

“More Than Conquerors”

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“As it is written, for Thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us” (Rom 8:36-37).

What is it to be “more than conquerors”? A mere conqueror is sometimes little better off than the vanquished, and a victory is often only next-door to defeat. France and Britain were said to have conquered in the late war, but certainly they were not more than conquerors, for they have both suffered and are still suffering to such an extent that they are but little better off than the vanquished. To be more than conquerors is not only that no enemy can do you harm, but it means you come out of the conflict a complete gainer in every way. In the passage before us the Apostle enumerates the worst of ills (ch. 8:35). He even speaks of being killed all the day long, and yet he can say, “In all *these things* we are more than conquerors.” Apparent defeat and disaster can be turned to our advantage through Him that loves us.

An American admiral said once, “I have fought in many engagements and been victorious in all, but I have one more enemy to encounter, and I know that when we meet I shall be defeated.” The enemy he meant was **death**. This is not being *more* than conqueror, to be defeated at last. The Apostle Paul, facing even death itself — as he faced it often — yea, speaking as one who was “killed all the day long,” could exclaim, “*Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.*” Through time and eternity, he knew of no enemy that could vanquish him, and he knew that out of all his tribulations he would emerge the gainer. “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment,” he could say, “worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”

To what does he attribute his final and complete victory? Not to his own courage or determination or wisdom or strength — not even to his own faithfulness or holiness — though these were necessary — but to “Him that [has] loved us.” He traces it all to one source, and that source is the love of God.

Nor does the Apostle speak in the singular number, for this is a victory that properly belongs to all the redeemed. The writer is speaking from the height of God’s purpose, and of each and all, who are called according to that purpose, it may be said, as truly as was predicted of Gad, “He shall overcome at the last” (Gen 49:19), though on the way we may, on occasion, as he was, be overcome.

How are we to reconcile the thought of a God of love with pain and suffering? Human life is full of tragedy, and the sight of it awakens in some minds very perplexing thoughts. Would it not have been greater love for God to have spared His creatures so much suffering? In other words, why did not God prevent the fall? If we think, for a moment, of the kind of creature God wanted and that He made, we shall see at once the irrelevancy of all such questions. To have made it impossible for man to fall would have made it impossible for man to be a man. The fall testifies as much to man’s greatness, as it does to the disastrous consequences of his offense.

What we want to show is that God, in His love, is seeking to turn man’s failure to good account and that even the woeful consequences of evil can be made to subserve the highest ends. The Bible never shirks this question. Some fourteen times over in this chapter, in a few verses, is

suffering referred to, until almost every word in the English language that indicates some form of suffering is brought into requisition, yet, strange to say, no chapter has more to say about God’s love. The glow of love is upon it, and the climax is a very paean of exultant praise in honor of it. Love survives every ordeal and every challenge. Even the mystery of pain cannot deprive us of it.

The Bible then assumes that there is no contradiction between infinite love and a groaning creation. The two are brought face to face and are found side by side in the same passage. For this reason the chapter before us has an intense interest for that numerous throng of men and women who today are called to suffer so much anguish of body or mind, and it brings them a message of surpassing comfort. God’s love can make us “more than conquerors.”

Winning Our Spurs

A simple story from history may help to illustrate the meaning of the difficulties of life and show us why we are left to wrestle with such antagonistic forces. At the battle of Crecy, the Black Prince, who was leading the van of the English army, was very hard pressed and in danger of being worsted. Some knights rode off to his father, King Edward III, who stood on a neighboring hill watching the conflict, to ask for help. The king refused. “No,” said he, “let the young man win his spurs.” The young man did win his spurs, and with more credit to himself than if he had received the succor that was asked. God wants us to “win our spurs,” and this is why we are exposed to so much trial. If in this life there were no conflicts, nothing to overcome, no dangers to be encountered, no trials to endure, and no sorrows to feel, how could we ever become “more than conquerors”? God does not spare us these experiences, but He uses them all to produce some good effect. We might have expected to read that, because God loved us, we should be spared the calamities mentioned in verse 35 of our chapter and that no tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or peril or sword should ever come nigh us. It is not so recorded, but instead we have a whole catalog of ills, to which even the believer is liable. How can we explain the mystery? God loves us too well and too wisely to shelter us from every adverse wind. We are allowed to feel the bitter blast of adversity or the numbing sense of loss or the blank caused by bereavement — we are allowed to groan and travail in pain — that in the possession of a love that is never more ours than then, we may be conquerors. God’s love arms us against every enemy and every calamity.

God’s Love Most Realized in Trial

Love does not spare us even the very worst — for the greatest ills that can come are enumerated in our chapter. Yet not any of them singly, nor all of them together, can separate us from the love of Christ, nor from the love of God, in Him. On the contrary, it is when we are undergoing these trials that love is at its best — nearest and sweetest. Those three Hebrew youths in Babylon were not spared the furnace, but Christ was nearer to them in that welter of fire than ever before. Could they have had His company amid luxury and ease as they had it amid scorching heat? Not only was there the miracle of deliverance, but theirs was the blessedness of companionship and communion. The furnace *with* Him was to be preferred to the highest station *without* Him. We can imagine what an ineffable calm would steal into the

soul of Daniel when confronting the lions and what a sense of the divine presence he would have as he realized the restraining power that was upon them. That den of lions must have been to him a very holy of holies. Could he have had one experience without the other? Both Daniel and his companions were “more than conquerors” through Him that loved them. To have been spared the suffering would have been to lose the blessing and the triumph.

The other day we sat beside the bed of a sufferer, a Christian woman who had been on her back for forty years, practically, though occasionally able to be taken out in a bath chair, and this affliction was the result of the carelessness of a doctor who had come to her bedside from a dinner and was under the influence of liquor. Well might she have thought there was occasion to complain. Instead of a murmur, she said, as we rose to go, “If I were clever enough, I would like to write a book to tell what God has done for me.”

What shall be said of Stephen? It is true his life was taken, but heaven was never nearer to him than when made to feel all the force of the enemies’ malice. He saw not the gnashing of their teeth; he felt not the stones; his gaze was fixed upon the opened heaven and the glory of God and Jesus. In him we learn the meaning of being more than conqueror.

What God Did for Stephen

A young preacher, who afterwards became famous, once had a public discussion with a noted infidel. During the debate, the skeptic turned upon his youthful antagonist and said, “You say that your God is a God of love. What did He do for Stephen when he was being battered to death? Why didn’t He deliver him?” The preacher felt that the whole discussion turned upon his answer to this challenge. He silently lifted his heart to God and immediately there was given him this reply: “God did something better for Stephen than save him from the stones; *He enabled him to pray for his murderers.*” The skeptic was so impressed with the answer that he promised to come and hear the young man preach.

Just here lies the secret of God’s purpose: He is conforming us to the image of His Son. To Stephen belonged the inestimable privilege of following in the footsteps of his Master. And in enabling him to pray for his murderers, God made him more than conqueror, for it is character God is seeking to produce in His saints, and all that appertains to this groaning creation is being used to that end.

The Apostle Paul speaks of being “killed all the day long.” But he does not question the love of God because of this. He dwells upon it. He revels in it. Every tribulation brought a new discovery of it. His was no easy lot, though called to the highest service God could confer upon him.

“Even unto this present hour,” he says, “we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place; and labor, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it; being defamed, we entreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day” (1Cor 4:11-13).

But his testimony is that the love of God never left him. Such confidence does this love give him that he challenges all things in earth and heaven, in time and eternity, in the present and

the future, to separate him from it. A love that was sufficient, a love that was ever present, a love that made him independent of everything else — his riches in poverty, his strength in weakness, and his consolation in all grief and thrall — was a love that made him more than conqueror — for if death came, it was but the receding tide that would bear him out to the wide ocean beyond, with love on every side of him, beneath, around, above.

If there is so much in this world which seems to contradict the thought of God’s love, this chapter affords evidences of it that are unmistakable. It does not indeed ignore the other side. As we have already indicated, the same chapter which reveals the heights and depths of divine compassion reminds us also of “all our woe.” The Bible never disguises anything on that side. What confidence this imparts! The same Book which reveals the love never hides or minimizes the disaster or the difficulty. Yet it never encourages unbelief or despair. Do we ever realize how *strong* the Bible is? and as tender as it is strong? It has strength amazing. With unfaltering hand it traces the evil of the world and pictures it in all its varied manifestations and results, revealing the unalterable depravity of man, which will, finally, as far as he is concerned, plunge everything into apostasy and ruin, yet it never loses its grip of the end, and that end is as bright as God can make it.

The Evidences God Has Given of His Love

1. First, have we ever thought that if pain and suffering had not entered the world, we never could have known divine love, as we know it now? The test of love is, How much is it willing to bear for the sake of others? In that incomparable chapter on love (1Cor 13), the first thing to be said about it is, “[Love] *suffereth long* and is kind.” Had there been no pain and no suffering to endure, then love would have lacked an opportunity to display itself. Let us never forget that pain, and pain alone, made it possible for God fully to reveal Himself. Christ felt pain — He groaned — He suffered agony — He shed tears. Weariness, want and woe were His portion. Had no such things existed, what losers had we been! We never could have known Him as we know Him now.

2. Although “the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together,” and “even we ourselves groan within ourselves,” yet we are assured that “*all things work together for good* to them that love God.” Estranged from Him, at enmity with Him, full of doubt and questioning, nothing works together for good, but in subjection to Him, accepting what He says as true, trusting Him, “all things work together for *good*.” What can love do more than achieve for us the highest and the best? “*God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.*” If we have learned the meaning of that and love Him in return, then we may believe that through everything, however dark and disappointing, however contrary to our wills things may turn out, our good is God’s constant aim. It is in a chapter which mentions the greatest ills that tells us all things work together for our good.

3. Another evidence of the love of God is the purpose He has formed concerning those who believe. That purpose is *to conform us to the image of His Son* (Rom 8:29). This is what God has before Him, and one reason why we do not always appreciate His dealings, and

sometimes give way to fretting, is because our aims and desires are so contrary to His. It is the image of His Son He wishes to see in us, and the being conformed to that image has a present application, as we have seen in the case of Stephen. There is a present process during which the conformation is proceeding, though it will not be perfected until the day of glory.

How God must love us, if nothing will satisfy Him short of having us like the One He loves best! Have we not here the very proof He Himself gives us? Do we ask for worldly ease and advantage as proofs? They are passing, and they are poor at the best, and they might deform our character, and so be proofs, not of love, but of the want of it. Here is the unmistakable proof: God will have us one day like His own Son, “glorified together.” All this is an infinitely higher proof of His love than worldly ease and enjoyment. Again we say, how He must love us if He wishes to see us like Christ!

4. But at the back of all, and above all, we have another evidence of that love. And it closes and completes the evidence, for what can be said after it?

“He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?” (ch. 8:32).

Do you ask for some proof that God really loves you? How would you have Him prove it? Would you ask Him to give you everything this world affords — friendship, fame, riches, pleasure? That would be no proof that He cared for you. *It would cost Him nothing.* Do you ask that He would create a new world and give it to you to be all your own? Would you believe then that He really loved you? It might not be for your real happiness, and — *it would cost Him nothing!* By a word He could create a thousand worlds and present them to you. But what would they cost Him? Nothing! And until we find that which *has* cost Him something, we have no proof of whether He loves, or of how much He loves.

Where shall we find this? Where shall we discover the final proof the heart craves? God Himself alone can disclose it. Blessed be His name, He has done so — **“He that spared not His own Son.”** The choicest and the best, the closest and the dearest, the object of His eternal love and pleasure, has been given. Had God said, “I would like to save; I am ready to do a great deal for My creatures, sinful as they are, but I must spare My Son all suffering; I cannot allow Him to enter that dark, sin-stained world, and die,” the final proof of His love would have been wanting. But “He that spared not His own Son” — this reveals all we need to know. God has given that which cost Him most to give. If we think of all the ills of humanity, let us think of this too — “He that *spared not His own Son.*” If it does not remove all the mystery, it awakens trust and enables us to wait until the shadows are all dispersed. What more can we ask for, or what more can God do than, in the Person of His own Son, take part in human life and taste its bitterness and woe and then be delivered up to death for us, even the death of the cross? That cross becomes a double revelation—it reveals, on the one hand, the awful character of sin and its fearful consequences, and, on the other hand, it makes known the love which, at infinite cost to itself, took the sin and bore the consequences and put them away.

Let us face all tribulation, distress and peril in the light of the cross and in the sure confidence

that it brings. For the love of God to be so real to the soul, so powerful — for us to be so possessed by it — that all afflictions can be borne and so that no ills shall disturb our faith and patience is to leave us master of the situation, and even God’s love could do few things greater for us than to make us “more than conquerors.”

*“And my soul despaireth not,
Loving God amid her woe;
Grief that wrings and tears the heart,
Only those who hate Him know;
Those who love Him still possess
Comfort in their worst distress.”*

Angels in White — OR — Words to the Worried. P. 108