

I had been in the office long enough to sense it was going to be one of *those* days. Too much to do and too little time. Soon there was a quick knock on the open door and a woman stood there. She asked if I had a few minutes, and one look told me things were not well. "Come in, come in. Have a seat. What's going on?" A wife and mother of three, she shared the painful burden of her marriage falling apart. We spent time in conversation and prayer.

As she opened the door to leave, she was followed by a man who had been out of work for a year. He had been downsized from a very good position and could find nothing that came close to using his skills, nor in pay. With a young family to care for he was considering going back to school, or perhaps seminary. He had questions. Toward the end of the day came a couple new to the church, and were attending new member classes. After many treatments they had just lost their third pregnancy and were convinced it was time to stop trying and adopt. Oddly, months later they had been approved for adoption and the next month found themselves pregnant with no additional help.

These were all battered believers, struggling up the rough side of the mountain. After the couple departed I remained seated in the office and a Word came to mind. Actually, it was mocking my mind. In the book of Romans, chapter 8, verse 37: "**No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.**"

More than conquerors! Yet those three incidents all involved Christians struggling with weakness, guilt, despondency, and defeat. More than conquerors? When as far as the eye of human understanding could see across the landscape of their experience, their reality was anything but that of a conqueror! Is that the way it is, for us?

If the truth were told, would our experience be less than that of conquerors? If the truth were told, would it find us about to let go and give up, feeling less and less like conquerors, and more like a junkyard full of broken promises? When the evidence of our lives is to the contrary, why would Paul say, "We are more than conquerors."?

With three rhetorical questions Paul establishes why. First in Romans, chapter 8, verse 31: "**What then are we to say about these things? If God is for us, who is against us?**" Grand, glorious, majestic words. Unfortunately most of the time, the verse is read with the emphasis in the wrong place. And what is worse, our lives are lived with the emphasis in the wrong place. "**If** God..."

If God? If in this verse does not imply doubt. This is an affirmation of confidence in God's power. "If **God** is for us, who can stand against us." No matter how dark the way, if **God!** Even when all evidence is to the contrary. More than conquerors? Yes! Because of our defender. If God be for us, who can be against us?

Then Paul adds another question. In verses 33 and 34 he uses the forensic, legal language of the courtroom: "**Who will bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? It is Christ Jesus, who died, yes, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.**"

Dr. Benjamin Reaves remembers going to a revival meeting. "The revival tent was hot. People were restlessly fanning away when the speaker asked, "How many would like their sins listed on the huge black board in front?" Suddenly, there was no motion, no fanning, no one was moving as far as I could see and I really didn't want to move too much myself. Thank God, the good news of the Gospel is...(in) the forgiveness of Jesus I have retained counsel. My case is in my lawyer's nail-pierced hands. All charges, no matter how far back they go, will be handled by my advocate."

I have the assurance captured in the old hymn, "Christ Jesus is my splendor, my sun, my light alone; were he not my defender before the judgement throne, I never should find favor and mercy in God's sight, but be destroyed forever as darkness by the light." (If God My Lord Be for Me)

Now, now, I'm beginning to understand how Paul could say we are "more than conquerors." Because of our defender...if **God** is for us. Because of our lawyer...Jesus Christ, who indeed intercedes for us.

Then Paul raises a final question in verse 35: "**Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?**" With that question Paul lets me know he's been there. He knows the sandpaper roughness of life: heartache, disappointment, loneliness, fear. He knew them intimately, and had faced them all.

And still his final question rings out: "**Who will separate us from the love of Christ?**" The answer he gives is both a revelation and a testimony, contagious in its certainty.

Verses 38 and 39 tell us: "**I am convinced.**" I am absolutely persuaded, unalterably convicted. "**that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 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.**"

More than conquerors. Absolutely! In the face of every possible development, situation, circumstance, diagnosis, or disaster. The passage is real; not being delivered *from* all these things, but being triumphant *in* all these things. Even a personal ground zero: you or a loved one faces a life threatening illness, a job loss, bankruptcy, divorce, whatever it may be for you – you are in the Lord's hands. Even at that moment, more than a conqueror. Because of our divine defender, if **God** be for us. Because of our divine advocate who intercedes for us. Because of a divine love that will not let me go.

Now the full light breaks, our despair, despondency, and defeat occur when we focus on our lives. Paul's questions shift the focus to what God has done. Our overcoming is in God's action. The action of a divine defender, a divine attorney, a divine love that will not let me go. Yes, we are more than conquerors. For as we in faith cling to God, we find he has a stronger hold on us.

"Through many dangers, toils and snares, I have already come; tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home." Grace Forever. Amen