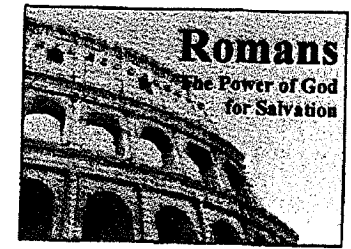


UNIT 18—More Than Conquerors/Romans 8:28-39



TEXT

More Than Conquerors

²⁸And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,^a who have been called according to his purpose. ²⁹For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

³¹What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³²He 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? ³³Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who is he that condemns? 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. ³⁵Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? ³⁶As it is written:

“For your sake we face death all day long;
we are considered as sheep to be
slaughtered.”^b

³⁷No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. ³⁸For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons,^c neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, ³⁹neither 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.

^a28 Some manuscripts *And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God* ^b36 Psalm 44:22 ^c38 Or *nor heavenly rulers*

STUDY

READ

First Reading/First Impressions

What feelings does this passage evoke in you?

☐ Relief ☐ Confidence ☐ Joy ☐ Uncertainty ☐ Determination ☐ Gratitude

Second Reading/Big Idea

In your own words, write out what you think is the central verse in this passage.

SEARCH

1. What additional perspective to suffering (v. 17) does Paul give in verse 28?

2. From verses 29-30, what do the verbs show about God as the “active agent” in our salvation?

foreknew—

predestined—

called—

justified—

glorified—

3. How would these truths bring comfort to Christians suffering because of their faith?

4. How would you explain salvation’s goal (v. 29) in your own words?

5. Through five rhetorical questions (vv. 31-35) Paul continues his case for our assurance with God. What are the five questions and their answers (some are implied)?

v. 31	
v. 32	
v. 33	
v. 34	
v. 35	

6. Using today's words, who are the potential enemies that could stand between us and God's love? (vv. 35-39)

APPLY

Paraphrase. Romans 8:28 and 38-39 are key sentences in the Bible. Choose the one that hits you the most now. Meditate on the verse phrase by phrase and rewrite it in your own words—the way you would explain the meaning to your next door neighbor.

GROUP AGENDA

Divide into groups of 4 before starting on these questions. Follow the time recommendations.

TO BEGIN/10 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ What gets you down—the big things or the little things? How? ☐ Do you see God more like a cosmic architect or a general contractor of our lives? Explain. ☐ Who among your friends or family deserves an award for their conquering faith? Why? ☐ What did you put down for READ?

TO GO DEEPER/20 minutes (Choose 2 or 3)

☐ Go around and answer the questions under SEARCH—one person answering question 1, the next person question 2, etc. ☐ When can we know that all things are working together for good in our lives? ☐ Why do we know that nothing can overcome us or prevail against us? ☐ Why do we know that no accusation can result in our condemnation? ☐ Case History: Bill's wife filed for divorce. A year later he is still depressed and uncertain about his life. How might you be able to share some hope with him without just giving him "canned" answers?

TO CLOSE/5-20 minutes (Choose 1 or 2)

☐ Where is God putting you through the school of hard knocks right now? How do you see God at work in the midst of this experience? ☐ What did you jot down for APPLY? ☐ Of the enemies mentioned in verses 38-39, which is the most real to you? How is it affecting your life now? ☐ What do you worry about most? Your past? Future? Money? Security? Why? ☐ What is the absolute in this passage that you need to claim right now?

NOTES ON ROMANS 8:28-39

Summary / Romans 8:23-39. In this well-known and well-loved section of Romans, Paul tells the reader why it is that he can dismiss present suffering as 'not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us' (v. 18). In verses 28-39 he reveals the basis for the sense of hope he has (which he just described in vv. 17-27).

v. 28 **In all things God works** ... some translations read 'all things work together for good' (see footnote) almost as though for the Christian things will just work out for the best on their own. In fact, the NIV translation is better: it is *God* who takes even that which is adverse and painful (the groans, the persecution and even death—see v. 35) and brings profit out of it.

for the good of those who love him ... this does not mean that things work out so that believers preserve their comfort and convenience. Rather, such action on God's part enables these difficult experiences to assist in a person's salvation.

those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose ... the love people have for God is a reflection of the fact and reality of God's love for them as expressed in his call to individuals to follow Christ. In fact, a person's love for God can even be said to be a proof of God's love for that person. Had God not called an individual, that person would still be his enemy and unable and unwilling to love him.

v. 29 **foreknew** ... God knew even before the world was created who would have faith (Ephesians 1:4 and 2 Timothy 1:9). In the Old Testament the word "knew" carried

the idea of "knowing" in a relational sense. To know someone is to be in relationship with that person and not simply to know facts about the other person. For God to know someone is for him to love and have a purpose for that person.

predestined ... God puts into effect what He foreknew. His purpose for people, as spelled out in the next phrase, is holiness for Christlikeness.

conformed to the likeness ... behind this phrase lies the Old Testament concept of a man and woman being made in the image of God as in Genesis 1:27 and as in Christ who was the very image of God (2 Corinthians 4:4). While Paul has in mind here that time of final glorification when believers will be brought into full conformity to the image of Christ, he is probably also thinking of *on-going sanctification* whereby believers come ever closer to the image of Christ via daily suffering and obedience.

firstborn among many ... the image is of Jesus as the elder son amongst many family members (who have come via adoption).

v. 30 **called** ... foreknowledge and predestination are prerogatives of God which enter the realm of history at the point of *calling*, whereby (through preaching, etc.) one hears the gospel and responds in faith. The end result then is justification.

glorified ... "bringing to resurrection and to heaven those whom He had predestined, called and justified, giving

them new bodies in a new world." (Stott) Sanctification is usually inserted in the chain between justification and glorification, but as F. F. Bruce points out: "Sanctification is glory begun; glorification is sanctification completed."

vv. 31-39 ... "Thus ends perhaps the greatest chapter in the New Testament. It speaks for itself or not at all. All commentary is bathos—like trying to describe the Ninth Symphony in words" (John A. T. Robinson). These verses provide not only the conclusion to chapter 8, but in fact, to Paul's whole argument thus far in Romans.

vv. 31-35 ... In one of his most eloquent passages, by means of five rhetorical questions Paul huris a challenge out to all who would oppose believers: Absolutely nothing can separate Christians from God's love.

v. 31 **God is for us** ... there are only four words here, but it is a sentence that can be spoken with four distinct emphases: *God is for us. God is for us. God is for us. God is for us.* (Earl Palmer)

v. 31b Paul does not ask, "Who is against us?" In response many enemies could be named: hostile society, Satan, indwelling sin, death. Rather he prefaces the question with the assertion that "*God is for us*" and then asks "Who *can* be against us?" Thereby all potential enemies fade into insignificance.

v. 32 Again Paul does not simply ask, "Will not God give us all things?" A response to that question would probably be ambiguous were it not for his preface in

which he indicates that God has already given the supreme gift—his Son who died on humanity's behalf.

- vv. 33-34 Paul's next two questions are set in the context of the law court. Their point: there is no charge that can now effectively be leveled against Christians to bring about their condemnation since God is the Judge who has already justified them and Jesus is their Advocate who pleads for them.

- v. 35 In response to his final unanswerable question, Paul names those enemies that might appear powerful enough to separate believers from God's love.

- v. 36 Such trials are not new for God's people as seen in the quote from Psalm 44:22.

- v. 37 **more than conquerors** . . . literally, hyper-conquerors or super-conquerors.

- v. 38 **death/life** . . . for Paul, to die was no longer a threat, it was to "be with Christ" (Philippians 1:21-23). **Life** is used here in the sense of trials, distractions, and enticements that could lead one away from God.

angels/demons . . . continuing his pairing of opposites, Paul says that neither benevolent nor malevolent spiritual powers need be feared. At that time in history the Jews had a highly developed view of angels, feeling that everything in the world had an angel—the wind, clouds, hail—and that these angels were jealous of humanity and hence sought to disrupt God's interest in us. (Barclay)

present/future . . . neither this age nor the events in the future eschatological age are to be feared.

- v. 39 **height/depth** . . . these words were used in first-century astrology to signify spirits that ruled in the sky above or below the horizon. Or the reference could be to the influence of a star at the height or the depth of its zenith. It may mean simply as one would put it today, that neither heaven nor hell can separate Christians from God's love.

Section Recap: Thus Paul ends this major section of his work (chapters 5-8) in which he has sketched out the dimensions of the Christian life. The Christian life begins, he has taught, when a person is reconciled to God and is at peace with him (chapter 5). Next, he asserts that baptism signifies that a believer has been united with Christ in his death and resurrection (chapter 6) and that one is free from the tyranny of the law with all its rules and regulations (chapter 7). Although a believer knows that obedience to the law does not bring salvation, one does have an obligation to live a life of holiness as empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to overcome the tendency to sin. All of this occurs with a clear hope of future glorification and a firm confidence that despite some very real assailants, nothing can separate one from God's love in Christ Jesus.

COMMENTS

"God is for us" (Romans 8:31)

What amazing words. How unexpected. How wonderful!

Down through the ages the relationship between God (the gods) and people has been fraught with ambiguity. Sometimes we were almost tempted to think that he (she/it/they) liked us; but most of the time we knew that whatever that other, unseen power might be it was not much taken with us and it ought therefore to be avoided. It was best to go unnoticed by the gods. Do your religious duties but be wary.

The Hebrew God did seem different though. He revealed himself to people. He made covenants with them. He declared that one tribe was special to him and that through it He would work wonders for the whole world. And He kept in contact with that tribe. He intervened on their behalf. He guided them. It almost seemed that He loved them.

Even the Romans noticed this. They noticed that in a day and age when religion and belief were separated (you weren't expected to believe in the ancient gods only to worship them), the Jews were exclusive monotheists. They refused to have their God put in the same category as any other gods. He alone was the God of the universe, they said, and only He was worthy to be worshiped. Surprisingly, the Romans backed down and gave the Jews unheard of privileges in following their own way.

God is for us? We tremble with the possibility that this could be true. But how could we ever know whether it is?

Paul answers our longing to know by pointing to the one fact that convinces us. "He did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all." Yes, God is for us. Who can doubt this when we see Jesus—God's own Son, sent to die for us. That is love. That is what being "for us" means.