full rights as God's children, and share in Christ's glory. That means new, eternal bodies: no more suffering, no more pain, no more sin and decay. Most importantly, we will be with God our Father forever. No separation—face-to-face.

Paul also told us that while we wait and suffer, the Holy Spirit empowers us, uses those hard things, repurposes those hard things, to transform us into the image of Christ.

And in addition, the Holy Spirit also prays for us in harmony with God's will. This is what God has called us to, now and for eternity.

So when Paul asks in **verse 31**, "What shall we say about such wonderful things as these?" he is implying that even in this season of waiting and suffering, we can have a genuine response to these wonderful things—even a victor's posture!

Is it possible to take the posture of a victor in Christ Jesus while grieving and suffering at the same time? Yes! I think that is an accurate picture of the Christian life in **Romans 8**.



Paul answers the first question with this powerful statement: "If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"

Notice what Paul's questions and statements accomplish. Each question captures the resistance of our minds and hearts to God's perspective of us as victors, and each statement moves us toward accepting it.

For example, when King David faced threats from his enemies, those threats were real. His enemies wanted him dead. Yet David knew from experience that God was with him and for him. When David called out to God for help, his enemies retreated. David captures this truth beautifully in **Psalms 56:9**.

The threats and danger were real, but so was the reality that God was with David and for David.

Think of the time David and his men were fleeing from Saul. Just as Saul's forces were closing in, they were called away to deal with another threat. That timing was clearly supernatural. Who else could that be but God? This is what Paul means in **Romans 8:31**: "If God is for us, who can ever be against us?"

In the next question, in **verse 32**, we see that some believers might be questioning God's willingness to deliver all that is ours as His children. Let's face it, we're used to people making big promises and not delivering. It's almost the definition of being human, isn't it? Sometimes people can't deliver because they don't have it to give. Other times they won't deliver because they aren't willing to keep their promise. But when God says He will deliver, He will deliver. He has it to deliver, and He is willing.

God so wants us to have what Jesus has that He gave His own Son for us. Paul argues, "Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else?" God has the resources, and He is willing to give them.

Paul's third question, in **verse 33**, deals with accusations—both from outside and from within. There are real accusers of the brethren, and there are believers who feel they don't deserve what God wants to give them.

Feeling undeserving and hearing accusations from others often go hand in hand. For example, maybe you get a promotion at work, and before the week is over a coworker mutters, "I can't believe they gave it to you." It stings because part of you already wondered the same thing. The accusation from outside hits hard because it matches the voice inside.

The same is true for believers. Why would I, a sinner, deserve such amazing things? And the enemy certainly throws that in our face. But God's Word says the Father loved us so much that He did not spare His own Son, so that we could have right standing with Him—an eternal relationship with Him as His children. So which will you believe: the accusations of your own mind and the enemy, or the truth of God's Word?

The fourth question, in **verse 34**, moves from accusation to condemnation. This isn't about feeling condemned; it's about actually being condemned in the courtroom of heaven, where God the Father is the supreme Judge. It is a real courtroom with a real verdict: guilty or innocent. And if guilty, condemned.



But as believers, our security is in Christ. **Romans 8:1** says, "So now there is no condemnation for those who belong to Christ Jesus." Why is there no condemnation? Paul tells us in **verse 34**: "Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us." Notice the words "for us"—three times.

The only way we could be condemned in Christ is if Christ Himself were condemned. If Christ had not risen from the grave, we might conclude that.

But because Christ did rise, we know God accepted His payment for the sins of the world. By the power of the Holy Spirit, God raised Christ to new life—and He has given that new life to us. Therefore, there is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus! Amen?

In **verse 35**, Paul asks the fifth question: “Can anything ever separate us from Christ’s love?” This may speak to our insecurity when we misinterpret our suffering and hardship. In other words, does my suffering mean God doesn’t love me anymore? Look at this list of hardships, and you can understand why that question comes up. It goes back to a common question: If God loves me, why does He allow me to suffer? What good father would let his children suffer if he had the power to change it?

Sometimes Christians ask these questions when facing very hard things—losing a job, a broken relationship, a parent with a terminal illness, the loss of a spouse or loved one—or when evil seems to prevail and terrible things happen.

Paul answers by quoting **Psalms 44:22**: “For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.”

What does this mean?

It means that suffering and death are not the measure of whether God loves you. They are consequences of Adam and Eve’s sin that reach into this present age. Hardship, persecution, and even death do not separate us from Christ’s love. Jesus Himself said in **John 16:33**, “Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows.”

In **Psalms 44:17-22**, the psalmist laments that God’s people are suffering even though they have not sinned against Him.

In other words, suffering and death do not mean we are separated from God’s love or that He has withdrawn His love from us. They are simply part of this season of eagerly waiting for Christ to return for those He loves.

This passage also shows that suffering and death are not the end, as the secular world thinks. For those who are in Christ Jesus, death is just the beginning of eternity with God. That is why Paul later writes in **1 Corinthians 15:55**, “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”

And it is why Paul writes here in **Romans 8:37**.

This is Paul—and you and me—taking a victory lap around the stadium: a posture of mind, heart, and body in response to what God’s love through Jesus has already accomplished for us.

Are you convinced? Or still skeptical? I can see your brains churning.

In **verse 38**, Paul steps out to lead us through our questions and skepticism with a strong statement: “I am convinced...”

So what does it take to be convinced? Questions and skepticism are normal, but being truly convinced—especially about God and spiritual things—is something special.

Paul didn’t get to “I am convinced” by ignoring the hard questions. He got there by asking every one of them and finding that Christ answered them all.

So here are common steps to being convinced. First, you hear a claim—a truth that runs against what you see or think.

Second, you raise objections, doubts, and questions—like the seven questions Paul anticipated.

Third, you weigh the evidence and see that each objection gets an answer grounded in something solid.

Fourth, you test it against experience: Does it hold up in real life?

Fifth, you must decide whether to believe it or not. And when you trust that what God's Word says is true, you gain a settled conviction.

That conviction begins to shape how you live—how you respond to the hard and painful things of life, how you respond to suffering.

Yes, the suffering is real. Yes, things are hard. Yes, there are times when we grieve. But as Paul says in **1 Thessalonians 4:13**, we do not “grieve like people who have no hope.” We grieve with hope. Why? Because “overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.”

Yes, suffering and hardship are real, and there are times we feel like throwing in the towel. But as Paul says in **Philippians 3:14**, “I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.” Why? Because “overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.”

Yes, trials will come and test our faith. That's why James writes in **James 1:2-4**. Why? Because “overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.”

Paul was convinced, and that conviction shaped every step of his race. So let me ask you one more time:



Whatever you're carrying into this week—the diagnosis, the empty chair at the table, the job that's gone—you don't have to wait for the finish line to lift your head. The victory is already won. So lift your head in victory, take the victor's posture and maybe even run the victor's lap.



For closing: let's read **Romans 8:38-39** out loud together—not as a wish, but as a declaration. Amen?

Today Paul left us with a promise: nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus. But next week, in **Romans 9**, Paul's tone suddenly changes. His heart breaks. He says his heart is "filled with bitter sorrow and unending grief" for his own people, his fellow Jews, who without Christ are still separated from that very love. Paul even says he would be willing to be cut off himself if it would save them. What kind of love says that?

So here's my invitation: this week, read **Romans 9** ahead of time, and bring your questions with you. Then come back next Sunday, bring a friend, and let's wrestle with it together. You do not want to miss next week! See you next week! 😊