

The Love Conquest

THE CHRISTIAN'S TASK

Romans 8:28-29, 35-39; 12:9-12

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Bethany Church

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Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21, NIV)

Do you know why St. Paul wrote that? Because evil doesn't come our way accidentally. Nor does it come our way just to harm us. It attacks everyone of us with the intent of overcoming or mastering us. Evil is not content to make us ache. It seeks to master the way we feel, how we think and what we do. It is so easy to be overcome by evil because we are tempted to fight fire with fire. We get upset over some injustice, and I'll give you an example in a moment, and then we respond with just as destructively as the event or action was that we identified as evil. We are tempted to fight pride with pride, anger with anger, hurt with hurt.

Here's an example. You heard about the husband who belittled his wife when she made a foolish mistake? He said, "*Honey, I don't know how God could have made someone so beautiful so dumb.*" The woman's face flushed red, and then lightened as she responded, "*I know how, I think God made me so beautiful so that you'd marry me and so dumb so that I would marry you!*" That response may be clever, but it is also typical of returning evil for evil, insult for insult. It offers a temporary sense of justice, but in the end it just sows more pain.

These last four weeks we've considered the Maundy, the mandate, the must that Christ has given all believers, specifically to love as Christ loves us. We've reflected on how Christ loves us. We've examined how we can connect with Christ's love and how that love can correct our spirits. Today, I want us to consider how that love can make us victors.

You and I are called to be "*more than conquerors through Christ who loves us.*" That passage suggests that Christ's love is critical to our victory. We aren't just "more than conquerors." We aren't just "more than conquerors through Christ." We are "more than

conquerors through Christ who loves." So how do we become "more than conquerors" or "mega-conquerors" of evil? The Bible offers us two principles in the life of Christ.

Principle one, trust God's love for your life! The essential battle that Jesus had with evil was trusting his Father. In the 40 days of temptation, Satan challenged Jesus, "If you really are the Son of God, prove it." Satan tried to get Jesus to act on doubt, doubt of his Father's love, doubt in his Father's word, doubt about his Father's power. In the Garden of Gethsamene, Jesus in anguish submitted to his Father's will. He submitted because he trusted God's love. He trusted God's love despite the power and pain of evil he faced. **He trusted God's love and that God's love was still ruling, still working, and still prevailing.** Jesus told Pontius Pilate, according to the gospel of John, chapter 19, verse 11:

You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above. (NIV)

Those words reveal Jesus's faith in an unfolding plan formed by the love of his heavenly Father. Jesus is not a fatalist. He has a personal choice to make that will dominate his destiny. His choice is to act in faith, to obey his Father's will, to trust God for the outcome.

It is that vision that the Apostle Paul promotes in Romans 8 and makes us "overcomers." Paul writes:

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. (Rom 8:28, NIV)

In the beatings Paul suffered, the slander Paul endured, the imprisonments Paul experienced, in the ship accidents, the illnesses, the viper attacks he encountered, Paul believed that God was working out a good plan. God's love for Paul was not hindered by the pain even though it may have been concealed by the pain.

For us, God's love may be concealed by the pain we suffer; but it is never hindered. God's love may not be readily visible through our tears, but it is no less potent. Paul not only maintains that all things work together for the good of those who love God. He continues to write in the 29th verse of Romans 8:

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. (NIV)

According to Scripture God is not only working for our good in all things, God is not only responding out of love in all things, God has anticipated all things. He has anticipated the things we encounter. He foreknew us. He didn't merely foreknow us, he also planned for our situation. He has a destiny for us. There's a destiny for you and me to claim. We are to walk in the love and faith of Christ, directed by the Spirit that was in Christ, focused on the same mission as Christ, resembling Christ as his brothers and sisters. As firstborn, Christ is our big brother, our mentor, our leader, our kin! How he deals with evil is how we are to deal with evil. First and foremost, we like Christ must trust our Father's love.

When I first prepared this message, an awesome truth was unveiled. Do you believe God loved Jesus? Do you remember how God affirmed his love for Jesus at his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration? Do you remember how God gave to Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth, how all angels worship Jesus, how every knee will bend and every tongue will confess the greatness and the lordship of Jesus? God loves Jesus, doesn't he? God passionately loves and seeks the exaltation of His one and only Son. However, when Jesus died on the cross, God said something profound and unexpected to you and me. Look at the cross now. Envision it. What was God saying to you? He was saying, *"Although I hate your sins, I love you as much as I love Jesus."* God says, *"See him hanging there? He's there because I love you as much as I love him. I love you no differently! He wouldn't have hanged, if I didn't love you the same!"* Will you receive that and believe that? Moreover, will you trust that love for your life? Can you imagine any force in the universe that is stronger than the Creator's passion for you and Jesus? Trust God's love for your life.

Principle two, heed God's word. Jesus said that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. In other words, when we do what God directs or commands, life unfolds for us as it is suppose to be in this battlefield of a world.

When we do what God directs us to do, when we do what God commands us to do, regardless of the choice of others, we advance God's plan of redemption. As we devote our lives to loving one another, investing in one another, honoring one another, and forgiving one another, we walk as Christ's sisters and brothers. We live as children of the heavenly Father and as instruments of God's salvation. Instead of returning evil for the evil we suffer, we take up our own cross, one that our Father asks us to embrace, in order to bless, forgive and serve those who hurt us. In doing so, we convey to others the same word God gave to us, that God loves others as much as us, and us as much as Jesus. God loves all of us no differently than Jesus. Again, God loves you no differently than God loves Jesus. In taking up our own cross, we declare Christ-like trust in God, and we sow the only kind of good that overcomes evil.

Jesus could have been infected with the fear that scattered his disciples. He could have been enraged by the indignities he endured. He could have been embittered by the injustice he suffered. Instead, he believed what Paul later wrote:

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... (Romans 8:38-39)

Do you understand what is being said? No drunk-driver can separate you, no natural disaster, no crippling illness, no malicious action can hinder the power and purposes of God's love for you. Jesus believed that. You can believe that too. God is such a great chess master. In life God's achievements and exploits are far beyond that of Tiger Woods in golf or Wayne Gretsky in hockey or Michael Jordan in basket ball. God is the ultra-designer of every human faculty, physical property and ordered system. God knows everything about timing, personalities and every influence on humanity.

There is a story with at least three versions I love to tell. In version three, Moses and Jesus were on a particularly difficult golf course. When Moses drove his shot from the tee it plopped into a water trap. The trap really was a lake. Moses walked over to the trap, raised his club up, the water parted, he walked about 30 feet in and chipped the ball on to the green. There was a satisfying smile on his face when he turned to Jesus. Jesus nailed his shot like a carpenter and it went sailing, but it didn't quite make it across the lake. No problem, Jesus stepped right on top of the water, caught the rhythm of the waves and walked over to the place the ball had landed. He looked at it and it immediately surfaced. Quickly he chipped it onto the green where it nearly rimmed the cup. As the two were about to walk on the green they heard a clap of thunder. A ball dropped out of the sky, but just as it was about to hit the water, a fish slapped the golf ball with its tail fin into the paws of a squirrel that quickly ran for a tree. But before the squirrel could make it, an eagle grabbed the squirrel and soared skyward. With another thunder clap, the startled eagle squeezed the squirrel who paws jarred opened. The ball bounded onto the green and rolled into the cup. Hole-in-one! Jesus looked up and said, "Dad, if you don't stop messing around, we won't let you play with us."

Jesus believed in a God who is that creative, that masterful, that wise. Jesus trusted the love of that God and heeded the word of that God.

Because Jesus believed, he did what God commands of us in Romans 12:

Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer... Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse... Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody... Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to

drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom 12:12, 14, 17, 19-21)

Trust in God's love, experience with God's love, obedience to God's love made Jesus a conqueror of evil and a savior of people. When we trust, experience and obey that same love, evil cannot long stand. That love will convert first us and then others. Let it then, first convert us, and in time we will become more than conquerors!