

The Gospel According To Paul: Romans

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We Are More than Conquerors (8:37-39)

No, 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, 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.

Paul's argument is that in all these things (i.e., the power of sin, the condemnation of the law, even human death) we are more than conquerors through him who loved us

We are "more than conquerors" Paul says. This expression is the translation of a single word in the Greek text. The word is *hupernikomen* (from *hupernikao*) and is one of my favorite Pauline words. It was a discovery of one of my first "mining" experiences while a second year Greek student in college. The expression "mining" is taken from a comment of Walter Scott in discussing the work of the Bible scholar: "The deeper he works the mine the richer and more abundant grows the ore." My Greek professor was especially fond of applying this comment to the mining out of exegetical ore from the Greek New Testament. I first learned what he meant by this in doing a translation assignment in 1 John 5.

1 John 5:4-5, in the English text (NIV), reads,

*for everyone born of God **overcomes** the world. This is **the victory** that **has overcome** the world, even our faith. ⁵Who is it that **overcomes** the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

Underlying the word "overcomes is the Greek word *nikao* meaning "to conquer." This was a word of great significance to the Greek speaking people of the first century in that conquest (*nike*) had for centuries been an obsession with the people of Mediterranean world. For over six hundred years the Jews had longed for the coming of a Messiah who would lead them in conquest over their conquerors (Assyria, Babylon, Greece, Syria, now Rome) and restore them to their once held position of power and authority. The Greeks had conquered the Mediterranean world through Alexander the Great but the conquests of the Greek in the time of Paul was limited exclusively to matters of culture and intellectual inquiry. The Romans with their great military might were now the rulers of the Mediterranean world. In fact, throughout the first century world the Romans were called, "*Hoi nikastia tou kosmou*" - "The conquerors of the world!"

The concept of "*nike/conquest*" was ever-present in the minds of the people who made up the first century Mediterranean world. And it is in the midst of this "historical milieu" that John writes to his readers:

*for everyone born of God **overcomes** (*nika* - he is conquering) the world. This is the victory (*he nika* - the conquest) that has overcome (*he nikesasa* - that which has conquered) the world, even our faith. Who is he that overcomes (*ho nikon* - the one conquering) the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God (1 John 5:4-5).*

It is not the armies of Israel, Assyria, Babylon, Syria, Greece, or Rome that will conquer the world, for in the world's own good time it will receive the bones of every army that has ever marched. And here is where Paul's word enters the discussion. For Paul those "in Christ" are not just conquerors (*hoi nikastai*), they are *hupernikomen* - more than conquerors.

In Christ nothing can conquer us, not in an absolute sense: not death, nor life, nor angelic [otherworldly] beings, nor thisworldly rulers, neither things that are, nor things that are about to be, nor powers: things in the heights (heavenly powers -ref. to astrological mythology), nor things in the

depths (powers of the lower regions - ref. to Hadean mythology), nor anything in the whole of creation can separate us (against our will) from the love of God that we experience "in Christ Jesus" - our Lord! With this "Lord of Love" as our deliverer/redeemer we will forever be "more than conquerors!"

Add to this Paul's portrait in 2 Cor 2:14-16 of Christians being led by Christ in a triumphal procession through the earth (*thriambeuonti* [from *thrimbeuo*] - the triumphal procession of a conquering general) and one has here a "serendipity" second to none. And it was there all the time - the vein of exegetical ore - hidden within the Greek text waiting to be discovered/mined out.

The point we must not miss here is that we are more than conquerors "in Christ" and as long as Christ is "our Lord." With this thought Paul concludes his discourse (with its various treatises) on "Messianic Deliverance" (3:21-8:39), and moves to the next major discussion of this epistle: "Israel's Rejection of God's Messiah and God's Rejection of Israel" (9:1-11:36).

The key that opens up this next section of material (9:1-11:39) is found in the last words of the previous section of material (3:21-8:39) - "through Jesus Christ our Lord." It is the one to whom Jesus Christ has become "Lord" that the promise of deliverance and conquest is given. Those over whom the powers of sin, the Law, and death reign stand condemned by their "lord(s)". Only if they will confess Jesus as Lord, and believe in their hearts that God has raised him from the dead (Rom 10:9) will they be saved from the tyranny of the lord of darkness to which they have become enslaved.

This Christological confession, found at 10:8-10, stands at the heart of this next section of material. Everything prior to it moves toward it and everything following it flows from it:

*But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, "that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: ⁹That if you confess with your mouth, "**Jesus is Lord**," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved (Rom 10:9-10).*

The promise of conquest “in Christ” is sure! No one or anything can conquer you or take you from the love of God. But this promise is rooted in the lordship of Christ. As long as he is your Lord, you are more than conquerors. It is when, and only when, he ceases to be the Lord of your life, and you replace his lordship with another Lord, then the conquest is Satan’s, because apart for Christ, you are on your own – and this you your choice!

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