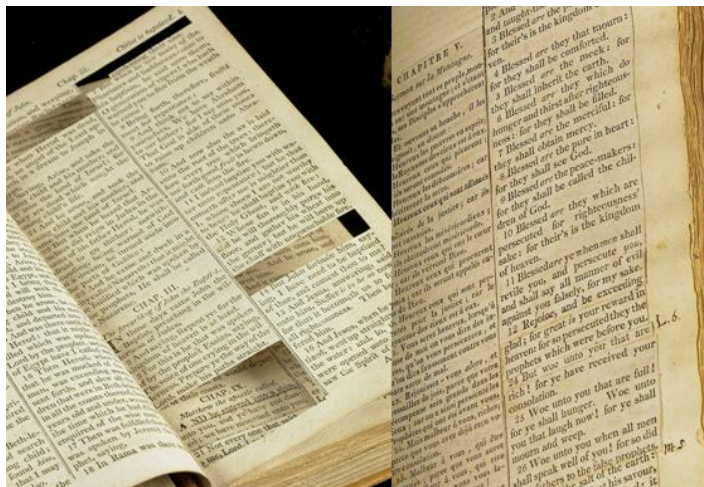




31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? **32** He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? **33** Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. **34** Who 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. **35** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? **36** As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." **37** No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. **38** For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, **39** 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.



It's crazy how people yank Bible verses out of context. I am not talking about the liberal churches who deny the authority of God's word and use the Bible to their own selfish ends. The world hates the hard sayings of the Bible. Thomas Jefferson literally took the gospels and sliced and diced them and pasted them into a Bible made in his own image. Anyone can make the Bible say anything they want it to say if

you rip it out of context and massage the meaning to your own ends. This is why there are so many cults and so much false teaching out there.

I am not talking about the most egregious kinds of ripping Bible verses out of context. I mean the kind that average Christians do. If you been in our church for a while, you have heard me talk about these verses and others like them.

Jeremiah 29:11- *For I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.*

Philippians 4:13- *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Matthew 18:20- *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them.*

Matthew 7:1- *Judge not, that you be not judged.*



If you know me, you know that the all too common misuse of these verses tends to drive me crazy. But our passage in Romans 8 has its own share of misapplication, like this graphic based on verse 37. I am more than a conqueror. Besides the fact that most Christians aren't experts in martial arts, it conjures up the opposite of what the verse is teaching.



This other one is slightly better. At least it quotes the whole verse--you know the really important part about being a conqueror "through him who loves us." I'd say that is fairly important piece of the context, wouldn't you? But what about the photo attached to this verse? Do you think this is what Paul meant by being more than a conqueror? That through Christ we will conquer every mountain and obstacle put in front of us. There is nothing that life will throw at us that we cannot conquer with God's help. Is that what this verse means? A poster like this one is kind of like a combination of Philippians 4:13 and Jeremiah 29:11. God has nothing but good plans for us and he will give us the strength to become "more than a conqueror."

We most certainly are more than conquerors through him that loved us, but this is most definitely not what this verse--or the final verses of Romans 8--means.

We can get to the meaning by following Paul's final question in verse 35. *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* When I was a fairly new believer, I remember having a discussion with someone about this passage and he didn't like the idea we talked about last week--that a true believer is secure in his or her faith. So in essence he was objecting to the entire chapter that is all about assurance and here's how he tried to explain away this first promise. He said, "Well

what does it mean by 'the love of God?'" In other words, what he was implying was that you could lose your salvation and literally be separated from God but you could never be separated from the "love of God." God would still love you even though you rejected him. So in that sense, no one is ever separated from the love of God.

Does that make sense to you? Could this have been written to an unbeliever? It didn't make sense to me either, but I tell the story to define one aspect of this promise. The "love of God" is not just the love that God has for us. Certainly in a different context it *could* mean that and often *does* mean that, but not in this context. Why would Paul take so much time to tell us that tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger and sword can't separate the unbeliever from God's love for them? Why does an unbeliever need to know that if they die, they will not be separated from God's love? In this context, it absolutely cannot only mean God's love for us.

Instead it means--and the phrase actually says, the love of *Christ*--it means the special, salvation love of Christ for us. The love of Christ is the love of the good shepherd for his sheep whom he calls by name, because they know his voice. The love of Christ is the eternal presence of Christ. After all, salvation is not just something that happens to us, but it changes our location. Ephesians 2:6 tells us that we were *raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus*. Did you know this was true of you? We are already in Christ, we are his child, we are adopted and eternally secure in Christ.

Therefore, the question that Paul asks, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?* implies that we are already united *in Christ*. We can't be separated if we are not already united. So it is imperative that we begin with this foundation. We have got to realize what it is that we presently have so we know exactly what cannot be taken from us. If we don't have this foundation, then later we will see all kinds of errors and problems that can result.

Therefore, let me highlight just a few verses that teach about unity and relationship in Christ. These are in addition to that wonderful promise in Ephesians 2:6.

Romans 6:11--So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and **alive to God in Christ Jesus**.

Romans 8:1--There is therefore now **no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus**.

Romans 12:5--so we, though many, are **one body in Christ**, and individually members one of another.

2 Corinthians 5:17--Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ, he is a new creation**. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

Galatians 2:4--Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out **our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus**.

Galatians 3:26--for **in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God**, through faith.

Ephesians 1:3-Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has **blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing** in the heavenly places,

Ephesians 2:10-For we are his workmanship, **created in Christ Jesus for good works**, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

Philippians 4:7-And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will **guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus**.

Philippians 4:19-And my **God will supply every need** of yours according to his riches in glory **in Christ Jesus**.

1 Peter 5:10-And after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to **his eternal glory in Christ**, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.

SEEN

- Tribulation
- Distress
- Persecution
- Famine
- Nakedness
- Danger
- Sword

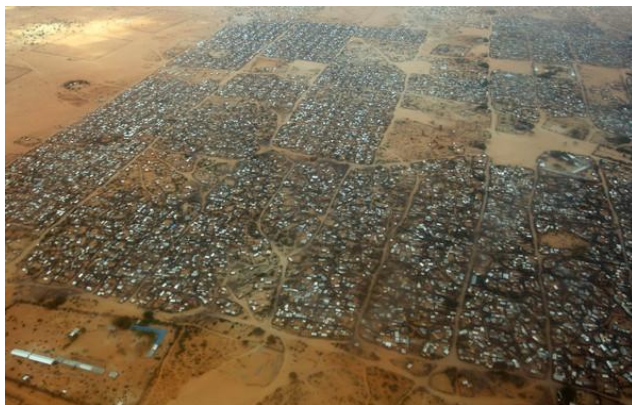
UNSEEN

- Death
- Life
- Angels
- Rulers
- Things present
- Things to come
- Powers
- Height
- Depth
- Anything else in all creation

Paul has two lists of things which cannot separate us from Christ. The first list are things that are seen and the second list are things which are largely unseen. This is not an exact science, but in my way of thinking, the first three on the "seen" list then bring about the other four. For example, tribulation, distress and persecution all can result in famine, nakedness, danger and sword. Famine, nakedness, danger and sword do not occur in a vacuum. There is always a larger reason. Tribulation,

distress and persecution cause things like famine, nakedness, danger and sword.

Notice that Paul did not choose things like worry, unemployment, relational strife and disobedient children. These are the common things which trouble people all of the time. In other words, he is not talking about everyday problems. Moreover, this list is deadly. Famine doesn't typically kill everyone but it does take significant numbers of lives. Nakedness means exposure. It means that a person does not have shelter and clothing. They are exposed to the elements. They are wandering refugees



Dadaab, Kenya hosts the largest refugee camp in the world holding over 400,000 men, women and children. Places like this are not exactly a good or a safe place to be, but nakedness describes what happens to someone in between leaving their homes and arriving at a refugee camp. They are homeless, hungry and in constant danger. They are at their most vulnerable from the

time they are driven from their homes until they reach the relative safety of a refugee camp. "Danger" certainly implies the possibility of death and "sword" means death. In Paul's day, the sword was either an instrument of war or an instrument of execution. So all of the things on this list can lead to death. This list is literally deadly serious.

Which is why Paul quoted from Psalm 44:22 immediately after giving this list. *As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered."* Why this verse from the Psalms? What was Paul trying to communicate here? I think it is quite obvious. God's people have always been slaughtered. Throughout history they have faced tribulation, distress and persecution cause things like famine, nakedness, danger and sword. And Paul certainly intended to include himself in the "we" here. This is but a sampling of his sufferings in the service of God.

1 Co 4.9- *For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.*

2 Co 1.9- *Indeed, we felt that we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves but on God who raises the dead.*

2 Co 4.8-10- *We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; 9 persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; 10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.*

Moreover, the theme of Psalm 42 could be called "suffering saints." Look at the four verses which preceded the one Paul quoted.

¹⁸ *Our heart has not turned back, nor have our steps departed from your way;*

¹⁹ *yet you have broken us in the place of jackals and covered us with the shadow of death.*

²⁰ *If we had forgotten the name of our God or spread out our hands to a foreign god,*

²¹ *would not God discover this? For he knows the secrets of the heart.*

This is the context for verse 22.

Yet for your sake we are killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

Do you see? The Psalmist was not suffering because of disobedience and sin. He was suffering in the midst of active obedience to the Lord. This is so very important because so many Christians want to turn this passage into a "nothing bad will ever happen to me" passage, just like the two posters I showed you at the start. Victory. Defeating your enemy. Scaling a mountain. More than conquerors and always victorious.

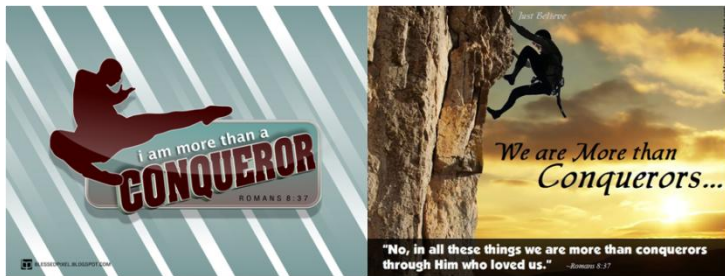
So here's the question we need to ask. How does Paul put these two phrases side by side?

We are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.

We are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

The phrase "more than conquerors" comes from one Greek word hypernike.¹ 'Hyper' means *super* and 'nike' means *victory*. So someone who is "more than a conqueror" is someone who is super victorious. So how do 'slaughtered sheep' and 'super victorious' go together? It doesn't

seem to trouble Paul at all to have these two descriptions right next to each other. They appear to be contradictory, don't they? How do you have slaughter and victory co-mingled?



I will tell you what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that we will always land on our feet. It doesn't mean that bad things never happen to good people. So if you look at those two posters again, it means that not only might you not win this battle, you might get pummeled in the process. Not only

might you not scale the mountain, you might fall off the cliff and die.



Joel Osteen @JoelOsteen Following

Don't get comfortable where you are. There's something bigger, something better, something more rewarding in front of you.



Joel Osteen @JoelOsteen Following

This is your year. Your sorrow will turn into joy, loneliness into love, lack into plenty. That drought is coming to an end.

This week I ran across a website called thirdworldosteen.com. Look at what this guy has done. He has taken a bunch of tweets from Joel Osteen and then paired them with photos of the poorest of the poor. Now that's a contradiction!!



Joel Osteen @JoelOsteen Following

Who says you can't rise out of that situation? Get rid of that limited mentality. All it takes is one touch of God's favor.



Joel Osteen @JoelOsteen Following

God wants to give you the desires of your heart. When you believe, it sets a series of events into motion.

But is that any different than what Paul has done by pairing slaughtered sheep and super victories? It's a huge difference and let me explain why. You could say that Osteen is tweeting about being "more than a conqueror" and certainly these poor children could be called "slaughtered sheep," right?

However, the difference is that what Osteen describes as victories are all temporal victories. Look at the words he uses: *bigger, better, plenty, rewarding, desires of your heart*. These are all describing wonderful things that are supposed to happen to a person, or at least they will happen to you as soon as you change your attitude and stinking thinking. All the bad stuff is going to go away and God is just standing by waiting for you to ask him for the good stuff. It's no wonder 40,000 people attend his weekend services.

In stark contrast, Paul's victories are all eternal. You might be naked and starving, but these trials cannot separate you from the love of Christ. You might experience persecution and danger, but you will never stop being seated in the heavenly places in Christ. You might be struck down with a sword in battle or have your head chopped off with the same, but even this cannot change your status as an adopted children. Can any of these separate us from the love of Christ? *No, in all*

these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. This is victory: being with and in Jesus Christ, now and for all eternity.

But we still have one more list, don't we?

For 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.

These fit loosely into a category of "unseen" or invisible things. It makes sense that death is listed first since the first list ended with "sword." You can see how these are set in pairs-life & death, angels & rulers. Now why would Paul out angels on this list? It could represent bad angels, namely demons, since it is paired with the word 'rulers,' but we can't be sure. Here is what we can know. This list finishes whatever was missing from the first list, so angels and rulers refer to the invisible realm. You can see and feel nakedness, famine, danger and sword but that it not true of angels and rulers. What Paul is doing here is answering all possible objections. Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Well let's start with the most challenging things in life: persecution, famine and sword. Tribulation and danger. These are not ordinary problems that the average believer will face. But even the worst things that life can throw at you will not separate you from the love of Christ.

Then the second list is like a catch all--everything else, including the kitchen sink is in this list. It's no wonder he finished this list with nor anything else in all creation. Together, these two lists are meant to be exhaustive. It's almost a dare. "Go ahead," Paul declared. "Try and think of something that you think could separate you from the love of Christ. Name it and I will refute it. Are you worried about suffering? That won't do it? Are you concerned about the future-what's going to happen tomorrow or next year? Impossible. Are you worried about death and dying? Please don't because you are secure. Anything else? Is there anything else in all creation that concerns you? Your sins? Your failures? None of that matters because it's not you who are holding onto Christ but rather Christ is holding onto you."

Few things can tell you about a person other than what happens on his death bed. Most historians are not very kind to Andrew Jackson. One preacher described him this way. "No doubt in his prime of life, [he was] a very wicked man,"² He was well known for his severe temper. He was Grandmaster of the Tennessee Masonic Lodge. he had quite a few strikes against him. However, if the words spoken on his deathbed are true, then he died secure in the arms of Christ.

One biographer recounted his last hour of life while he lay dying from tuberculosis.

"Sir," the dying man croaked to one visitor, "I am in the hands of a merciful God. I have full confidence in his goodness and mercy...The Bible is true....I have tried to conform to its spirit as near as possible. Upon that sacred volume I rest my hope for eternal salvation, through the merits and blood of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ."

*“When I have suffered sufficiently,” he said very slowly and deliberately, “the Lord will then take me to himself—but what are all my suffering compared to those of the blessed Saviour, who died upon that cursed tree for me, mine are nothing.”*³

It's as simple as that. "I rest my hope for eternal salvation, through the merits and blood of our blessed Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ." If spoken from a true heart, none of Jackson's former sins could have separated him from the love of Christ. The same is true for you and me. This is not based on your ability to hold onto Christ but on his ability to hold on to you.

Rich Maurer
July 27, 2014

¹ ὑπερνικάω, from the root word, νίκη (nike)

² <http://www.biblebelievers.com/Grady1.html>

³ The Life of Andrew Jackson, Robert Remini, p. 356-358.