

MORE THAN CONQUERORS

In the Second World War, in Nazi-occupied Netherlands, the family of Corrie Ten Boom gave aid and comfort to Jews, and members of the Dutch resistance. The resistance later sent an architect to Corrie's home to build a hiding place for fugitive Jews. The Ten Booms helped around eight-hundred Jews escape arrest. When a Dutch informant told the Nazis about what the Ten Booms were doing, the Gestapo, the Nazi secret police, raided the Ten Boom home. Corrie, her sister, Betsie, and their father, Casper, were arrested and sent to Seveningen prison. Casper died ten days later, and the two sisters were eventually sent to the hellish Ravensbrück concentration camp, a woman's labor camp in Germany. Of her experience there, Corrie wrote:

It grew harder and harder. Even within these four walls there was too much misery, too much seemingly pointless suffering. Every day something else failed to make sense, something else grew too heavy. Will You carry this too, Lord Jesus? But as the rest of the world grew stranger, one thing became increasingly clear. And that was the reason the two of us were here. Why others should suffer we were not shown. As for us, from morning until lights-out, whenever we were not in ranks for roll call, our Bible was the center of an ever-widening circle of help and hope. Like waifs clustered around a blazing fire, we gathered about it, holding out our hearts to its warmth and light. The blacker the night around us grew, the brighter and truer and more beautiful burned the word of God. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? . . . Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." I would look about us as Betsie read, watching the light leap from face to face. More than conquerors. . . . It was not a wish. It was a fact. We knew it, we experienced it minute by minute—poor, hated, hungry. We are more than conquerors. Not "we shall be." We are! Life in Ravensbruck took place on two separate levels, mutually impossible. One, the observable, external life, grew every day more horrible. The other, the life we lived with God, grew daily better, truth upon truth, glory upon glory.

Through the ministry of Betsie and Corrie, a number of the women were converted. Betsie grew ill, and died in the camp. By some clerical error, Corrie was released, and two weeks later the women of her age group were killed in gas chambers. Corrie later said, "You can never learn that Christ is all you need, until Christ is all you have." There are in this fallen world many difficulties, and the Christian may feel at a loss how to endure; yet, God has given to the Christian all that he needs.

Man's sin has ruined the world. The sin of the first man brought sin and death to the world, so that all men come into the world corrupt, and then by their sins they corrupt the world. Saint Paul wrote to the Romans that sinful men deserve condemnation and death, but men who have, by the Spirit of God, been united to Christ are free from the bonds of sin, and so they are free from condemnation. The Christian, by the help of the Spirit, does what God commands, and so he has life. The Christian will suffer in this life. He will suffer hardship, and, finally, death. Yet, the Christian is by the Spirit of God joined to Christ such that, although he suffers in this life, and dies, he will by the Spirit be raised to a new life, and the sufferings of this present life are not nearly so great as the glories of the next. The Christian is, like Christ to whom he is joined, bound to suffer, and to die; but he, like Christ, will rise from death to new life, never to suffer or to die again. So, with this hope in mind,

the Christian patiently endures trials, knowing that this life is one of temporary difficulty, and the next life one of eternal bliss.

Not only does the Spirit deliver the Christian from sin and death, but He gives help to the Christian in this life. Saint Paul wrote:

Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26, 27)

The Christian is an adopted son of God, but he is still a man, and so he has all the weaknesses, all the limitations, of men. One of those limitations respects his knowledge of prayer. Jesus has given the Christian a model for prayer, and the Scriptures give the Christian examples of prayer. Yet, the Christian is finite, and fallible, and the world is complicated, so that the Christian does not always know what to pray for. He does not always pray for the will of God. Just as a child does not always make right requests of his earthly father, so the Christian does not always make right requests of his heavenly Father. Moreover, as a good earthly father will not grant his child wrong requests, neither will God the Father grant wrong requests from His child. So, the Holy Spirit comes to the aid of the Christian in prayer. Just as the Spirit in some mystical way bears witness with the Christian's spirit that he is a child of God, so He communicates to the heart of the Christian, not by words, but by unutterable groanings, what he ought to pray for. Then the Father, who knows the heart of man, knows what are a man's thoughts; and, because He knows the Spirit, He recognizes those thoughts as his own, for the mind of the Father and of the Spirit are one. So, the Spirit helps the Christian to pray according to the will of God, even if his words are not wholly adequate.

There is still more reason for the Christian with patience to endure suffering: God works all things for good. Saint Paul wrote:

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (Romans 8:28–30)

God loves the Christian, His adoptive child, and the Christian loves God, his adoptive father. The child of God experiences trials and tribulations, but these experiences are not apart from the love of God. They are not apart from the knowledge, the power, and the goodness of God. God has called to Himself certain people, and He has called them for the purpose that He should conform them to the image of His Son. God made the first man, Adam, righteous. Adam chose to sin against God, and, when he did, his nature changed from righteous to sinful, and every one of Adam's descendants has inherited that sinful nature. Every man needs, then, not only forgiveness, but a new nature, a righteous nature. So, God adopts children for this purpose, to conform them to the image of His only begotten Son, who is Himself the image of God. (Colossians 3:15) Yet, God does not choose to adopt as His children those He deems worthy of adoption. He does not choose for adoption any one because that one has in him any goodness; he chooses for adoption any one so that He can make that one good. Saint Paul wrote that those God chooses to conform to the image of His Son He foreknew. He did not write that God foreknew something about them, some fact about their virtue or about the choices they would make; he

wrote that God foreknew the people themselves. This is the language of sovereign choice. So, the Son of God was foreordained, which is to say, was foreknown, before the foundation of the world to be the Savior of the world. (1 Peter 1:20) So, in time the Son of God was “delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God” to be killed by sinful men. (Acts 2:23) This does not mean that God knew in advance that His Son would die for the sins of the world, true as that is; it means that God in eternity God ordained that His Son would die. To the Romans, then, Saint Paul wrote that God, in eternity past, gratuitously established a relation to certain people, a relation in which He determined, not only forgive their unrighteousness, but also make them righteous. So, in eternity past God made a choice of certain people. Those He chose He made their destiny to be conformed to the image of His only begotten Son, so that, in all of God’s family, His only begotten Son would be the firstborn, having the rights of primogeniture, which is to say, He would have preeminence in all things. Those that God chose and predestined for this purpose, He in time also called them to this purpose. He first of all called them by the preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the message that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that all men must believe in Him, and obey Him. As men are sinful, and disposed not to believe the Gospel, God by His grace, and by His Spirit, worked in the hearts of those He had chosen so that they would accept the call of the gospel. Jesus said, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him.” (John 6:44) So, when Lydia of Thyatira heard the preaching of the gospel, the Lord opened her heart to heed the things she heard. Those having answered the call, and believing in Jesus Christ, God also justified, forgiving their sins, and declaring them righteous before Him. Those He justified He glorified, which is to say, He finally perfected, conforming them completely to the image of His only begotten Son. Saint Paul wrote of this glorification in the past tense, not because it had already happened to those God had chosen, but because it is their destiny, which nothing can thwart. God is the perfect Father, and, like any good earthly father, God does what is necessary for His children to grow in virtue, what is necessary to make them like His only begotten Son. So, God works all things, even hard things, even evil things, to the end that they will be like Jesus.

Saint Paul then asked a series of questions concerning God’s kind providence:

What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

(Romans 8:31–36)

What should the Christian think of sovereign purpose in salvation? If God Almighty is for the Christian who can be against him? If God is on the side of the Christian then who can have any success in opposing Him? Of course, no one can. God and His only begotten Son have eternally loved each other. If God did not spare His own Son, but gave Him up as a sacrifice for His adopted children, then how could it be possible that God would not to His adopted children, and the Son of God would not give to His adopted brothers, all that is good for them? It could not be possible. If the righteous God justifies someone, declares him to be righteous, then who is there to bring a charge against him? There is no one. Satan is the great accuser, the one who brings to God charges against the people of God. He accused Job. In the vision of Zechariah the prophet, he accused Joshua the high priest. (Zechariah 3:1) In the Revelation of Saint John he is said to accuse the people of God day and night. (Revelation 12:10) His accusations have no foundation, and they fall to the ground. Christ has died for

the sins of His people, and so God counts them as righteous; no charge can be laid against them. Christ has not only died for the sins of His people, but He also rose from the dead, and ascended to the right hand of God, the position of honor and privilege, and there he intercedes for His people. Not only did Christ die for His people, but He also pleads their innocence on the ground His atoning sacrifice. God loved the world, and so gave His Son a sacrifice for the sins of the world. The Son of God loves His people, and was pleased to sacrifice Himself for their sins. (Hebrews 12:2) If Christ so loved His people, who can separate them from His love? Of course, no one can. Nothing can. Tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, sword. Saint Paul argued from his own experience, for he had suffered all these things. (2 Corinthians 11:23–28) The righteous have always suffered for righteousness' sake, and Saint Paul cited the Book of Psalms as proof. (Psalm 44:22) Whatever may come, Christ's people will always remain in His love.

Saint Paul then gave this summary:

Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:37–39)

The Christian in this life suffers hardship. He is not overcome, however, but rather overcomes. He not only survives, but in the end reigns with Christ. Through the struggles of life, the Christian emerges victorious, not under his own power, but under the power of God who loves him. Considering all that God had done for the Christian, considering all that Christ had done for Christian, Saint Paul was convinced that nothing whatsoever can separate the Christian from their love. Neither death nor life; no power natural, or supernatural; nothing in time or in space; in short, no created thing can separate the Christian from God's love from him in Christ. This fact should give the Christian hope, and courage to persevere under trial, so that he might finally be received into the glory of Christ's kingdom.

Jesus told several parables concerning His kingdom. He said:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:44–50)

Christ's kingdom is a great treasure, and invaluable treasure. The glory of Christ's kingdom is such that a man would pay any price to be a subject in it. He would give all that he possesses; he would even give his own life. When a young man asked Jesus what he must do to inherit eternal life, Jesus told him to keep the commandments. The man said he had, and asked what else he needed to do. Jesus told him to sell all his possessions, to give the proceeds to the poor, and to follow Him. The man walked away, dejected, because he was a rich man. Jesus told His disciples that it is hard for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven. He said that, if left to men, it is impossible, but that it is possible with God. (Matthew 19:16–26) Jesus said that the

kingdom of heaven is like a net that is cast into the sea, and gathers fish, both good and bad. When the fishermen get to shore, they keep the good, and cast away the bad. There are in the kingdom of heaven men both good and bad, true and false, and it is in some cases difficult to discern the difference between them. At the end of the world, God will dispatch His angels, and they sort things, and they will cast bad men into hell. If any man would enter into Christ's kingdom, then he must seek it with all his heart, and be prepared to give up all that he has, and all that he is, to find it. He will be like Isaac, who so prized Rachel that he worked seven years to possess her, and then, when he was denied, worked seven more. He must persevere in faith and good works, and, with the help of the Triune God, Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit, he will do so.

Let us acknowledge that we will experience tribulation in this life. Let us also understand God has done what is necessary to ensure our victory. Let us persevere in faith and good works, so that we may be glorified.

Now unto Him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy; to the only wise God our Savior, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.