

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

Romans 8:18-39

Key Verse: 8:37

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

In the first part of Romans 8, we learned that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. It is because Jesus paid the price of our sins in full with his own life. Now the Spirit of Christ dwells in us and leads us with his wisdom and love. He gives us assurance that we are God's children.

Today's passage teaches us that we are more than conquerors through Christ. What? We often feel defeated in our spiritual struggles. But St. Paul declares that we are more than conquerors. Let us learn today why and how we are more than conquerors.

I. PRESENT SUFFERING AND FUTURE GLORY (18-30)

Look at verse 18. *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.* The other day, my grandson Jonathan (aged 3) sang to me the song, "God is so good," so well that I joined him in singing. Then I asked myself, "What if he begins to realize our cold reality and asks the question, "If God is so good, why do bad things happen to us?" What should I tell him? In verse 18, Paul used the two words, present and sufferings, together. That is our reality. Then Paul declared: "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

We don't live in a paradise. Our reality is that there are all kinds of sufferings we have to endure, including sicknesses, natural disasters, famines, atrocities committed by war criminals, and so on. In fact, Paul says that the whole universe is suffering. "For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay" (19-21; NLT). Even the nature is eagerly waiting for the day of liberation. Did you know this? So the question is: why, when and by whom was creation subjected to frustration? The short answer is that sin brought the frustration into the world. In Genesis 3, we learn that the ground was cursed by God when sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve. You might say, "It is not fair the ground was cursed when it didn't do anything." Well, that is what sin does. When a man sins, many innocent people around him suffer because of his sin. Some babies are born with AIDS though they haven't done anything wrong. Some children cry at night because their parents argue and fight because of their sinful nature. Rain falls on both the good and the evil.

Paul teaches us two things here: First, our present reality is that we have to endure sufferings that were caused by sin. Second, if we live by faith in God, we will have future glory that cannot compare with the present sufferings. This second point is clear in verses 22-25: *We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the **pains of***

childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the **firstfruits** of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for **our adoption to sonship**, the redemption of our bodies. For in **this hope** we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently. The Christian suffering is different from that of the unbelievers. Many people who don't believe in God would kick and scream when they suffer because they don't understand why they have to suffer. They swear a lot. We Christians suffer even more. But we know that our suffering has a purpose. It builds up our character in Christ (Ro 5:3-4). Our faith in Christ grows stronger as we go through sufferings. Our suffering has a meaning. We also know that our suffering is temporary. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. That is why Jesus first used the analogy of the birth pains to foretell the sufferings of the believers in the last days (Mk 13:8). Mothers suffer a lot during their labor, but soon their pains are forgotten when they hold their new-born babies in their arms. Paul also used the term "firstfruits" to describe our hope for future. The word implies that there will be more fruits—the second, third, and hundredth fruits. This is our hope-- hope to be adopted as the sons of God and the redemption of our bodies. This hope has not been fully realized yet. It will be realized when Jesus returns and establishes his kingdom. Unlike some hopes of this world, this hope in God will not disappoint us (Ro 5:5). And so we wait for this hope patiently, even as we groan sometimes because of our present suffering.

Still waiting is not easy. Waiting in the midst of suffering is very difficult. But we are not alone. Paul says that the Spirit is with us. He helps us in the midst of suffering. Look at verses 26-27. *In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us through wordless groans. And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for God's people in accordance with the will of God.* In our weakness, we often do not know what to do. This is true. Many times, we don't know how to pray—what to ask God for. We often ask God what we want from him. And it may not be the best for us. It may not be what God wants us to have. During the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln would kneel down before God to pray, heart-broken as many young men were being killed everyday. Knowing this, his cabinet members also prayed. One day, as Lincoln was coming out of his room after his prayer, they told him, "Sir, we also joined in your prayers, asking God to be on our side." Lincoln was surprised to hear this and replied, "You should know that my concern is not whether God is on our side. My greatest concern is to be on God's side, for God is always right." Paul's point here is not that we shouldn't pray. His point is that we should pray. We are weak, which is why we should depend on God through prayer. Our prayer says that "God, I cannot do anything on my own. I need your help." When we pray, even when we don't know what we ought to pray for, the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. And the Father who knows all hearts knows what the Spirit is saying, for the Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's own will (27; NLT).

Let us read verse 28 together. *And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.* This verse is a source of great comfort for all of us. It tells us that "God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for

them” (NLT). This is a wonderful promise indeed. But this verse can be misunderstood and misapplied in two ways. First, this promise is reserved for those who love God and who have been called according to his purpose. Those who hate God and those who are not saved through the blood of Jesus cannot claim this promise. How do you know that you have been called by God according to his purpose? Well, let me ask some personal questions. When you heard the gospel of Jesus, did you accept him as your personal Savior? Did you make a decision to commit your life to him? You didn’t love God before you were saved. Now do you love God? If your answers to these questions are “Yes”, then you have indeed been called by God. Second, when it says that God works for the good in all things, it does not mean everything will always turn out to be fine and dandy. On the contrary, we have to endure present sufferings. But in the end, God works out for good of those who love him and who have been called according to his purpose. For example, God’s purpose for Joseph in Genesis was to use him to save his people by sending him to Egypt. He was called by God according to his purpose, but many terrible things happened to him. He was sold as a slave by his own brothers. He was thrown into prison on a false charge of attempted sexual violence. He suffered a lot. But in the end, God worked out for the good. God fulfilled his purpose in his life. Joseph testified to his brothers, “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives” (Ge 50:20).

We may not be sure about God’s specific purpose for our life. But one thing is certain. He wants us to be justified from our sins, sanctified in the image of Christ, and also glorified. Paul makes this clear in verses 29-30. *For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.* God foreknew each of us. He predestined us to be justified, sanctified, and glorified. The word “predestined” is used twice here. Predestination is a difficult theological term. One of the students in AJ McClain’s theology class said, “Dr. McClain, why do we have to study for the exam if our grades have already been predestined?” The professor told him, “Young man, if you don’t study, you are predestined to fail in this class.” Indeed, if our salvation is predestined, why do we have to make a decision to accept Jesus? Why do we have to study the word of God to grow in faith? Why do we have to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with others? Again this is not an easy concept to understand. I think the key point of predestination is that our God is all-knowing and he is sovereign. God knows us. He knows everything about us. He knows our past, our present and our future. Do you know what you will be doing 10 years from now? I am not sure what I will be doing a year from now. But God knows all about it. This is good to know—that the God whom we believe and trust knows each of us. Jesus knew Nathanael even before they met. Nathanael was impressed and asked “How do you know me?” (Jn 1:48). The Samaritan woman in John 4 was also impressed by Jesus who knew everything about her (Jn 4:39). She was deeply moved by Jesus who knew all about her sinful life but did not condemn her. Jesus didn’t condemn her. He really wanted to be her personal Savior. This is our God. He knows all about our sins. And yet he loves us. In other words, God’s love for us is not accidental. How wonderful is it to know that God foreknew us and predestined us to be conformed to the image of his Son!

II. MORE THAN CONQUERORS (31-39)

God loves us. He demonstrated his love for us when he sent his own Son to save us while we were still sinners. But our enemy Satan tries very hard to plant doubt in us about God's love. Let us read verse 31. *What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?* Paul asks, "If God is for us, who can be against us?" What is his answer? He says in verse 32: *He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?* Paul asks three more similar questions with the same answer. Look at verses 33-36. *Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: "For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered."*

Finally, Paul declares in verse 37. *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.* Now we know and believe that our final victory over sin and death is guaranteed because of the love of God who did not spare his Son and gave him up for us all. No one or nothing can separate us from the love of Christ! We will be victorious, not because of us or anything we did, but because of God and what he did. We are conquerors. But what does it mean we are more than conquerors? Isn't it enough to be conquerors? Why **more than conquerors**? The football team that won the Super Bowl XLIX this year stole the victory at the last minute. They barely won the game because of the dramatic interception. If the two teams played the game again, no one could be sure who would win. But our victory is not like that. Our victory is certain because of God's unfailing love for us. There were some great conquerors in history such as Alexander the Great (356-323 BC), Caesar Augustus (63 BC - 14 AD) and Genghis Khan (1162-1227). But their victories were short-lived. Our victory is not temporary. Our victory is eternal as our God is eternal. In addition, after their victories, these ruthless conquerors killed, maimed, and enslaved their subjects. But our victory is not like that. Our victory in Christ brings peace and reconciliation. Our enemy is sin, death and Satan. Our victory over the enemy is 100% certain, permanent and results in peace. This is what it means that we are more than conquerors.

So we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. How dependable is God's love? Look at verses 38-39. *For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.* St. Paul suffered a lot in order to preach the good news of Jesus Christ to the Gentile world. He was chained, thrown into dungeon, and beaten almost to the point of death. Once people threw his body outside the city thinking he would die there. But here, Paul gives a powerful testimony about the love of Christ. He said he was convinced that neither death nor life, or anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Let me ask you: Are you absolutely convinced of the love of Christ as Paul was? If so, are you willing to suffer for him? Would you say the same thing Paul said at the beginning of today's passage? *I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us (18).*

In conclusion, our final victory against the enemy is certain because of God's love for us. God is love. God works for the good for those who love him. We are God's children. If God is for us, who can be against us? Yes, at present, we believers have to endure sufferings for Jesus. But as Paul did, we can joyfully participate in his sufferings, fully convinced that we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Let us read verse 37. *No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.*