

More than Conquerors

Romans 8:26–30 (ESV)

INTRODUCTION: Last week, Paul left us in a position of tremendous privilege. We who are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ are adopted into the family of God, and we have become co-heirs with the Firstborn, Christ Himself.

But then, Paul acknowledged the reality that this does not always seem to be the case. It does not always feel like we hold such a privileged standing. In fact, there are times when our own faculties seemingly betray us. In the words of Paul, those things we hate, we find ourselves doing, and those things we know we ought to do, we often fail to do. What was the Apostle's explanation of this reality?

CONTEXT: Paul explained that the work of the Gospel of grace is, in one sense, completed; in another, ongoing; and in still another, yet to be.

We used the following terms to describe these three tenses of Salvation:

- **Past Tense** - We were Saved - that's **Justification** - that occurs within our Spirit.
- **Present Tense** - We are being Saved - that's **Sanctification** - that occurs within our Soul.
- **Future Tense** - We will be Saved - that's **Glorification** - that occurs within our Body.

We concluded last week as a people who are being sanctified as we cooperate with the Spirit, in a world system that is still under the curse of sin and living on ground the enemy has yet to surrender. Thus we have a threefold problem:

- The **World** - That's our External Foe
- The **Flesh** - That's our Internal Foe
- The **Devil** - That's our Infernal Foe

A question inevitably arises: If we cannot trust our own flesh, how on earth are we to overcome the World and the Devil?

- Who would dare enter into the institution of marriage under these circumstances, much less bring children into the world?
- Who would enter into covenant with a local Church knowing that we are already a marked people under the constant attack of the enemy?

Is it not best that we simply lay low, keep our heads down, and hope it all works out? Well, that is not at all the conclusion of Paul; in fact, his conclusion is quite the opposite.

ILLUSTRATION: My father was the youngest of 12 children. His father never taught him how to tie a tie. Thus, he never taught me how to tie a tie. My father was friends with the local mortician; the local mortician could not only tie his own tie, but he was also accustomed to tying the ties of other people, provided they sat still. So dad, who owned over 20 ties, would take each new tie he purchased to his friend the mortician and ask

him to tie it for him. I was about to give my first public speech for the 4-H club, and I needed a tie for the occasion. I did something very risky; I carefully untied all 20 of my father's neckties, making careful notes along the way, in hopes that I could reverse engineer the process. As you can see today - I was successful.

I hope to do the same thing with the text before us. I want to reverse engineer it. In order to do so, we must go to the end and see where Paul lands - Look with me at **Romans 8:37 (ESV)** ³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

The phrase “More than Conquerors” is the Greek word ὑπερνικάω (**hypernikaō**, pronounced roughly hooper-nee-KAH-oh), meaning “to conquer overwhelmingly,” “to be more than victorious,” or “to prevail completely.”

It combines two Greek elements:

- ὑπέρ (hyper) — over, beyond, above, exceedingly
- νικάω (nikaō) — to conquer, overcome, prevail, or gain victory

So Paul does not merely say, “We conquer.” He intensifies it: We overwhelmingly conquer. We win beyond winning.

NOW - how can this be? If we are trapped in the body of sin and death, as Paul has described it? The body where temptation finds a place? In this world where sin is rampant?

How will we conquer, in the words of **Martin Luther** -
*amid the flood of mortal ills prevailing.
 For still our ancient foe does seek to work us woe;
 his craft and power are great, and armed with cruel hate,
 on earth is not his equal.*

What conquering is there for a believer in such a place? Well, let's tear this necktie apart and learn. *First of all, we are aided by...*

1. The Prayer of the Spirit -

TEXT: Romans 8:26–30 (ESV)

²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.

Notice where the conquering begins — not with our strength, but with our *weakness*. And notice exactly what Paul says that weakness is: “we do not know what to pray for as we ought.”

He does not say we don't know *how* to pray — you learned the mechanics of prayer. He says we don't know *what* to pray. And we don't.

You cannot pray about an accident that hasn't happened yet. You cannot run a spiritual CAT scan on your own heart — there are things going on inside you right now that you know nothing about.

- Students, you don't know what you will need this year— courage, or comfort?
- Teacher, you have no idea what will be required of you in the days ahead - you know some things: there will be difficult students, there always are; there will be angry parents, there always are. But you don't know what some of those students, especially the most difficult ones, have been through. And students, don't forget your teachers are not exempt from the difficulties of life either.

We know we need prayer; we know how to pray, but often we don't know exactly what to pray.

GREEK NOTE: “Groanings too deep for words” is *stenagmois alalētois* (στεναγμοῖς ἀλάλητοις). Be careful — that English phrase can send you hunting for something mystical.

- *Ala-lētos* simply means *wordless*. It is the poverty of vocabulary.

Some have suggested that this is the gift of tongues which Paul explicitly teaches in other places. I would argue that this passage cannot mean that. For Paul indicates here that there are some mysterious prayers that cannot be captured by any words, not even the language of Heaven.

You will face things that are unspeakably profound and immeasurably difficult. You've been there, haven't you? Those times when you pray all you can pray, and weep all you can weep, but the situation is not yet resolved? That is when the Spirit intercedes in something more powerful than words. The Holy Groan of the Almighty - which is on your behalf, for your benefit, for your good, for His Glory!

Our Catholic friends will at times appeal to Mary in hopes that she has more leverage with the Son than we do. Logically, it makes sense. However, how much more powerful is the appeal of GOD the Holy Spirit?? Oh, I want your prayer; I'll take her prayers, but can any prayer of the Holy Spirit go unanswered? I think not!

Oh, there will be times when the Ancient Dragon will mock your prayers - he will say Listen to you - you have no idea what you are dealing with; you can barely string three words together. But don't you see - that is the wonderful secret... stop arguing with him, acknowledge that you are at the end of yourself, for it is then that another steps in that strikes the devil with an infinite terror - our comforter, our friend, our teacher, the blessed Holy Spirit.

Satan quakes when the Spirit GROANS!

You will step into this year with the Prayer of the Spirit...

2. The Providence of the Father -

²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 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.

Verse 28 is one of the most beloved verses in the Bible — and one of the most misquoted.

It does not say that all things are good. It never calls the cancer good, or the casket good. Remember Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus? He was five minutes from raising the man — and He still stood at that grave and wept, angry at death. Because death is an intruder. It is bad, and God is against it.

What the verse says is far better: God takes all things — including the heartbreaking things, even the wicked things — and He weaves them together for good.

GREEK NOTE: “Work together” is *synergei* (συνεργεῖ) — *syn*, “together,” plus *ergon*, “work” — the word that gives us *synergy*.

William Butler Yeats capture the spirit of this age well in his timeless work, “The Second Coming”

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.*

Much is wrong in the world, and much is growing worse. Yet, notice that God is the subject of the verb *synergei*: all things do not drift toward good on their own — left to themselves, things fall apart. Yet, there is a *God* in Heaven who works all things together, like a master weaver working a thousand threads — including the dark ones — into one design.

Behold the supreme proof, the very cross of Christ: the most evil act in human history — and through it, God accomplished the salvation of the world (Acts 2:23). If God can work Calvary for good, He can be trusted with your Tuesday.

ILLUSTRATION: Tim Keller loved to point out that the Bible records two crises at the very same little town — Dothan. In Genesis 37, young Joseph is thrown into a pit at Dothan by his own brothers. You know he prayed — “God, get me out of this!” Heaven’s answer? Silence. He was hauled out and sold into slavery. Centuries later, in 2 Kings 6, Elisha is surrounded at Dothan by an enemy army. He prays — and instantly the hills blaze with chariots of fire. Same God. Same town. One spectacular rescue; one deafening silence. But follow the silence: because Joseph went to Egypt as a slave, he rose to Pharaoh’s right hand, stored grain before the famine, and saved the known world — including the very brothers who threw him in the pit. God was working just as surely in the silence as in the chariots.

You will find yourself in both Dothans this coming year. At times, God will show up and gloriously deliver, and at times the suffering will continue, because God plans a greater deliverance that you cannot yet fully comprehend. Trust His heart when you cannot trace His hand.

Then verses 29 and 30 pull back the curtain and show us the machinery behind the promise — five links in what the old theologians called the golden chain: ***foreknew*** → ***predestined*** → ***called*** → ***justified*** → ***glorified***.

“Foreknew” does not mean God looked down the corridor of time to see who would choose Him. In the Bible, for God to “know” someone is to love them — “You only have I known of all the families of the earth.” He told Israel (Amos 3:2), and He certainly knew about the Philistines. Foreknown means fore-loved. And “predestined” is proōrisen (προώρισεν) — pro, “beforehand,” plus horizō, “to mark out a boundary” — the word that gives us horizon.

Before you ever set sail, God marked out your horizon. And what are you predestined to? “Conformed to the image of his Son” — God’s goal is not to make you comfortable; it is to make you Christlike.

Keller said it perfectly: “Jesus did not suffer so that you would not suffer. He suffered so that when you suffer, you would become like Him.”

In other words, God took care of your Justification; God has guaranteed your Glorification; trust that He will take care of your Sanctification as well.

Philippians 1:6 (ESV) ⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

You will step into this year with the Prayer of the Spirit...the Providence of the Father...

3. The Payment of the Son -

Here lies the guarantee...Here Paul seals his argument, concludes his argument, and rests his case...

Romans 8:31–39 (ESV)

³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?

You, oh man, are nothing when faced with the forces of Darkness, but greater is He that is in you than he that is in the world!

There is no weapon formed against you that will ultimately prosper - who can kill a man who has been promised a resurrection? It is a colossal waste of time.

If God be for us, who can be against us? Do you know what this is suggesting???? Paul is making the absurd claim that GOD is FOR YOU! Can you believe that? Oh, it will take a while for some of you; some of you were raised with the idea that God is up in Heaven just hoping you will mess up so He can give you what you deserve... don't you see it - Christ has already absorbed what you deserve. And look at how Paul continues...

³² 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?

In rhetoric, this is called an "A Fortiori" argument. That is the presumption that if the greater is true, then certainly the lesser is true. If God has already given you His very best, His Son, how much more will He provide with us all that is needed for life and godliness?

³³ Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ 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.

ILLUSTRATION: I've told you before that wonderful lesson I overheard at a coffee show in Huntsville, Alabama. An attorney was trying to get a defendant to hire him. The man asked, "Why should I choose you and not the other guy"? To which the attorney answered, "My competition is a fine attorney; he certainly knows the law, but there is a difference, you see, between a good lawyer and a great lawyer. A good lawyer knows the law; a great lawyer knows the Judge." He continued to explain that he and the Judge belong to the same country club and have a great rapport. The man wisely said, "You're hired."

Well, if a country club friend makes a good attorney, how much more would the Judge's only begotten Son carry weight in your defense? The answer is obvious...

³⁵ Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?

Paul names these things because there is a possibility we may face any or all of them. Salvation doesn't guarantee you an easy life - the TV preacher has lied to you. The Gospel does not prevent bad things from happening to you any more than it did Paul or Jesus Himself.

³⁶ As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."

Oh, you can count on the fact that you will be persecuted, and at times prosecuted for standing for Christ... but what will that matter...

³⁷ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸ For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹ nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ILLUSTRATION: I read a story this week about a Christian camp that hosted camping trips for fathers and Sons. At a certain point in the week, the kids were taught rappelling. They would go over a 100-foot cliff with nothing to hold them but a rope attached to a harness. Now, the rope was fixed to a tree, and the harness was secured on the boy, but for extra precaution, an adult would stand at the cliff's edge and hold the rope. Each boy would have an option - either the Master Rappeller could hold the rope, or the child's father could hold the rope. The camp director said that in 30 years, he never saw an occasion where a boy didn't ask for his father. Why? He trusted his dad. He knew his dad, who loved him enough to take him on this trip, would not let him fall.

Can I say to you - how much more can you trust your Heavenly Father who gave up Jesus on your behalf? What would He not do for you? And here is the good news: He has the rope.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: So there is the necktie, reverse engineered — every knot and loop of it. How do people trapped in bodies of sin and death, in a world under the curse, facing the World, the Flesh, and the Devil, win beyond winning? Not by laying low and hoping it all works out. We conquer by the **Prayer of the Spirit**, the **Providence of the Father**, and the **Payment of the Son**

The entire Trinity, enlisted in your victory. That is why Luther's hymn doesn't end with the ancient foe. Do you remember the next stanza?

*Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,*

*the Man of God's own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabaoth his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.*