

More Than Conquerors

An Explanation of Romans 8:37

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In the early and middle 1950s, the United States deployed batteries of anti-aircraft missiles around her major cities and military installations. Many of you may remember seeing these batteries. As a boy I remember very well seeing their pictures in the newspapers. Then, shortly after the deployment of these purely defensive weapons, some foreign policy strategists got to thinking, “That’s always dangerous!” They argued successfully for the decommissioning of these weapons on the grounds that such a reliable anti-aircraft interceptor would ultimately drive the Soviet Union to develop Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles of their own. ICBMs approach far too fast, and at far too high an angle for anti-aircraft weapons to intercept. And so it was that America changed her policy, quickly—and also rather quietly—drawing down her anti-aircraft missile systems, relying instead on the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) to deter a Soviet nuclear attack! The military called these missiles, so briefly deployed, “The Nike.” Nike is the name of a pagan goddess of victory.

Years later, another Nike appeared on the scenes, quite a bit less dramatic than anti-aircraft missiles. They were shoes. And, what better name for athletic shoes than the name of a goddess of the games? Reflecting the international economic system of our day—globalism—these shoes are generally made in various Asian countries under the control of Japanese management, with American capital, and a Greek name. Nike comes from the Greek word *nikos*, the Greek noun for victory.

Today, I want to talk about *nike*—victory. Today is the holy day that commemorates the historical victory God wrought over the Egyptians, as His people escaped their forced servitude to them. But more important than what this day commemorates is what it celebrates: The victory we now enjoy, as well as the spoils of that victory—spoils we will soon come to possess. In the next few minutes, let us look at the source and the nature of that victory.

The Greeks Had a Word for It

The English noun victory does not appear very often in the King James Version—only 12 times—six times in the Old Testament, and six in the New. Of these, this Greek noun *nikos*, from which we get the word Nike, appears only four times. Most well known to us is its occurrence in I Corinthians 15. Here, Paul exalts:

I Corinthians 15:54-55 Death is swallowed up in victory. 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory.'

I Corinthians 15:57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

More frequent than the noun *nikos* (for “victory”) in the New Testament is the Greek verb *nikao* which appears 26 times. In the King James Version, the translators often render it as, “to overcome,” “to prevail,” or “to conquer.” For example, this is the Greek verb that appears as overcome so often in Revelation chapters 2 and 3.

But more to my point today is a very special form of this verb *nikao*. Turn please to Romans 8. This special form of the verb to overcome appears only once in God's Word. It is *hupernikao*. *Huper-* is the Greek prefix meaning “over” and “of more.” It is akin to the Latin prefix “super.” In German, we would use *uber*; in English, “over.” *Huper*, *super*, *uber*, and *over* are all related, one to another, and have about the same meaning.

I am going to give myself the liberty today, if you would please indulge me, of coining a word, creating a word by combining the Greek verb *nikao* with the Latin prefix *super* to form the word *supernikao*. It is half Latin and half Greek, a hybrid word, like the word *televise*, which is also half Greek, half Latin. I am going to use the word *supernikao* rather than *hupernikao* simply because users of modern English, like ourselves, feel so much at home with the word *super*, as in Super Bowl, supernova, or supercomputer—or simply the slang, *super*!

Let us look at the one occurrence of *supernikao* in God's Word, where Paul says,

Romans 8:37 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

Supernikao—more than conquerors. The English language does not have a single equivalent word for *supernikao*. So, we just have to state it as, “to be greater than a conqueror” or “more than a conqueror.”

Now, think about this word logically for a moment. One who conquers is a conqueror; one who overcomes is an overcomer. That is obvious. But how does one become greater than an overcomer, more than a conqueror? Conquering is an on-and-off thing, you know. You are either a conqueror or you are a loser—either a conqueror or not!

It is rather like Christ's statement, “He who is not with Me is against Me.” There is really no middle ground. You are one or the other. Or, let us put the matter this way: How can one conqueror be a conqueror more than another conqueror is a conqueror? This problem is somewhat akin to the logical difficulty with the term “very circular.” A disk is either circular or it is not—one or the other. It cannot be very circular.

Or we say, “very pregnant,” as another example of this logical problem. A woman is either pregnant or she is not. While, of course, gestation is a process, pregnancy is a yes or no state. One is not truly very pregnant, only pregnant or not pregnant.

As a third example, consider the infamous term, “very unique.” Check your dictionary: Unique means, “one of a kind.” There is no room for the superlative very when you are dealing with only one.

So, what does Paul mean when he calls us “more than conquerors”? One is either a conqueror or one is not! How can we be “more than conquerors”—*supernikao*? Specifically, that is what I want to take a look at today.

In addressing this question, we will note that there are two components to the meaning of the verb *supernikao*. But as we will see, these two components by no means fully define the word as Paul uses it. Let us begin by looking at the first component of this word.

Vine's asserts that, to be more than a conqueror is to be, “pre-eminently victorious” or “to gain a surpassing victory.” Accordingly, the New American Standard Version renders Romans 8:37 this way:

Romans 8:37 (NASB) But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us.

As we will see, part of the meaning of *supernikao* is indeed the totality, the completeness of the victory. The victory is overwhelming. Satan is never going to be able to tell God he almost won. Satan, as we all know, does not even stand a chance at the end of the day. But *supernikao* means more than to conquer overwhelmingly.

As a second component, we will see that *supernikao* has reference to the size of the spoil—the amount of the prize. That prize—God’s Kingdom—is vast. But that is still not all that Paul is trying to express by his use of *supernikao*.

Yes, aside from the totality of the victory and aside from the vastness of the prize, there is something else, something very important behind the meaning of *supernikao* as Paul uses it. That “something else” is that to Paul, to be more than a conqueror is to carry away the prize of victory without putting forth the effort, or taking the risk, of a conqueror. That word “risk” is a key word. Risk is a big part of any sacrifice. God in Christ risked a lot when He made that sacrifice, and became a human being. This is one of the key components of any sacrifice. If there is no risk, there is no sacrifice. Someone else takes the risk—someone else makes the sacrifice, someone else does the fighting. One who is more than a conqueror shares in the prize without sharing—or at least without sharing proportionately—the risk of the struggle.

Yes, he may struggle—as we will see he must do so. But the lion’s share of the struggle (the *agon*, as the Greeks called it—the agony of the struggle) is

taken by someone else. Those who are "more than conquerors" come long afterward and enjoy the prize of victory.

Victory over Sin

To see this, let us look at Romans 8:37 in context. Let us back up all the way to Romans 7. Paul is frustrated, as he says in verse 15, and then again in verse 19.

Romans 7:15 For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do.

Romans 7:19 For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.

His frustration reaches its pinnacle in verse 24, where Paul cries out,

Romans 7:24 O wretched man that I am!

Compare this to his later statement that we are "more than conquerors." Paul, in calling himself "wretched," comes a long way from claiming to be more than a conqueror. He continues in verse 24:

Romans 7:24-25 Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!

There is his answer. Paul is everything *but* victorious; he is losing the battle every day; he is continually unable to do good. In fact, he says he "practices" evil. But yet, he is delivered from death by Christ. Through Christ's struggle, Paul gains the prize.

How great is that victory? Notice the next verse, Romans 8:1, where Paul exults in the thoroughness, the completeness of Christ's victory:

Romans 8:1-3 There is therefore [through the efforts of Christ] now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law

of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh.

Then in verse 30, Paul emphasizes again the totality of the victory, as well as the vastness of the prize.

Romans 8:30 Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified.

Past tense! The struggle, the fight, was Christ's. The victory, which is complete and total, was Paul's. And that prize is indeed vast glorification. This thread runs throughout Romans chapter 8. What is Paul's conclusion, based on God's work in him and for him?

Romans 8:31-34 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? [Greek: *ta panta*, the all, the everything, the universe, a huge prize.] Who shall bring a charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.

The triumph was Christ's; the triumph, brethren, is Christ's, as He intercedes for us day by day. So, although Paul too admits in Romans 7:19, as we saw, that he practices evil, he yet enjoys victory through Christ's ongoing intercession for him. This changes everything, does it not? Indeed it does.

Romans 8:35-36 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 Your sake we are killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter."

That does not sound much like “more than conquerors” rhetoric, does it—“killed all day long?” Is Paul saying we are a bunch of losers, hopelessly lost in the tangle of sin, practicing evil? Not a chance! Again, we come to verse 37 where there is a remarkable change of tone:

Romans 8:37-39 Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who 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 created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul concludes the major doctrinal section of the book of Romans with a bang, a magnificent and astounding statement of God’s working in us and for us.

The victory is ours through Christ. Through the unquestioned, total victory that comes with His death, resurrection, and His ongoing intercession, we become super-conquerors—more than conquerors. We take a vast spoil through the conquering efforts of Christ. He made the sacrifice; we take the prize.

Other Witnesses

Carrying on this thought, let us notice a few other scriptures. First, turn to II Corinthians 2:14:

II Corinthians 2:14 Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place.

Paul here is introducing another topic, mentioned in the second clause. We are not going to get into that. But he starts out by thanking God “who always leads us in triumph in Christ.

Let us notice some Old Testament witnesses to God's struggle to conquer for us. We will start in Micah 7, a particularly beautiful millennial passage, but one with meaning for God's people today.

Micah 7:18-20 Who is a God like You, pardoning iniquity and passing over the transgression of the remnant of His heritage? He does not retain His anger forever, because He delights in mercy. He will again have compassion on us, and will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will give truth to Jacob and mercy to Abraham, which You have sworn to our fathers from days of old.

Did you catch it? It is God who "subdues our iniquities." The Hebrew verb subdue here means, "to bring into subjection." It is often used of people being conquered and brought into slavery. It may be instructive to notice more where God covenants with David in I Chronicles 17.

I Chronicles 17:9-10 Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel. Also I will subdue all your enemies.

We understand the spiritual meaning behind this passage. God subdues our spiritual enemies.

Let us quickly notice three verses from the Psalms. I am just going to read these scriptures with little comment. First, notice Psalm 60, where David confidently acclaim God's commitment to give us the victory.

Psalm 60:12 Through God we will do valiantly, for it is He who shall tread down our enemies.

Psalm 103:12 As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.

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Now in Psalm 130, the psalmist again points out God's role in conquering sin:

Psalm 130:8 And He shall redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Finally, notice Isaiah 38:17, where I will break into the middle of the verse:

Isaiah 38:17 . . . But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, for You have cast all my sins behind Your back.

Turn please to Romans 5. In all these cases we have looked at, this point is clear: God takes action first, carrying the victory, while others follow on to take the prize. Notice the sequence, as the apostle Paul states it in verse 8:

Romans 5:8-9 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.

No wonder we love Him—"because He first loved us," as I John 4:19 puts it, "We love Him because He first loved us." The apostle John clearly states there the sequence: God acts first—wins first; we later enjoy the prize of His victory.

The Old Testament Example

This sequence is clear in the finest Old Testament example of a people who become "more than conquerors." This holy day today speaks of this example. Notice Exodus 14, where the children of Israel stand on the Egyptian side of the Red Sea.

Exodus 14:13 And Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand still, and see the salvation of the LORD, which He will accomplish for you today. For the Egyptians whom you see today, you shall see again no more forever."

God's victory, Moses asserts, will be complete.

Exodus 14:14-16 "The LORD will fight for you, and you shall hold your peace." And the LORD said to Moses, "Why do you cry to Me? Tell the children of Israel to go forward. But lift up your rod, and stretch out your hand over the sea and divide it. And the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea."

Exodus 14:22 So the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea on the dry ground, and the waters were a wall to them on their right hand and on their left.

Exodus 15 provides a second witness of God's victory on behalf of His people. This is a poetic witness, the Song of Moses, sung by Moses and the people just after they had crossed the Red Sea. Now, the children of Israel are on the other side of the Sea, assessing God's working on their behalf.

Exodus 15:1 Then Moses and the children of Israel sang this song to the LORD, and spoke, saying: "I will sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!"

Exodus 15:4 "Pharaoh's chariots and his army He has cast into the sea; his chosen captains also are drowned in the Red Sea."

Exodus 15:6-8 "Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power; Your right hand, O LORD, has dashed the enemy in pieces. And in the greatness of Your excellence You have overthrown those who rose against You; You sent forth Your wrath; it consumed them like stubble. And with the blast of Your nostrils the waters were gathered together."

God's was the victory.

Speaking of the pursuing Egyptians:

Exodus 15:10-12 "You blew with Your wind, the sea covered them; they sank like lead in the mighty waters. Who is like You, O

LORD, among the gods? Who is like You, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders? You stretched out Your right hand; the earth swallowed them."

And to whom went the prize?

Exodus 15:13 "You in Your mercy have led forth the people whom You have redeemed; You have guided them in Your strength to Your holy habitation."

Yes, it was God's victory, but the people of Israel took the prize.

Moses continues speaking now of other nations' witnessing God's deliverance.

Exodus 15:14-17 "The people [*goim*—nations] will hear and be afraid; sorrow will take hold of the inhabitants of Philistia. Then the chiefs of Edom will be dismayed; the mighty men of Moab, trembling will take hold of them; all the inhabitants of Canaan will melt away. Fear and dread will fall on them; by the greatness of Your arm they will be as still as a stone, till Your people pass over, O LORD, till the people pass over whom You have purchased. You will bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Your inheritance, in the place, O LORD, which You have made for Your own dwelling."

God's victory was stunning. It amazed Israel, erstwhile slaves. It weakened the Egyptians for generations. It dismayed Israel's enemies, far and near. It was such a vast victory. And it was at the cost of simply walking, simply following God's leadership.

Now, admittedly, the children of Israel had their own struggle, their own agony, over the matter. After all, with water stacked up all around, walking required more than a little bit of courage on their part—a whole lot of faith. But Israel did walk, did follow, and took the victor's spoils, without loss, without much struggle.

Since the ground was dry, they did not even need to wrestle with mud. Whereas water flooded into the lungs of the pursuing Egyptians, the Israelites' feet did not even get wet. They were, indeed, "more than conquerors."

Conclusion: Our Part

What of us, that Paul should term us today in God's church "more than conquerors"? Well, we too will enjoy the unimaginably vast benefits of Christ's stunning and total victory over sin. I will conclude where I began, this time asking you to return to I Corinthians 15, where Paul tells us of that victory, its source, and our role in it.

I Corinthians 15:57-58 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. [What do we need to do?] Therefore [by virtue of that victory], my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.

Steadfast conviction and immovable confidence in God we must display. And make no mistake about it, work is involved. It takes work to obey God's law, and obey it we must. Always abounding in that work, Paul says—not just obeying God's law here and there, where and when it is convenient for us, expedient for the moment, but always, as a way of life, as a walk. Yes, like the children of Israel, we need to walk, following God. Then, we know that we will enjoy the stupendous fruits of Christ's mighty victory—becoming "more than conquerors." For our "labor is not in vain in the Lord."