

ROMANS 8:28-39
GOD'S GUARANTEED LOVE

Daily we are bombarded with commercials, ads, and emails that promise us more, more, and more of whatever it is that will supposedly make us truly happy or healthy. But let's face it, all such promises are lies. Trusting in such promises will only disappoint us — and likely put a dent in our wallet, purse, or bank account. However, the worst thing is that they can distract us from the one promise of “more” that we can always trust in: God's promise that in Christ Jesus He has already won and provided for us everything that we could possibly need or want in this life, and the next. What's more God has personally delivered it to us — free of charge! — by the work of His Spirit through His Word and Sacraments.

Through Christ, “we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (v 37). What “more” could we need, want, or ask for? We already have more — in Christ. We're called by God, justified by God and glorified by God. Salvation is grounded in His work, His plan, and His choice alone, from the beginning of time – all centered in Jesus, the Word made flesh.

As sinners, yes we're guilty as charged (3:19, 23) — yet we're declared completely innocent by God for Christ's sake, by grace through faith (3:24, 27–28). “Who shall bring any charge against God's elect?” – Paul asks this rhetorically. “It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us” (vv 33–34). No accusation against us can be sustained in the face of God's grace. Victory over sin is ours through Jesus the Christ who died and rose for us! Paul begins this chapter, “There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1). There is no condemnation for you.

Yet still there's more in Christ. God not only forgives our sin for Christ's sake; He even promises to use our sins – and the sins of others – in ways that work together for our good. Our text opens with verse 28: “We know that for those who love God all things work together for good.”

Two things need to be addressed here: “all things”, and “those who love God”. In my first congregation a member came to me with this verse feeling she did not love God enough, because she had cancer. How do you answer that? How do you answer someone who is hurting and feels that they're hurting because the Word of God leads them to believe they don't love God enough. We address that serious concern with the Word of God. The good that this verse talks about isn't earthly good, but rather eternal spiritual good, heavenly salvation. God can and does use all things in our lives to guide us to salvation through His Son Jesus.

The “all things” that work together for our good includes all that this sinfully corrupt world throws at us, including cancer and all our other hardships, our sins and the sins of others. Sin is that catch all group that includes all that is wrong within this world, and Biblical examples abound of God using sin for good in this world and in the world to come.

Joseph’s brothers sinned against him horribly by selling him into slavery, “but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20), saving the earthly lives of many. Peter denied Christ three times, but Jesus thrice reinstated him and called him to even greater ministry and discipleship (John 21:15–19), for the spiritual salvation of many lives. Paul was “the foremost” of sinners, a Christian persecutor, and yet precisely for this reason Jesus chose Paul to “display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life” (1 Timothy 1:15–16).

We’re included in those who believe in Jesus. “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (v 37). Through Christ, we are more than conquerors over sin and all the bad things that happen to us because of this sinfully corrupt world.

Yet Jesus doesn’t just use sinful corruption for our spiritual good, He uses the wages of sin: death. Hear Paul say this: “I am sure 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” (vv 38–39). Even death cannot separate us who believe God raised Jesus from the dead (8:34; 10:9) from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Victory over death is ours in Christ because Jesus is the first born from the dead and we who follow Him are to be His brothers and sisters (8:29).

Even our great enemy, death, is “swallowed up in victory” through Christ’s death and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:54–56), so that St. Francis of Assisi can actually speak of death for the Christian as “most kind and gentle,” since it “lead[s] to heaven the child of God, where Christ our Lord the way has trod” (“All Creatures of Our God and King [LW 436:6]). Through Christ, we are more than conquerors over death.

And finally Jesus even uses Satan for our good. Satan is indeed the lord of this world (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31), but Jesus has overcome the world and its cruel lord and has shared His victory with us who have been freely elected, called, and justified by God in Christ so that we may be glorified in heaven. Victory over the devil is ours in Christ!

Christ has not only defeated Satan, but now He mocks and frustrates Satan by using the devil’s own weapons against him. Yes, the “all things” in verse 28 must also include the works of the devil! Satan, the accuser, will

never stop shoving our sins in our face. He reminds us of our sins by day in our thoughts, and by the words and actions of others, and even by night in our nightmares.

But note Martin Luther's suggested retort: "Just by telling me that I am a miserable, great sinner you [Satan] are placing a sword and weapon into my hand with which . . . I can kill and floor you. For if you can tell me that I am a poor sinner, I, on the other hand, can tell you that Christ died for sinners and is their Intercessor" (*What Luther Says*, comp. Ewald M. Plass, vol. 1 [Concordia Publishing House, 1959], §1190). So, if I'm a sinner, if you're a sinner, and we are all sinners, Jesus died for me, Jesus died for you, Jesus died for us, and He prays to God the Father for us.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword?" (v 35). The devil constantly attempts to use such things to weaken or destroy our faith in Christ. But God constantly turns the tables on the devil by causing even our sufferings to work together for our good and to intensify our longing for the hope of the glory in heaven that's ours in Christ (5:1–5).

"For I am sure," we can say with Paul, "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" (vv 38–39). "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (v 37).

Through Christ we are more than conquerors over sin, death and the devil. On the basis of God's completed work and promises in Christ all these things are powerless to break the strong grip of God's love for His elect, claimed by Him in Baptism, fed by Christ's body and blood in the Lord's Supper, sustained by His life-giving Word, and nurtured in this community of faith.

When the world promises you more, more, and more, remember who's talking: the world — the sinful, fallen world; your flesh — your selfish, deceitful flesh; and the devil, who's been a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). Let someone else talk to you: your ever-faithful, ever-truthful, and ever-dependable God who sent His only Son to live, die and rise for you, and who speaks to you through His inspired and inerrant Word, through His Spirit.

In Christ, God has already purchased and won for you all the treasures of His heavenly kingdom, which you possess even now by faith in Christ and through the indwelling of His Holy Spirit. And when trials and difficulties come, and they will come, as they do for all of us, continue to trust in God's promise: We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us, and someday soon He'll return to reveal that "more" to us in ways that are beyond earthly expression or imagination. Amen.