

Loved ones, have you ever been in this situation where, for instance, you had a payment due, and the month is drawing to a close, and you haven't got the payment? Or have you ever been in a situation where there's an assignment due, and you're just not getting the work done, and the thing is coming up closer and closer? Or have you ever been in a situation where there's strain between you and your roommate, or between you and your partner or your husband or your wife -- there's just strain? Now all those situations are situations of pressure -- just a continuous, never ending, increasing pressure away in the back of your head that keeps nagging at you.

Now that's the real meaning of the Greek word that's translated a little differently in Romans 8:35 and perhaps you should just turn to that and look at it -- Romans 8:35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" And those translations tend to take the verse right out of our experience. So it's important to look back at the Greek words themselves and the Greek word translated "tribulation" is a word "thlipsis" and it really just means pressure.

And if I said to you, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ -- shall pressure?" Probably all of us would say, "Yeah, yeah -- I get so panicky about the thing that I think if Christ really loved me, would he let me get into this situation?" Or maybe some of us say, "Well, I know he loves me, and yeah, I know that's true away back there in my mind somewhere, but I somehow can't remember it when I'm in this kind of pressure situation."

Now if you take it a little further and you deal with the assignment this way -- you lie about it to the professor -- and yet you find the new deadline coming up and you still haven't the assignment done. Or you borrow the bank payment from a friend and that loan is beginning to spoil your relationship with your friend. Or you decide with your partner or with your roommate you'll have one of those "solve it all, let it all hang out" sessions, and you have one of them and the thing just disappears in a mess. The alienation is worse than before and you withdraw from each other more than ever.

Now that's the kind of situation that is described in the next Greek word "stenochoria" and it's translated there as "distress." But remember, some weeks ago we saw that it really meant narrowness of room -- painting yourself into a corner. You think you'll try to deal with the assignment problem by at least winning more time for yourself through a lie, but you find yourself being painted into a corner where you still haven't the thing done, and your present state is worse than it was before.

It's the same with the roommate or the husband-wife situation; you have one of those sessions where you're going to solve it all by being absolutely honest and telling each other exactly what you think of each other and you find the old "stenochoria" -- you paint yourself into a corner. You have fewer fronts on which to meet each other than you had before. And the same with the old payment thing; you think you'll get yourself out of the tight spot that you're in by negotiating yet another position from which you can fight the issue. And you get yourself into a narrower spot, a straightened place -- "stenochoria".

It's an intense form of pressure, of course. It's pressure in your life that you've tried to deal with in your own way, and then it becomes almost unbearable pressure. If you say "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ -- shall "stenochoria"?" All of us will say, "Yeah, it separates me. I'm so preoccupied with my problem when it gets to that point that I can't get clear. I feel -- I'm sure I can get clear through to God after all this is over -- but at the moment don't bother me with that kind of stuff. Let me get myself out of this tight spot that I'm in." Now that, I think, is what many of us find ourselves in.

Then of course if you just take it another step; you've lied to the professor about the assignment -- and you still aren't able to get it in -- and now you have to start planning your day and missing lectures so that you don't have to face the professor. Or you find yourself having borrowed the money from the friend, and now you're constantly aware of that so it's utterly spoiled your friendship. Now you spend your time trying to avoid the person that you used to enjoy being with. Or with your roommate or your husband or your wife -- you've negotiated through "stenochoria," and now you're at the position where you still have to keep a front up in front of other people. You have people into your room with your roommate, and you have to keep up an appearance of friendship between you. Or you invite people to your house for supper and you have to keep up an appearance of happiness with your roommate or with your partner.

Now that is what is described in the third word there that's translated in Romans 8:35 as "persecution" but it's the Greek word "diogmos" and it means "pursuit." It's that feeling you have that "circumstances are out to get me, they are, and they're coming against me. Now I'm not only retreating into where I wanted to retreat, but I have to turn around and run from it." And you feel "Boy won't they leave me alone? Why won't they leave me alone -- stop crowding me, just give me a little room and I'll negotiate myself out of this."

Loved ones, that's usually the process, isn't it? Probably all of us in this room this morning could say, "Yeah, I could give you an example of that where I've had pressure, and by my own foolishness I've turned it in to "stenochoria." I've turned it into a kind of narrowness and straightened place. I've painted myself into a corner. And then I've taken another step, and it seems I can't get away from these things -- they seem to be pursuing me -- the circumstances and the people seem to be actively seeking to destroy me."

Now loved ones, many of us who are faced with the question, "Who shall separate me from the love of Christ -- will pressure, or narrowness of room, or pursuit?" We would say, "Sure -- any of those. And as it intensifies more and more I haven't time to think of the peace of God because I'm so busy trying to get myself out of the mess."

Now loved ones, it isn't so with God's children. Let's look at that and then let's tie it up with ourselves. Do you see that Paul asked the question in verse 35, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or pressure, or distress, or narrowness of room, or persecution, or pursuit, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?" Then in Verse 37 he answers, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us." Paul says that there are certain people who actually, in the midst of all those things, end up more than conquerors.

I don't ask you to take sides in the Six Day War [in 1967] but I suppose it's a good example of a "more than conqueror." I don't know whether they were attacked, or whether they made the first strike, but it was very close. Somehow the Israelis managed to come out of it more than conquerors.

I mean, they came out of it -- the Six Day War -- with more weapons than they went in with -- more tanks. Many of them were Russian tanks I suppose, but they came out with more than they went in with, so they were stronger than when they went into the battle. And they gained a lot of ground from the enemy that they actually had never intended to take, I suppose, originally.

I suppose that's what it means to be "more than conquerors." You not only win the battle, but you actually come out of it stronger than when you went in and you come out of it with ground that you've taken from the enemy. Now loved ones, that's what Paul says God's children do in down to earth problems of everyday living such as we've discussed.

I think many of here would say, "Well, I feel I'm a child of God. I believe that God, the creator of the universe, is my loving Father and I believe that he put my old, selfish, self ruled, self reliant personality into Jesus and destroyed it there so I would be free to trust him as my Father. Because I know before, with my old perverted personality, I couldn't trust him, but now I believe I am free to trust him. So I do believe I'm a child of God and yet I admit that, in these kinds of situations, I'm not more than conqueror. In fact, I'm often roughed up badly and often come out of it conquered and fleeing with my tail between my legs."

And I think that's true, isn't it -- that there are many of us here this morning that actually are children of God, and actually have received the Spirit of Jesus into us, and have been changed inside. And we do believe that God is in charge of everything, and that there's nothing comes to us other than what he has filtered through his hands. But when we get into these particular situations -- in the chaos and confusion of the situation -- we find we're not able to rest in peace, and we find we lose all our peace and a lot of our trust.

Now loved ones, why is that? Don't you see that it's because God is trying to reveal something to us through allowing these things to come to us? He doesn't send them, but he allows them to come to us. The payment for the bank that we can't make, the roommate relationship or the husband-wife relationship that has strain in it, the assignment that we can't get done on time -- he allows these things to come to us to show us that even though, on the whole, we believe God is in charge of our lives, we have to start bringing that control of his down into the nitty gritty, individual, everyday experiences of our lives. And he will continue to allow these things to come to us so that we will come more and more, into the position of conquerors in them.

We usually experience defeat in these situations because that's an area that we have not handed totally into the Father's hands. If you want to know, "Where have I not yielded my life to God" -- loved ones, it's dead easy. Everywhere there is strain in your life; there you have not given everything over to the Father. That's right, really. It's just a sure way of telling -- wherever you have strain. If you're sitting there and you're thinking, "I have four payments like that." Or "I have two relationships in that situation." Or "I have five assignments like that." If you're sitting there and you're thinking, "I can think of others that you haven't mentioned" -- loved ones, wherever there is strain in your life, that's a place where you have not fully handed the thing into the Father's control. That's it.

Now don't keep worrying and being anxious about it. Don't sit there and squirm and work yourself up into a kind of strength where you'll be able to take this thing and pull it into shape. Rather, see that God is showing you, "My child I want you to live at ease. I want you to live at ease -- not that your circumstances will be easy -- my Son's weren't. The cross was not soft to be upon. My disciples did not have an easy time physically. But inside you can have a continual ease in all

these situations.”

Now loved ones, how do you come into it? Well, think of the strain with the roommate, or with the husband, or the wife. The first step is to ask the Holy Spirit to undeceive you -- to undeceive you. Somehow the lying spirit in this universe, whom Jesus calls Satan, has deceived you about that relationship. That's why you have strain about it. The other person may have strain too -- your wife or your husband may be strained in their attitude to you. Your roommate may be strained in her attitude to you. You can't do anything about that, that's not your business. Your business is to deal with your own strain. You get nowhere while you keep on saying, "Oh, but they're doing the wrong thing, they're causing the strain." You have no control over them. The fact is that God can bring you into a place where you have such freedom from strain yourself, that even their strain does not touch you.

So the first step is to ask the Holy Spirit to give you light, to reveal to you in what way you have taken that relationship under your control, taken it into your hands and out of God's hands, because that's the basis of the problem you're having. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you; "Holy Spirit, in what way have I a wrong attitude to my husband or my wife, or a wrong attitude to my roommate? In what way am I wanting them to do things that they won't do, and wanting them to stop doing things that they won't stop?"

In what way, in other words, do I want to control their lives? In what way do I want to be God over them instead of you? In what way am I expecting something from them that they are not giving me? In what way, Holy Spirit, am I looking to them for something that I should look to you alone for? In what way, Holy Spirit, am I trying to get some significance from them in the way they treat me -- some security for myself in them, in the way they treat me? Some happiness for myself in them, and in the way they treat me?"

Loved ones, that's the first step and honestly, you would not believe it, but every strain that you and I have in relationships with another loved one comes because of deception in us about what we should expect from them. That's it. Loved ones, every husband-wife team here that have strain with each other, that's why, loved ones. We're looking to each other for something that we should receive from God alone, and we're expecting from one another some security, some significance, some happiness, some attention, and some love that we should receive from God alone and therefore, actually, we're using each other. We are.

We all like to say, "Oh no -- we're not." But, we're using each other as crutches to somehow help us through our lives because we don't believe that the Father is able to do this for us. We believe, rather, that we should receive it, maybe, from him -- but through the other person. And so we're using each other, and therefore are unable to love each other -- that's it. When we say we love each other to our roommate or to our partner in marriage, we're really saying, "I need you" -- not "I love you." So usually, loved ones, it's some deception there.

It's the same in the business issues, the same with the payment thing. It concerns our financial lives -- some way in which we're taking our whole financial life into our hands. That's why it begins to go astray. It's the same with the assignment, our academic life, you know -- we're not doing things when God tells us to do them. We're trying to burn the candle at both ends, and so we're cutting this thing short so we can get our own way here. It's always because we're taking the thing, whatever it is, into our own hands and trying to run it our way that we end up in situations of pressure that turn into situations of narrowness of room and turn into situations of pursuit that

we cannot escape from. But the first step is -- ask the Holy Spirit for light.

If you ask me, "Why ask the Holy Spirit?" Loved ones, you and I are great at introspection, but we cannot see through the blindness that this lying spirit of the universe puts upon us -- and you know it. What husband or wife here has not come back from a vacation and discovered that they are treating each other abominably? What husband or wife here has not come back from a break when they've been away from each other and you come back more determined to really love each other than ever before? It's the same with roommates. Inside that narrow little room, there's a deception that takes place until they begin to see the whole thing awry -- off balance. And what we need is to see it right, and only the Holy Spirit can give us light about that.

The second step is to be willing to take our place with Jesus on the cross in dying to our rights to get from this other person what we think they ought to give us, or dying to our rights to run our financial life the way we want to. In other words, it's always because we want the car and we want this other thing as well, that we come into pressure. It's always because we're not willing to give to our dear partner or dear roommate -- but we want to get something from them -- that we come into pressure.

The second step is coming into a place where you are willing to say, "Lord Jesus, you died to anything that Pilate could give you, you died to anything that the soldiers could give you. You never dickered with them, you never pled with them, and you never copped a plea with them to get from them what you thought they could give you. You depended wholly on your Father. Lord Jesus, I want to put myself, like you, into the hands of your Father. I want to say, 'Father into thy hands I commit my spirit. I commit my love life, and my social life, and my financial life, and my academic life, and my professional life. Lord Jesus, I'm willing to die to the rights to the things that I've been demanding in this situation.'" And loved ones, when you come to the ground of your heart in that particular area of your life, and are willing to say that, there comes down from the Holy Spirit of Jesus, at the right hand of the Father, peace and rest that you cannot believe.

Now loved ones, it is miraculous, because it is not just the absence of strife, or the absence of pressure, it is a positive rest and peace and an unbelievable source of love that goes out to other people and an actual source of, not just freedom from anxiety, but actual joy and peace in the midst of the situation. So it is a real gift of life of the Holy Spirit that God gives you when you at last hand that part of your life over to him. So in effect you end up more than conqueror, because you come out of the tight situation having appropriated a new part of Jesus -- a new part of his life. You come out of the situation stronger than you went in and you've taken ground from the enemy that you will never yield the same way again -- you'll never be caught just on that same issue again. From then on, you'll be able, in that area of your life, to walk in peace and rest.

Now loved ones, that's part of what Paul means when he says, "In all these things we are more than conquerors." But the two steps are: first, the light of the Holy Spirit to see in what way you've taken the thing out of God's hands into your own hands and in what way you're looking to this other person, or this other situation, for what you want and what you need, instead of looking to God for what he will give you when you need it. And secondly, taking your place with Jesus in dying to your rights to those things, and in looking to God alone for what you need in your life.

Now loved ones, I know it works, because God teaches me it day-by-day. And I know that he is the same to you as he is to me. So I would encourage you -- maybe you're sitting there and you don't know anything about Christianity at all -- maybe you have difficulty even believing some of it. But

this is reality, you know it fine well, you know this is where we're living and loved ones, if you see that -- whether you have all your intellectual arguments sorted out or not -- I'd take a step forward this morning. You don't need to look far, you know it. If it's a pressure situation -- you know the strain. Just go right to that situation and speak to the Spirit of God this morning and then look to Jesus -- really.

I'll try to pray a prayer that would help you to know how to pray yourself. And I'd ask you to do it as we come, now, to an end and then, this afternoon especially, to begin to look at some of these things. But take a step now. Don't just listen to it -- it's not just stuff to understand. It's truth that we can be freed by -- really.

Let's pray. Dear Father, it's almost unbelievable in this world of pressure and this world of tension to think that you have intended us to live in complete ease and rest. And Lord, with all our selfishness we have so often thought that means free from troubles or free from difficulties. But Father, we see that Jesus was not free from those things nor the disciples, and that you want us to be able to bear all the things that other people bear, but with complete peace and unruffled rest. Father, you can see the area in our lives where there is strain. It's a strain that prevents us enjoying this present moment, it's a strain that prevents us being interested in other people -- we're so tied up with ourselves and our own problems. It's a strain that prevents us rejoicing in you, and enjoying your world, and loving you, and letting our spirits go up to you in peace and in rest.

Lord, we ask you now to send your Holy Spirit down to us -- as you promised that you'd give the Holy Spirit to them that asked. And Holy Spirit, we would ask you -- will you reveal to us in a deeper way than even we've heard this morning, reveal to us in a personal way that we will understand how we have taken this situation into our own hands, how we're demanding from it what we want, how we're wanting to be God over our partners, or over our finances, or our academic life or our business life? Holy Spirit, will you show us? We're blind and we cannot see it. You know that. You know we're blundering about here, and we're experiencing this strain because we can't see what we're doing. Will you show us in what way we have to put this back into God's hands and relax into him?

And then, Lord Jesus, we know that you took this personality of ours that always wants to do things itself, you took it into yourself and destroyed it in Calvary. And Lord Jesus, you know that you're able to destroy all this manic activity and its attempt to bring its own solution to these problems, now. Lord Jesus, we want to take our place with you on the cross and die to our rights in this situation. We want to die to our right to get out of it what we want. And we want, with you, to say "Into thy hands, Father, I commit my spirit." Lord Jesus, we want to do what you do -- look to your Father alone for all that we need and be content with what he gives us. And be content, as he is content, with our roommates and our partners, and no longer strain to change them ourselves.

Dear Father, I would ask you for my brothers and sisters and for myself, that you would help us now and give us light, each one of us. Enable us to see where we have to submit our wills, and it will bring us into that peace that passes all understanding, that will keep our minds and hearts in Christ. Amen.

