

A Different Perspective Having Faith That Moves Mountains (4) 09-25-2 Godly Self Confidence

I recall learning in a class at Bible College about having a Godly self confidence. As the lecture began, I remember thinking "How can that be? Isn't 'Godly self confidence' an oxymoron?" Isn't it a complete contradiction in terms?

Doesn't God expect us to lay down our lives and be humble? Doesn't God call us to put our trust in Him and not in ourselves? Yes, He call us to all those things. But there is an inescapable fact that so many people miss. It is this. We are made in His image.

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. (Genesis 1:26,27)

Not only are we created in his image – which is what gives us the dignity and worth that sets us apart from the rest of His creation – but we are made to have dominion, and mastery over the rest of creation.

Let's just let that sink in for a moment. We are created in God's image. We aren't worms. We're not one of those creepy, crawly things. Not a cow or a horse or a dog. But a man or a woman who reflects the very nature of God Himself.

That means that you and I matter to Him in a way that my pet cat does not. You and I matter to Him so much that He would send His Son to die for us. And when we place our faith in Christ, something special happens. We aren't just people who live life being tossed around by the fortunes and misfortunes of life anymore.

*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced 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.** (Romans 8:37-39)*

Nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ. And in that love, as we place our lives in his hands, as we lay them down voluntarily, becoming vulnerable to His will, it is in that place that we are meant to discover that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us. Not just conquerors. More than conquerors!

A point that Jesus Himself made to His frightened disciples in those last few hours leading up to His crucifixion:

I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world! (John 16:33)

It is the sweetest of oxymorons, this becoming a vulnerable conqueror. Because we no longer conquer the things that we once would have conquered, we conquer the things God would have us conquer. We no longer conquer in our own strength, we conquer in His.

What does all that mean in practical, day to day terms? As we journey together with Jesus through our lives, we discover three things:

1. A new way of living – open and vulnerable to His will
2. A faithful and trustworthy God – as in our vulnerability He deals with us through His unfathomable love, and
3. A new self – a person who can not only survive the trials of life, but overcome them and grow through them. And what that develops in us is a quiet, Godly self confidence.

Now I have often heard this one Scripture verse quoted out of context:

I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:13)

The way that this is often used is as the basis for supporting the notion that *I can do anything I set my mind to, because God will make me strong.* Any adversity that comes my way, I will cast it aside, I will crash through it, I will overcome, I will succeed, because I am meant to be a conqueror, and I am made strong in Christ and there you have it. I can do anything and overcome anything.

Hmm. Sounds okay. Fits with our favoured template of success after all. But let me ask you this. What if, as in the case of Job, God sets adversity in our path out of His sovereign will? What if the

suffering that we're going through is part of the deliberate plan of God for our lives?

Surely God doesn't do that?! No? Then read just the first Chapter of the book of Job and tell me who it was that gave the devil permission to pursue that faithful man of God.

Now, if we use this Scripture as a proof text for "I can use my faith to remove any pain, obstacle, discomfort, failure or threat from my path" then we have completely missed the point of what Paul is saying. To get the point, we need to read the whole passage:

*I rejoice in the Lord greatly that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned for me, but had no opportunity to show it. Not that I am referring to being in need; for I have learned to be content with whatever I have. I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. In any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of being well-fed and of going hungry, of having plenty and of being in need.
I can do all things through him who strengthens me.
(Philippians 4:10-13)*

Paul writes these words as he's rotting in a Roman dungeon on death row. He has been through so much in his life. Riots, death threats, plots, ridicule, misunderstanding, rejection, turmoil, pain, discomfort, floggings ... as I read his letters in the New Testament and the account of his journey in the book of Acts, I shudder to think that one man could be called to go through so much suffering.

And here on death row he tells the simple story of how it is that he can get through it all. He's learned how to cope with little and with much. With being well-fed and with going hungry. Of having plenty of everything and of being in need.

Good and bad. Up and down. He's learned to cope with it – how? "*I can do all things through him who strengthens me*". In other words, his "I can do all things" isn't about removing the source of pain and suffering, it's about travelling through it and coming out the other side.

I so relate to this. It's what happened to us when I was a young Army officer cadet at the Royal Military College Duntroon. As we went through one test after another, we discovered we could get through them. It's okay, we could go without much food for five or six days. We could go on a three day route march over hill and dale through storms and wind and cold.

What Paul's talking about here is Godly self-confidence. I can do all things, I can get through all things and come out the other side just fine *through him who strengthens me*. This is experience talking. He has the sort of faith to know that he can make it through whatever it is that happens along his journey because he has the Spirit of God in him and that makes all the difference.

Do you see the marked difference between the two interpretations of this verse? On the one hand, we can quote it out of context and use it as a shonky biblical justification for clinging to the world's template of success. Or we can use it powerfully to know that no matter what we're going through, God is in this place to strengthen me and I can learn not just to deal with it, to cope with it, but to rejoice in it.

I can cooperate with God's plan for my life and rejoice because I have a quiet confidence that I am made by Him for this journey and He is in control and He is here to give me all the strength that I need. And when I've passed through this trial I'll know Him better and me better and have a greater faith and be ready for what lies around the next corner and over the next rise – whether that be 'plenty' or whether it be 'need'.

