

## SELF-SUFFICIENCY SLAIN NO. 345

A SERMON  
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AT EXETER HALL, STRAND

*“Without me ye can do nothing.”  
John 15:5*

CONSCIOUS of this truth in my own case, I would earnestly seek the help of God’s Spirit in preaching as in every other spiritual exercise, for, without Him I can do nothing. It is a remarkable fact that all the heresies which have arisen in the Christian church have had a decided tendency to dishonor God and to flatter man. They have always had for their covert, if not for their open aim, the exaltation of human nature, and the casting down of the sovereignty of divine grace. Robbing God of the glory which is due unto His name, these false prophets would shed a counterfeit luster upon the head of the rebellious and depraved creature.

On the other hand, the doctrines of the Gospel, commonly known as the doctrines of grace, are distinguished for this peculiarity above every other, namely, that they sink the creature very low, and present the Lord JEHOVAH before us as sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up. So true is this, that the most uneducated Christian may, even if he is incapable of refuting an erroneous discourse, always be able to discover its untruthfulness, if it glorifies man at the expense of God.

The merest babe in grace may carry this test with him, in the midst of the diversities of opinion with which he is surrounded, he may always judge, and judge infallibly too, of the truth or falsehood of a doctrine by testing it thus—“*Does it glorify God?*” If it be so, it is true. “*Does it exalt man?*” Then it must be false.

On the other hand, does it lay man very low, and speak of him in terms which tend to make him feel his degradation? Then doubtless it is full of truth. And does it put the crown upon the head of God, and not upon the head of man’s free will, or free agency, or good works? Then assuredly it is a doctrine according to godliness, for it is the very truth of the Lord our God.

My text—the very word of Christ, contains in it a doctrine which belongs to the class of those which speak against the vaunting of humanity, casting down its high hopes—and scorning its proud looks, and to the same degree this sentence honors Christ and lifts Him up in the estimation of all His people.

This morning I shall speak of my text thus—Jesus said, “Without me ye can do nothing.” First, *this is true of His saints in matters relating to themselves*, secondly, *this is even more manifestly true of unconverted and unregenerate men*, and thirdly *it will be found by experience to be equally a fact if we look at saints in relation to sinners*, without Christ the most earnest saint can do nothing whatever for the conversion of the sinner.

**I.** To begin then with THE SAINT IN RELATION TO HIMSELF.

Jesus said to the apostles and if to them certainly as strongly if not more so to us, “Without me ye can do nothing.” Let us explain this, then try to support it, and then draw the practical lessons from it.

**1.** Child of God—Jesus Christ speaks to you personally this morning, and He saith to you, “Without me ye can do nothing.” Do you understand this? Mark how decisively it speaks!

I borrow from Augustine much of the exposition which follows. He observes that this sentence seems to have been written to put an end to the impudent impostures of the Pelagians, for the text does not say, “*Without me ye can hardly do anything*, it will be with extreme difficulty that you will be able to accomplish a good work or to achieve a holy purpose.”

No, it lays the axe far more decisively to the root. It says, “Without me ye can do nothing”—absolutely, positively nothing at all. What, not if I seek and strive, if I bring all my energies to a single point, concentrate all my faculties to the purpose—can I not then do it? If I be extremely watchful, if I be intensely earnest, if I be sincerely prayerful—can I not then accomplish something, even if the Spirit’s influence be withheld? It may be it shall cost me much difficulty, it may be hard rowing against the stream, but may I not with my own unaided power, if I strain it to the utmost! may I not speed at least a little in the things of God?

“No,” saith the Lord Jesus, “No, without me ye can do nothing.” Strive as you might—struggle as you could—your striving and your struggling would be strength misapplied strength, they would not speed you towards the goal, they would but sink you deeper into the mire of desperation or of presumption.

Mark further, the text does not say, “Without me thou canst not do *some great things*, some special acts of piety, some high and supernatural deeds of daring—of self-denial and self-sacrifice.” No, “Without me ye can do *nothing*.” Including in the sentence, as you will clearly perceive, those little acts of grace—those little deeds of piety—for which, perhaps, in our proud self-conceit, we think ourselves to be already sufficiently equipped. You can do nothing, not only is the higher duty beyond your power, but the lesser duty too. The lowest act of the divine life you are not capable of performing, except as you receive strength from God the Holy Spirit.

And surely, my brethren, it is generally in these little things that we find out most of all our weaknesses. Peter can walk the waves of the sea, but he cannot bear the jest of a little maid. Job can endure the loss of all things, but the upbraiding words of his false friends, though they be but words, and break no bones—make him speak far more bitterly than all the sore boils and blains which were in his very skin. Jonah said he did well to be angry, even unto death, about a gourd.

Have you not often heard that mighty men who have outlived hundreds of battles have been slain at last by the most trivial accident? And has it not been so with professed Christians? They stood uprightly in the midst of the greatest trials, they have outlived the most arduous struggles, and yet in an evil hour, trusting to themselves, their foot has slipped under some slight temptation, or because of some small difficulty.

John Newton says, “The grace of God is as necessary to create a right temper in Christians on the breaking of a china plate as on the death of an only son.” These little leaks need the most careful stopping. The plague of flies is no more easy to be stayed than that of the destroying angel. In little as well as in great things the just must live by faith. In trifles as well as in nobler exercises the believer should be conscious of his own inability—should never say of any act, “Now I am strong enough to perform this, I need not go to God in prayer about this, this is so little a thing, it is beneath the dignity of God, and I am quite sufficient for it of myself.”

No, believer, you are sufficient for nothing at all, without Christ you can do nothing that is good, nothing that is right. “We have not sufficiency of ourselves to think anything of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God.” “We know not what to pray for as we ought.”

We do feel each day that to will is present with us, but how to perform that which we would, we find not. Our strength is not only weakness but perfect weakness, weakness even for little things, weakness for ounces as truly as for tons, weakness in drops of grief as well as of seas of sorrow, weakness for splinters of trial as well as for the terrible darts of the evil one. In everything, Christian, you are powerless apart from the Lord who is your strength and your salvation. Learn then, the meaning of this text, “Without me ye can do nothing.”

In further explaining the meaning of this passage, let me remark that Christ did not say “Without me ye can *perfect* nothing,” but “Without me ye can *do* nothing.”

The Pelagian might perhaps admit that the Christian could not complete the good work unaided, but then he might do much towards it. Saith he, “If he do not finish, he may begin, if he is not the Omega, he may at least be the Alpha, if he cannot bring out the glorious top stone, and crane it up to the sublime

height in which it is to stand forever and ever, he may at least dig out the foundations and lay in the first hidden stone.” “No,” saith Christ, “Without me ye can *do nothing*.”

As in that last glorious leap when the believer shall vault from his dying bed into the land of the living, all his strength must be of God, so must it be in that first trembling step when as a penitent he comes to Christ, and rests his soul on Him. Do not say, if you are about to undertake some enterprise, “I will begin this, and then God will give me grace to make up my deficiencies, but I will trust in myself as far as I can.”

Ah! you foolish one, your trowel is covered with untempered mortar, you do build with wood, and hay, and stubble. So far from its being yours to do much apart from the Spirit of God, you can do nothing whatever. You can neither lift a finger, nor stir a hand in this spiritual work apart from God. You cannot put on the white robe of glory—nay more, you cannot unwrap yourself from the cerecloths of your death, even this must be done for you, from the beginning to the end.

And yet still further, to put the meaning in a forcible light. There might be some who would say, “Well, while the text may be understood to say the believer cannot commence any good thing, yet possibly he may be after it is commenced of great assistance to God the Holy Spirit in his own salvation, he may do something apart from the Spirit.”

Ah! my brethren, when the Spirit of God is with us we do much, when He is in us He makes us the instrument of our own deliverance, but let the Spirit of God be taken away from the Christian man, albeit that he is renewed, albeit that he has a new heart and a right spirit, yet would he retain that new heart and right spirit not one single hour, nay, not for a tithe of a second, if the Spirit of God were once withdrawn from him.

There is no support for the new life to be found in the natural soil of manhood. Every grain of mold with which the sweet flower of paradise is nourished in our heart had to be brought there from heaven, for naturally our heart is a rock too barren to yield any subsistence to the plants of paradise. If in our soul there flows a river of the water of life, its rise is in the mountains of God’s eternal purpose, the river finds no tributary springs in our heart. Flesh can yield no aid to spirit. Unrenewed nature can be a huge impediment to grace, but assistance it can never be.

The apostle Paul never found the old man a help to the new man. If it had been so, he would not have cried out—“O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death.” He would have shaken hands with that body of death, and thanked it for its assistance if it yielded any, but he felt it was of no more use to him than would a dead, rotten, corrupt, filthy noxious carcass be to a living man if he had it chained side by side with him.

When we shall get rid of self and self’s power, then we shall be strong, but all the strength of nature is but a weakness to grace, and all the power and energy of the flesh is but a hindrance to the Lord and not a help to Him. Without Him—in the widest sense in which the language can be possibly understood—we can do nothing.

**2.** And now, having thus sought to explain the text in regard to the Christian, let me try to support it. I would support it first of all by the common consent of all believers in all ages. With the exception of ancient Pelagians and their modern off-spring, I do not know that the church has afforded any instance of any professors who have doubted the inability of man apart from God the Holy Spirit. Our confessions of faith are nearly unanimous upon this point.

But I hear someone say—“Do not the Arminians believe that there is natural strength in man by which he can do something?”

No, my brethren, the true Arminian can believe no such thing. Arminius speaks right well upon this point. I quote his words, as I have them in a translation—“It is impossible for free will without grace to begin or perfect any true or spiritual good. I say, the grace of Christ, which pertains to regeneration is simply and absolutely necessary for the illumination of the mind, the ordering of the affections, and the inclination of the will to that which is good.

“It is that which operates on the mind, the affections, and the will, which infuses good thoughts into the mind, inspires good desires into the affections, and leads the will to execute good thoughts and good desires. It goes before, accompanies, and follows. It excites, assists, works in us to will, and works with us that we may not will in vain.

“It averts temptations, stands by and aids us in temptations, supports us against the flesh, the world, and Satan, and in the conflict, it grants us to enjoy the victory. It raises up again those who are conquered and fallen, it establishes them, and endues them with new strength, and renders them more cautious. It begins, promotes, perfects and consummates salvation. I confess that the mind of the natural and carnal man is darkened, his affections are depraved, his will is refractory, and that the man is *dead in sin*.”

Richard Watson, who among modern Arminians is considered to be a standard divine, especially in the Wesleyan denomination, is equally clear upon this point. He fully admits that, “The sin of Adam introduced into his nature such a radical impotence and depravity, that it is impossible for his descendants to make any voluntary effort (of themselves) towards piety and virtue,” and then he quotes with great approbation an expression of Calvin’s, in which Calvin says that, “Man is so totally overwhelmed, as with a deluge, that no part is free from sin, and therefore, whatever proceeds from him is accounted sin.”

It is very satisfactory to have these testimonies to the common doctrine of the church. I know that some Arminians are not so sound even as Arminius or Richard Watson. I know that some of them do not understand any creed at all, not even their own, for in all denominations there are men so ignorant of all theology that they will venture upon any assertion whatever claiming to be Arminian, or Calvinistic, without knowing what either Calvin or Arminius taught.

Arminians would be much better even if they were as good as Arminius. Much as he swerved from the faith in some respects, he was not one-half as grave a heretic as multitudes of his followers, but in many points would be as stern and unflinching a defender of the faith as John Calvin himself.

But my dear friends, instead of dwelling upon this point any longer, let me make one or two other remarks. Suppose for a moment that the doctrine of our text were not true, and that Christians had power in themselves to do something, take down your Bibles when you get home, and see what a great many promises of the Word of God would be without any value to you. God never made a promise which was not necessary, now if I have strength of my own, God certainly will not need to make me a promise of giving *His* strength to me.

But inasmuch as there are scores of promises in which it is written, “Unto him that hath no might, He increaseth strength,” inasmuch as we are often told that “young men do faint and are weary, and the youths do utterly fail, but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength,” I think you see that the very fact of these promises prove that they are needed, and if needed, it must be because man is weak.

But again, what should we make of the praises of the saints? Have you not heard them all through Holy Scripture ascribing their strength and their power to God? Did they not all, from the first even to the last, confess that all their fresh springs were in *Him*, that He, the Lord JEHOVAH, was their strength and their song, and had become their salvation? Did they not unanimously confess that their sufficiency was of God, that when they were weak, then were they strong, that in themselves they were nothing?

I say, what make you of these praises? What are they? Are they not mere empty wind if these men really had in themselves strength and power to do good? And what are the songs before the throne—those eternal cries of “Salvation be unto our God that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb”? How can they ascribe power, and dominion, and might to Him forever and ever, if their power was of themselves?

Must there not be a mingled strain, and while they sing the power of grace, must there not be some interludes in which they will chant the power of nature too? If they came to heaven partly by God and partly by themselves, must not some of the sacred harpers sing to grace, but others of them vary the

strain, at least at intervals, to the praise of him who by his own strength did snap the fetters of his sin, and by his own watchfulness did preserve himself unto eternal life? 'Tis blasphemy to think thus.

Oh! no, my brethren, it is because they had no power on earth but that in which God gave to them, that they have no song in heaven except the song which exalts and praises God!

Other arguments I suppose are unnecessary, but yet let me mention one other. If it were so, that man had power in himself, what were the need of the Holy Spirit's office at all? The office of the Holy Spirit becomes at once a useless sinecure if man can do anything and everything. What need to quicken men by the Spirit if they can take the first step towards quickening themselves? What need to strengthen us with might according to His Spirit in the inner man, if the inner man be already strong enough in its own natural power? What need that the Spirit should daily teach God's people if they can instruct themselves? What need that I should pray "Hold thou me up," if I can hold myself up?

Prayers for spiritual aid are prayers for mercies that are unneeded, if we have strength of our own. I do aver that, if man has grace enough to keep himself one single hour from sin, it is not necessary for him to pray, at least during that hour. Why should he want more strength than he needs? Should he have it to spend it upon his lusts? If it be possible for me to perform any one holy action apart from the Lord Jesus, then let me at least perform that one action independently of Him. Let me for that time dispense with the Holy Spirit. But you revolt from such an idea. I see your blood would curdle if I should continue to talk thus.

"No," say you, "day by day we have need to pray, hour by hour we have need to trust. 'My soul, wait thou only upon God, for my expectation is from him.'" I am compelled to feel each day I can do nothing without Him, my strength is wholly Thine. The very fact that the offices of the Holy Spirit are needed, by our experience, proves that we can do nothing without Him.

**3.** Now let us improve this doctrine. We see here a reason for the deepest *humility*. Are you proud, believer, because you have done some little service to the church and to your times? Who makes you to differ, and what have you which you have not received? Have you shed a little light upon the darkness? Ah! who lit your candle, and who is it that keeps you still shining and prevents you from being extinguished? Have you overcome temptation? Hang not up your banner, do not decorate your own bosom with the glory, for who made you strong in the battle? Who made your sword sharp and enabled you to strike home? Remember, you have done nothing whatever of yourself.

If you be this day a vessel unto honor, decorated and gilded—if now you are a precious vase, filled with the sweetest perfume, yet you did not make yourself so. You are the clay, and *He* is the potter. If you be a vessel unto honor, yet not a vessel unto your own honor, but a vessel unto the honor of Him that made you. If you stand among your fellow men as the angels stand among the fallen spirits—a chosen one, distinguished from them, yet remember, it was not any goodness in yourself that made you to be chosen, nor has it been any of your own efforts, or your own power, which has lifted you out of the miry clay, and set your feet on the rock, and established your goings.

Off with your crown from your proud head, and lay down your honors at the feet of Him who gave them to you. Come with cherubim and seraphim and veil your face and cry, "Not unto us, not unto us, but unto His name be all the glory for ever and ever."

And when you are thus bowed down with humility, be you prepared to learn another lesson, namely—*never to depend on yourself again*. If you have aught to do, go not forth to do it leaning on an arm of flesh. First bow your knee and ask power of Him who makes you strong, and then you shall come back from your labor rejoicing. But if you go in your own strength, you shall break your ploughshare on the rock, you shall sow your seed by the side of the salt sea upon the barren sand, and you shall look upon the naked acres in years to come, and they shall not yield you so much as a single blade to make your heart glad.

"Trust ye in the LORD for ever, for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength," but that strength is not available to you as long as you repose in any strength of your own. He will help you if you are but as a worm, but if you be strong in yourself, He will take away His own power from you and cause you to

stumble and fall, and happy shall it be if you stumble not to be broken into pieces. Learn then the grace of depending daily upon God, and do this constantly with proper humility.

Ah, my brothers and sisters, I should speak very earnestly here ere I turn from this point, for this is a common vice with us all—to wish to grow independent. We get a little stock of grace on hand, and we think we will spend our pocket money before we will go again to our Father’s treasury. We have a little faith, our Master honors us with enjoyment of His presence, and we grow so great that we cry, “My mountain standeth firm; I shall never be moved.”

Ah! there is always a trial near at hand. Do we not make most of our trials through our boasting, and do we not kindle our own furnace with the fuel of our pride? If we were more childlike, resting more simply on the Spirit’s power, should we not be more happy? Does not God our Father hide His face, because to see His face too much might make us exalted above measure? Does not that thorn tear our flesh because otherwise we would lie upon the bed of carnal security and sleep all day long?

Oh! we might always be on the mountaintop if we had not such dizzy heads and such slippery feet. We might always have our mouths full of sweetness if it were not that we are so weak that we cannot bear these sweet things always, and must have a draught of wormwood that we may be brought back again by a bitter tonic into a healthy state of soul.

I pray you seek to lie flat on the ground before our God, for every inch we rise higher than that, is an inch too high, not an inch heavenward, but an inch hell-ward. Every grain of self-strength we gain is a grain of weakness, and every particle of self-reliance is but a new particle of poison infused into our veins. From all reliance upon self, and all carnal security, good Lord deliver us!

**II.** I now turn to the second part of the discourse, upon which I shall dwell briefly but earnestly. “Without me ye can do nothing.” If this be true of the saint, we affirm that it is equally, if not even more forcibly true of THE SINNER.

Instead of dividing didactically here, as I have done under the first head, let me at once speak to the conscience. Sinner, the child of God who has been quickened and renewed, feels that without Christ he can do nothing. How much more must this be true of you, for you are absolutely dead in trespasses and sins. When the branch is in the vine, and has been grafted into the good olive, it can then bring forth no good fruit without the stem. How much less then, can you hope to do anything, for you are not even grafted in, but you belong to the wild olive—how can you bring forth fruit?

If when the Christian’s face has been made white he cannot keep it so, how much more shall the Ethiopian—such as you are—change his skin, or the leopard his spots? If when healed of his leprosy the believer feels that the leprosy would break out day by day, were it not for the constant miraculous power of the good Physician, how much less can you, all over defiled with the leprosy of sin, make yourself clean?

Sinner, it is true of you that unless visited by the Holy Spirit, unless united to Christ, you can do nothing. We do not assert that you are physically incapable, you can perform natural acts. You can go to the house of God, you can read God’s Word, you can do a thousand things which only need your arms, and legs, and eyes. Nor are you even mentally incapable. You can discern between good and evil, you can judge of truth and error, and in choosing the false and rejecting the true, you are verily guilty.

We speak now of your actions spiritually, not morally. Of all spiritual acts you are as totally incapable as the dead in the graveyards, or as the dried bones after they have passed through the fire. There remains in you no spiritual life, no spiritual power with which to help yourself. You are utterly ruined, entirely undone, and in yourself you are beyond the reach of all hope and of all human help. Yet remember, I pray you, that this incapacity of yours is a sinful one. It is not one which is your misfortune, but your sin. You are incapable of righteousness, but you are capable enough of iniquity, and your very incapacity is in itself a deadly and a damning sin.

Yet again, your incapacity does not deliver you from your duty. Though you can do nothing, it is equally your duty to do everything which God commands. Though you cannot pay the debt, for you are



utterly bankrupt, it is still your duty to pay it. God has not remitted His law because you have lost power to obey.

Nay, even the Gospel itself does not take back one of its precepts because you cannot fulfill them in and of yourself. Still does God demand of you that you should, “love the LORD thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, and with all thy strength,” though you can no more do this than you can fly. Still does He demand of you that you turn from sin, and that you believe in the Lord Jesus with all your heart, though you can no more accomplish this than a stone can transform itself into an angel, or silent rocks chant forth the hallelujahs of eternity.

Thus, you see sinner, in what a state you are. You have a Lord to demand of you, but you have nothing wherewith to pay. You have the same claims upon you as Adam had in the garden, but you have lost all capacity to fulfill the demand. Oh, sinner! What a lost thing you are! What a lost thing you are!

But I hear someone say, “Preaching like this will paralyze men’s exertions and make them say, ‘I can do nothing.’” Ah, my friends, it is just this which we wish to make them say. We wish to paralyze their exertions, we wish to strike them with a sense of their inability. Do not think I would deny or shrink from the consequences of this truth upon the sinner’s conscience, it is just this I wish to bring him to. The Arminian seeks to bring men to activity, I seek to bring him to no such thing at first, but to a sense of his inability, for *then*, when he has come to know his inability, *then* God the Spirit works in him, and *then* shall the activity begin.

But activity apart from a sense of inability is but putting the sinner on a path which seems to lead to heaven, but which will really lead to hell. I care not though it should be said, thousands have been converted by a preaching contrary to this. The conversion of most of these has been a fallacy.

I have been lately in a district where a most excellent brother in Christ had worked a very great revival. It was said that nearly every person in the town had been converted, and the town is as drunken, as profane, as blasphemous this day, as it was before. I am persuaded that much of the excitement and fanatical ravings, which have disgraced the true revival movement, are no more the work of God than the work of Satan himself. I would discern between the precious and the vile.

God *has* made bare His arm, multitudes have been converted during the last few years by true revival work. But that excitement which has attended some of these revivals is nothing more than the excitement of the passions of men, making men weep about their parents, but not about their sins; making them cry about their children, but not about their souls; making them tremble for the moment, but not reaching their inmost heart.

We shall need to have the Master come again, with a fan in His hand, thoroughly to purge His floor. I may state an unpalatable truth, but the floor is getting heaped with chaff now, and preachers are receiving into churches men that will need to be cast out again. They may be received with sound of trumpet, but they will have to be thrust out the back door with the noise of weeping, because they were not savingly converted to God.

I feel in my own conscience that I were not clear of man’s blood unless I did aver that any conversion which does not bear in it a consciousness of man’s total loss and ruin—any conversion which does not teach man the fact that he can do nothing, is a conversion from which he needs to be converted, and a repentance which needs to be repented of.

Still, I hear another say, “It must be an ill thing to bring men to feel that they can do nothing.” It is no ill thing, I would to God that every sinner felt it in his own soul. “But,” says one, “I knew a man who used to say he could do nothing, therefore he would not try.”

My friend, what that man said is one thing, what he felt was another. I venture to affirm that that man did not believe what he said, or he would not have added the last sentence. He thought in his own heart that he could believe, and could repent, and could be saved when he liked. He still treasured up in his soul the fallacy that one of these fine days, when he had a more convenient season, he would come to Christ. That was his inmost thought. What he said was but a mere pretense to screen his conscience from your rebuke.

Why, men and women, if you could be made to feel that you were so lost, so ruined, that you could do nothing, it would fill you with trembling and with self-despair, and then you would cry out in the midst of your horror, “Lord save, or I perish.” “God be merciful to me a sinner.”

I say again, it is because you do not feel it, but only say you do. You therefore make your saying it an excuse for a want of feeling it. I pray God the Spirit strike you now with a sense of powerlessness, that at once you may fall flat on your face, and feel in your inmost heart that your salvation lies in Christ’s hands and not in your own, and that if you are saved, it must be the work of grace in you, and of grace for you. It cannot be your own work since you have no power to do it, in and of yourself.

If I could only bring you there! Oh, my God, bring the sinner there! I pray You bring him there! If you are come there already poor sinner, God has begun a good work in you. I tell you if you are come to know this truth really in your very heart, God the Spirit has begun to save you, and the work of His own hand He will never leave.

Do not misunderstand me. If you merely *say*, “I can do nothing—(any man can say that)—that is not the Spirit’s work. But if you *feel* you can do nothing, then that is the Spirit’s work. Is not this doctrine very unpalatable? There are many of my hearers who do not like it now, perhaps they will go away and say, “This is a hard saying, who can bear it?” I do not expect the natural man to receive a spiritual truth. If you have received it, I thank God for it. He that strips you will clothe you. He that has killed you this morning will quicken you. He that has made you feel that you can do nothing, will give you strength to do all things.

If you could see the bottom of your own treasury, that there is not a farthing left in it, if you could feel your own emptiness, I am sure you would soon see Christ’s fullness, and would discover that He is able to save unto the uttermost those who come unto God by Him, that though we can do nothing He can do all things, that though we can neither begin nor end, “He is Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the author and the finisher of our faith.”

**III.** I now close with the third head, “Without me ye can do nothing.” This is true of THE SAINT ON THE SINNER’S ACCOUNT.

Brethren, I sometimes hear of men called Revivalists, and I suppose it is imagined that there is some power in them or about them to create a revival. I would be sorry to wear the title lest I should be thought to arrogate any power to myself. I know too that people sometimes plan to have a revival at a certain time. As if the Spirit of God were at their disposal, as if they could make the wind, which bloweth where it listeth, and when it pleases, come at their beck and at their command. I think all that is beginning at the wrong end.

Instead thereof we ought to hold meetings for prayer, to confess our inability. If we began by feeling we could not do anything, we should do everything, but when we begin by thinking we can do everything, we shall end in doing nothing. The church of today needs more and more to have this fact driven right into her heart. Church of God, you are powerless, you have no strength, no might to convert a single soul apart from the Spirit of God.

Have any of you proved this to be true in your own experience? Perhaps I look upon a father who has many children. He says, “There is one of my sons who completely confounds me. I have prayed for him, I have talked with him. I have sought to instruct him, but I can only go up to my chamber and on my knees feel that unless God puts to His hand, that boy will never be saved.” It is a good thing that you should feel this, for now you will go to work in the right way, using not your own tools, nor your own power, but the strength of God.

And I too, come up into the pulpit and I feel I may preach—ay, with the tongues of men and of angels I may preach—not I alone, but all my brethren in the ministry, we may all of us preach vehemently, earnestly, but there will be no power whatever in our preaching for the winning of a single soul, apart from that Spirit of God who goeth forth with the Word.



We want ministers always to feel that it is not the mere *adaptation* of the sermon to the salvation of souls, but the *application* of that sermon to the soul. It is not the mere fact that we are earnest, but the energy of the Spirit going with our earnestness, to quicken the heart and arouse the conscience.

Sunday school teachers, you want to feel this. It will not unnerve you, it will not paralyze you, it will make you strong, for when we are weak then we are strong. You want to feel that you could no more convert a child in your class than create a world, that you could no more change a heart than make an ocean blaze, or compel the solid granite to mount in watery fountains to the sky. You know that this is in God's hand, not in yours. Yours it is to use the means, but God's to work the result.

Go, then, each of you, beloved of your God, to your separate works, casting aside all your own trust, and depending simply, wholly, and entirely upon God.

I do believe there would be much more good done in the world if some of those who try to do good looked less to their own carnal power to do it. I mean by this, if they had less apparent power they would have more strength.

There is a story told by Toplady of a Doctor Guyse, a very learned man. He was in the habit of preparing his sermons very carefully, and he used to read them very accurately. He did so for years, but there was never known to be a sinner saved under him—never such a wonder! The poor good man—for he was an earnest man and wished to do good—was one day at prayer in the pulpit, praying to God that He would make him a useful minister. When he had finished his prayer he was stone blind. He had sufficient self-possession to preach the sermon extempore, which he had prepared with notes. People did not notice his blindness, but they never heard the doctor preach such a sermon as that before.

There was deep attention, there were souls saved. He found his way from the pulpit and began to express his deep sorrow that he had lost his eyesight, when some good old woman who was present said, perhaps a little unkindly, but still very truthfully—"Doctor, we have never heard you preach like this before, and if that is the result of your being blind, it is a pity you were not blind twenty years ago, for you have done more good today than you have done in twenty years."

So I do not know whether it would not be a good thing if some of our fine sermon readers were struck blind. If they were compelled to be less elaborate in the preparation of their sermons, to lose some half-dozen hard words, which they always write down as soon as they meet with them, and use them as stones in the middle of the sermon, if when they came up into the pulpit, though condemned by critics as speaking vulgar language, they talked of commonplace things such as poor people could appreciate.

If they were only do this, God being with them, the absence of their mental power would be the means of more spiritual power, and we would have reason to thank God—that the man had become less, and that God did shine out with greater resplendence.

For what are many learned men after all but stained glass windows to keep out the light? Oh that we had more men who were as the plain glass of the poor man's cottage, to let the light of God shine through them. Let the church feel that her power is not mental power, but spiritual power. "Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." She might then use all her learning, all her education, and all her eloquence. She would use them well too if she did but feel that these were not her weapons in the hand of God for the pulling down of strongholds.

May God add His blessing for Jesus Christ's sake.

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Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at [www.spurgeongems.org](http://www.spurgeongems.org).