

## The Keeping Power of God

I'd like to begin this morning by talking about something only you can do; something God will never do; only something you can do, but it would be very foolish for you to do so. However, millions of people will end up doing this, but hopefully you will not be among that number. God loves you far too much to allow you to do this thing without a struggle, but in the end He will not overrule your free will. Let's read a few verses of Scripture together and I think you'll understand what I'm talking about.

Turn with me to **Romans 8** and we'll read verses **31-39**. In the previous verses, Paul speaks of the future glory that all the children of God will experience when the hope of our redemption is fully realized at Christ's return, and then he says, **verse 31**, "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us? **(Isn't that good to know? If God is for us, what power is there that can do us harm? If God be for us, certainly He cannot also be against us, why? Because verse 32 says)** He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? **(In other words, since God gave us His Son, why would He keep back anything else we need to make it through this life and come out on the right side of things in the end?)** Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? **(How can anyone accuse God's people of anything when God Himself has declared them not guilty? They can accuse all they want, but accusations will not change God's opinion of those who accept the sacrifice of Jesus in our behalf)** It is God that justifieth. **(It's God that forgives and cleanses from sin, and because of that)** Who is he that condemneth? **(Certainly not)** Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. **(So, if God gave His Son that we might be forgiven and cleansed from all sin and Jesus is that Son, and neither will He do anything to jeopardize our salvation through the sacrifice He made, then who is there that is stronger than the Father and the Son?)** Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?"

Good question. There's only one, isn't there, and it's not the devil. The devil is far too weak to overcome the strength of our Creator and Redeemer. So who is the only one left who can separate us from God? It's we ourselves, isn't it? And in that respect, we can do something that even the devil has no power to do. We can choose to be lost, but the devil can't make us make that choice. Someone might ask, "Who would be stupid enough to reject salvation once they have it? No one in their right mind would do that." And yet millions of people have done it and will do it in the future because they have been lied to by the clergy or by someone they trusted had the truth.

It's true, no one in their right mind would choose to be lost once they've been found, but it is possible, out of a neglect to study these things for ourselves from God's word, that

someone who has been given the mind of Christ can be given a reprobate mind. That's why Paul said it was possible that even he, after preaching to others could be a castaway. This is exactly why the false teaching of eternal security, or once saved always saved, or salvation in sin is so dangerous. People who have this false idea believe that even they themselves can't separate themselves from God, which is totally and completely fabricated by the devil himself and in turn taught by the preachers of unrighteousness. Read **2 Corinthian 11:15**; the devil has his preachers who have disguised themselves to look like ministers of righteousness when in reality they are ministers of sin. Anyone who teaches we can be in a saving relationship with Jesus even while we have ongoing sin in our life is a minister of sin, and **1 John 3:4** defines sin as the transgression of the Ten Commandment law. So any minister who thinks it doesn't matter if we violate any one of the commandments, or that doing so won't separate the soul from God is ministering sin to his flock.

Now let me read a short quote from *Acts of the Apostles, page 552* to show the fallacy of what we've been talking about. "Neither life nor death, height nor depth, can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus; not because we hold Him so firmly, but because He holds us so fast. **(That's why I said earlier that God will not let you go without a struggle)** If our salvation depended on our own efforts, we could not be saved; but it depends on the One who is behind all the promises. **(And that's good news, is it not? It goes on)** Our grasp on Him may seem feeble, but His love is that of an elder brother; **(now listen closely to the rest of the sentence)** so long as we maintain our union with Him, no one can pluck us out of His hand."

Is that important to know? There's only one way the devil can get to us, and that is by our own neglect to maintain our union with Christ. And how is that union maintained? It is through obedience to the truth; it is by the power of the Holy Spirit through obedience to the truth, and of course it has something to do with our devotional life.

We need to understand that it is impossible to be united to Christ and do the things He has told us not to do. As soon as we decide to disobey what we know is right, we begin to serve another master, and if we serve another master other than Christ we are immediately plucked out of God's hand and held fast by another and the only way to break free from his grasp is through confession and repentance. That's the only way to become united to Christ once again, and thus be in a saving relationship with Jesus once again, but we are always free to choose another master. God will never violate our free will. He will do everything He can to persuade us to stick with Him, but we are always free to go our own way, which is the way of death.

Now, I want to get back to **Romans 8** and continue reading with **verse 35** and onward, because it's important for us to know the list of things that cannot separate us from God and our hope of eternal life.

"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation?"

Do you know what tribulation is? In the Greek it's defined as "pressure." All the pressure in the world cannot separate us from God. There's all kinds of pressure we have to experience in this life, isn't there? Everything from having enough money to pay our household bills to those who might persecute us for following the truth, but there is no pressure, no matter how strong, that can separate us from God. If anything it will draw us nearer to Him when we ask Him to intervene in our behalf. By the way, that's how a righteous character is formed. When tribulations come, God allows these things so we will run to Him when they do. And so, in this way God turns the purposes of the devil into something that will help us become more like Jesus. That's why **James 1:2** says, "Count it all joy" when you fall into various kinds of temptation.

The next thing on Paul's list that's not able to separate us from the love of God is "distress." Again, distress, according to the primary definition in the Greek is "narrowness of room, or anguish." When it seems that circumstances are so narrow that there's no way out of a particular situation, or if you are in anguish, which is extreme mental or physical pain; even that of itself cannot cause a separation to take place.

Some of you listening to me right now may be in chronic physical pain and you don't know how much more you can take, but I can assure you that God knows all about it and He will give you the ability to endure as long as He sees fit. The important thing to know is He knows how much more you can take, and He will not allow you to pass a certain threshold without providing a way of escape. Death may be the escape for some, and I know that's not very encouraging, but we need to be like Job and say, "Even though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him."

Others of you may be experiencing mental anguish of some kind and you may be getting discouraged or depressed because of it. All I can say is cling to God in spite of it and say like Jacob, "I will not let thee go except thou bless me." Friends, there's a time of trouble coming, isn't there? And we must have an experience, we're told, that can endure hardship and privation. In ***The Great Controversy, page 622*** it says, "The 'time of trouble, such as never was,' is soon to open upon us; and we shall need an experience which we do not now possess and which many are too indolent to obtain."

Have you ever considered that the reason you are going through the things you are is for the purpose of preparing you to go through this time of trouble? I believe we're closer than we think to this time that is like no other, and God knows what it will take in order for us to go through it and still maintain a vital connection with Him, and we need to realize through all our present difficulties that God is in control and He will not allow narrowness of circumstances or physical and mental anguish to separate us from Him, but again, we are always free to let go of God's all powerful hand. In **1 Corinthians 10:13** God's promise is that we will not be called upon to endure more than we can handle, and we need to take Him at His word when the trials come.

The next thing on the list is "persecution." To some degree or other we have all suffered persecution of some kind if we are truly Christians. In fact, the Bible is clear that if we live godly lives we're going to be persecuted. Persecution comes in many different forms and to differing degrees, but no matter what the persecution, that will not be able to separate us from the love of God. He allows it because it will strengthen us to be able to deal with worse persecution in the future, and believe me, we ain't seen nothin' yet.

I can't say that I have ever suffered really terrible persecution, but there have been a few times when persecution has come, and whenever it has happened I have always felt blessed afterward that I was counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake, and it's got to be strange to the persecutors when they see that you are happy and smiling in spite of their best efforts to make fun of you. We just better make sure that when we are persecuted, we're being persecuted for doing the right thing in a Biblical sense and not because we have some erroneous or fanatical beliefs that can't be sustained from inspiration. But when we know we're doing the right thing and we're persecuted for it that will never separate us from God; it will only draw us closer to Him, and you'd think the devil would have been able to figure that out by now, but I guess he just can't help himself. I can tell you one thing for sure. If we ever fail God because of persecution or are afraid to stand up for truth because we're afraid of being persecuted, that is an indication that we do not have the saving relationship with Jesus that we thought we had and that we better start working on strengthening that tie to our Saviour.

"Famine" is the next thing Paul mentions in his list. Have you ever been really hungry to the point of feeling totally destitute? I dare say that those of you listening to my voice right now have never experienced Famine. We live in the land of plenty compared to many places around the world and there are many government programs and so forth to take care of the needy. There have been a few times in my life when a plain piece of white bread with nothing on it tasted pretty good, but I've never been to the point of starvation by any means.

I've often wondered what it was like for Jesus to go 40 days without food and then at the most critical point of just about dying for lack of food to then be tempted by the enemy to satisfy His own hunger by creating bread from stones. What would you have done? Appetite is the most powerful urge we have, and to be able to satisfy a ravenous appetite by just speaking the word would have to be a tremendously strong temptation, don't you think? We're told that if we can get the victory over appetite, then we can have victory over every other temptation, that's how strong it is. And if we can't gain the victory over our appetite now, how do you think we'll fare when in the time of trouble we'll have less food to eat?

Let me read you a couple short quotes from *Christian Temperance and Bible Hygiene*. This first one is from **pages 152, 154**, "The time of trouble is just before us, and then stern necessity will require the people of God to deny self, and eat merely enough to sustain life. . . The controlling power of appetite will prove the ruin of thousands, who, if they had conquered on this point, would have had the moral power to gain the victory over every other temptation. But those who are slaves to appetite will fail of perfecting Christian character. The continual transgression of man for over six thousand years has brought sickness, pain, and death as its fruit. And as we draw near the close of time, Satan's temptations to indulge appetite will be more powerful, and more difficult to resist."

So when famine comes, how will you fare? Will you be able to say no to food when it's offered by the powers that be in return for your homage? Or will you be able to stand firm to truth and principle and refuse that meal? Friends, we just read that if we are slaves to appetite we will fail of perfecting Christian character, and if we fail, I think you know what that means. Appetite is one of the three great leading temptations; the other two are presumption and love of the world. These are the three Jesus was assailed with in the wilderness, and as He was victorious so can we be, so long as we continue to abide in Him. Just as Jesus prepared His whole life to meet these temptations, so must we if we would conquer as He did. And of course, now is the day of preparation, not tomorrow. Today if you will hear His voice, harden not your hearts.

Next on the list is "nakedness." You know, when Adam and Eve sinned they were embarrassed to be seen without a covering, weren't they? And I'd like you to ask yourself the question: would you be so embarrassed if you were about to be stripped of your clothing that you would be just about willing to do anything to keep from being exposed to onlookers? I don't mean to get too personal here, but we must determine now that no matter what the devil's agents may do to us, we will not capitulate or surrender to the enemy. If we are clothed with the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness friends, we will be true to Him even if we are stripped of our physical clothing, amen? This reminds me of

what it says in **Revelation 3:18** where we are counseled to buy that white raiment so the shame of our nakedness will not appear. But just know this, even if we are not stripped of our physical clothes, we will still appear naked to the all seeing eye of Jehovah if we are not wearing the covering furnished by Jesus. Only the covering which Christ Himself has provided can make us qualified to appear in God's presence unashamed, and if we don't have that covering, even though we are physically clothed, we are still naked.

I want you to think of a couple things that may make you shudder this morning. Are you ready? It's not going to be very pretty, but necessary, I think, so we get a correct picture of our wily foe. I want you to think of our dear Saviour as He hung upon the cross. When we see pictures of that scene, He's always pictured with some kind of cloth over His private parts, but believe me, the Roman soldiers didn't have that kind of decency. He was completely exposed to every passerby, and at the moment I can't think of anything that would be more humiliating to the modest Christian to have to endure, and I'm sorry to have to paint that kind of picture for you this morning, but we need to realize that the devil has not changed, and fallen human nature has not changed over the past 2000 years, if anything it has gotten even more corrupt. Our sinful human nature is capable of horrendous atrocities when devoid of the Holy Spirit and the devil will leave no stone unturned in order to get Christ's followers to surrender to him in these last days as the great controversy heats up.

I want you to think also of the Holocaust. Millions of Jews were led into the gas chambers thinking they were going to take a nice hot shower. They had them all disrobe and hang their clothes on hooks and their shoes neatly placed thinking they would put them on again after they showered. But instead of water coming out of the shower heads it was poisonous gas. You see, the Nazis fooled them so they would go to their death peacefully and not resist and cause a stampede or some kind of commotion so the next batch of people would go quietly also.

By the way, I'm certain there will be some martyrs before probation closes, and if we fail to maintain our union with Christ, devil inspired men will think of some way to cause us to give in to their demands. And so, it is imperative that we make our calling and election sure while we have the opportunity to strengthen our union with Christ.

Next the apostle Paul uses the word "peril." Can peril separate us from the love of God? It can if we fail to maintain our union with Christ, as we read earlier and as I just mentioned. If we are in peril, we are in danger, and being exposed to evil is dangerous, is it not? and we are exposed to evil every day! It's pretty much impossible to keep from it. When we go to town evil is all around us, and if we don't live in a country setting, it's pretty much unavoidable all day long. But even here danger doesn't have to get to us if

we walk with Jesus wherever we go. Enoch did it, Noah did it, and there were others who were considered perfect in God's eyes all through history, and because they were able to perfect a Christian character in a sinful world, so can we, and we must. We're not to place ourselves needlessly in the way of danger, which is caused by temptation, but at times we can't help being placed in certain circumstances, can we? That's why our union with Christ is so necessary, and to maintain that union takes some effort on our part. If we don't take time to connect to Christ every day, we are in peril every day.

There are some who would say that absolutely nothing can separate us from God's love, because He is love, and if He's love He cannot possibly hate, but is that true? In **Malachi 1:3** and **Romans 9:13** God says, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated." I didn't say that, God did! But how can that be? Haven't we always been told that God hates sin but loves the sinner? Yes, but will that be the case with every sinner for all eternity? Will God continue to love me even if I reject the sacrifice of His Son and end up burning in the fires of hell? We need to understand something. It's true that God is not affected by hatred like we are, but even though this is true, He still hates sin with a perfect hatred, always has, always will, and if we choose to identify ourselves with sin we will be consumed along with that which God hates.

In the context of Jacob and Esau, notice what it says in *The Desire of Ages, pages 107, 108*, "In all who submit to His power the Spirit of God will consume sin. But if men cling to sin, they become identified with it. Then the glory of God, which destroys sin, must destroy them. . . Jacob had been guilty of a great sin in his conduct toward Esau; but he had repented. His transgression had been forgiven, and his sin purged; therefore he could endure the revelation of God's presence. But wherever men came before God while willfully cherishing evil (**like Esau**), they were destroyed." Was Esau separated from the love of God? He certainly was, and as a result he will be destroyed right along with the thing God hates.

Let me just say this, when a person becomes identified with a certain thing, like sin, they essentially become the same as that thing. For instance, when one becomes identified with Babylon, they are Babylonian and will suffer her penalty, and **Revelation 18:4** says that if they don't come out from among them, they will partake of her plagues. When a person commits a crime and becomes identified as the perpetrator, they are guilty and will suffer the penalty for that crime. Just so, when we commit sin we become identified with it and the hatred God has for sin will also fall upon us. Does that make sense?

Then Paul says that the "sword" cannot separate us from the love of God. The Greek meaning here is "judicial punishment." Isn't the time coming when we will be hauled before the courts to answer for our faith? But what if we haven't prepared ourselves for

that time ahead of time? Will the threatenings of the courts cause us to lose our faith in Christ? Will judicial punishment and the sentence that comes through the authority of the court system cause a separation from that love of God that led Jesus to the cross? Would that be possible if we aren't ready when placed upon the stand?

Let me read a couple statements. The first is from *The Review and Herald, May 3, 1892*, "We may know that if **(the word "if" introduces a condition)** if our life is hid with Christ in God, when we are brought into trial because of our faith, Jesus will be with us. When we are brought before rulers and dignitaries to answer for our faith, the Spirit of the Lord will illuminate our understanding, and we shall be able to bear a testimony to the glory of God. And if we are called to suffer for Christ's sake, we shall be able to go to prison trusting in Him as a little child trusts in its parents. Now is the time to cultivate faith in God." But if we fail to do that, we can't expect God to help us bear a testimony to His honor and glory, can we?

The next statement is from *Last Day Events, page 209*, "Many will have to stand in the legislative courts; some will have to stand before kings and before the learned of the earth to answer for their faith. Those who have only a superficial understanding of truth will not be able clearly to expound the Scriptures and give definite reasons for their faith. They will become confused and will not be workmen that need not to be ashamed. Let no one imagine that he has no need to study because he is not to preach in the sacred desk. You know not what God may require of you." So, preparation is the word.

Well, we've looked at just 7 points in **Romans 8:35**, but there are 10 more in **verses 38, 39**. We don't have time to go over the rest, but I would like to read them and inject just a few things as we close. So maybe you can look at these things this afternoon or as you have the opportunity.

**Romans 8:38, 39**, "For I am persuaded **(or convinced because I have taken God by His word)**, that neither death **(the prospect of death in this life)**, nor life **(or anything that might happen to us in this life)**, nor angels **(this would have to be evil angels, because holy angels wouldn't do anything to separate us from God)**, nor principalities **(or the rulers of this world)**, nor powers **(those that would use force to carry out the orders of the rulers)**, nor things present **(or things happening at the moment)**, nor things to come **(that could be threats or expected evil)**, Nor height **(or an elevated position. Think of Daniel and Joseph. High rank didn't corrupt them, did it?)**, nor depth **(no matter how low a place we're assigned)**, nor any other creature **(better translated created thing, especially a rule established by authority, such as a decree, there's a death decree coming, isn't there? Not even this)**, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."



And I say praise the Lord for that, don't you? but let's not forget that we have a part to play in keeping that union with Christ alive and well if we don't want to be separated from the love of God.

I'll close with the following quote from ***Steps to Christ, page 72***, because I want to end on a positive note. “When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself. Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to break this tie—to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to choose another master; for we are always free to do this. But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe.”