

A SERMON UPON ONE NOTHING BY ANOTHER NOTHING

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A SERMON
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“Though I be nothing.”
2 Corinthians 12:11

THE divine discipline had succeeded well with the apostle Paul. There was danger of his being exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation which he received, and therefore there was given him a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to buffet him—this trial fully answered its purpose, and Paul remained a lowly-minded servant of Jesus Christ.

His humility comes out in the incident before us. He was compelled to defend himself and prove his apostleship, and this he does very thoroughly, but very modestly. In the midst of strong expressions of self-assertion, every one of them truthful and none of them exaggerated, his true humility is as manifest as if he had been unveiling his inward faults, or writing his “Confessions.”

Not Augustine at his “Retractations” is no more humble than Paul in his self-vindication. It is easy for a man to use lowly expressions when he is writing about his own faults, and the grace of God which saved him from them. But it is not so easy to maintain the virgin blush of modesty when called in necessary self-defense to vindicate one’s own character, and mention one’s own achievements.

Indignation is generally awakened in such a case, and humility creeps out of the way—the more wonderful is it then to find Paul esteeming himself as nothing, even when answering the cruel depreciations of his opposers. Read verse eleven, and see the lowly heart of the man, “I am become a fool in glorying; ye have compelled me: for I ought to have been commended of you: for in nothing was I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.”

Beloved, when we have to take the same medicine, may it have as sure an effect upon us as it had upon Paul. If it should be needful for us to be buffeted, or to endure a thorn in the flesh, may the affliction be as much sanctified to its end as it was in his case. Alas, I am afraid that some have many thorns in the flesh, and yet are not humble—many buffetings, and yet are lifted up.

And what is worse still, they have never enjoyed a perilous abundance of revelation to lift them up, but rather they have been surfeited with an abundance of that which is gross and earthy, and yet they are not humble. Though they have no good thing to glory in, they have exalted themselves above their brethren, and have spoken harshly of them and to them, and have been exceedingly high and haughty in all that they have done.

Such persons may expect to be stayed in their glorying ere long. May God grant that a little thorn may be enough for us, that one touch of the lancet may suffice to let out our proud blood, that a little buffeting by the messenger of Satan may avail to prevent our being exalted above measure. For has not the Lord said, “Be ye not as the horse, or as the mule, which have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle”?

A little trial ought to suffice to ballast us, for I am sure we have nothing so abundant in the way of revelations and spiritual attainments that we should feel inclined at all to glory. It is a great shame if we have fallen into the danger which Paul escaped, and have fallen into it without rhyme or reason. He who is proud about nothing is a fool in capitals.

I desire to call your attention to the fact that although Paul was undoubtedly humble, and the discipline of God had helped to keep him so, yet there is not a particle of cant in any of his expressions. There is no trace of the whine of hypocrites, revealing rather than concealing their self-conceit.

Humility has been well-defined as having a just estimate of yourself. There is no humility in such self-depreciation as would lead you to deny what God has wrought in you, or wrought by you—that might be willful falsehood, and certainly would be grievous error. Falsehood is not a constituent element of anything that is gracious—we are not required to call five talents one in order to be humble.

If we make a fair and just estimate of ourselves, we shall certainly discover nothing therein to boast about, and we shall not then be likely to borrow from the lips of others words and confessions which do not accurately represent our character, or state our feelings, and ought not, therefore, to be employed by us.

The mimicry of humility is a very common piece of masquerading. You shall find persons speaking in very lowly terms of themselves, but they do not expect you to believe them. A brother who has called himself worldly in prayer, if you should tell him in private conversation that you were glad to hear his truthful description of himself, would not take it at all kindly, but would ask who and what are you that you should judge him. He is as spiritual as you are, and perhaps more so.

A monk, we remember, confessed that he was so great a sinner that he had broken all the commandments. And when afterwards one of his friends began to charge him with breaking first one commandment and then another, the hypocrite averted that he had not broken any one of them. Men are so little humble that when they smite on their breasts, they may be still boasting in their hearts.

Mock humility creeps around us, cringing and fawning, but every honest man loathes it, and we may be sure that God loathes it too. Now, if the apostle had said that he was not an apostle at all, that he had never suffered anything for Christ, or done anything to spread the Gospel, he would have been speaking, as some say, “humbly.” But this is a mistake—he would have been telling lies.

He therefore does nothing of the kind. He says that he is not a whit behind the very chief of the apostles; speaks of his sufferings and his toils, and of the manifestations of divine grace to his soul. And yet for all that, he finishes his detail of experience by saying, “Though I be nothing.”

Brethren, do not deny what God has done for you, or by you. Look at all of it and value it, and bless the Lord for it. But still when all is said and done you must—nay, I trust you cheerfully will—come back to this, “Though I be nothing.” Truth-speaking all the while, and not using a good expression for a sort of religious fashion’s sake, but because it is deeply felt to be quite as true that you are nothing, as it is true that God has blessed you.

I shall endeavor at this time, as the Spirit of God shall help me, to speak upon this very remarkable expression of the apostle, “Though I be nothing.” O that both the preacher and his hearers may be able to enter into the spirit and soul of the text, and make it all our own.

I. And first, we shall say of it that this was OTHER MEN’S ESTIMATE OF HIM.

Every one did not value the great apostle as we do, but many spoke ill of him. Perhaps he meant, though I be nothing in the opinion of my detractors. I hardly think he intended it, but still he may have included that in its meaning. “I am not,” says he, “a whit behind the chiefest of the apostles, though in the judgment of others I be nothing.”

I mention this point, first, because it may comfort any earnest servant of God who is faithfully serving his Master, but finds himself undervalued and despised by those from whom he expected sympathy and help.

You may be starting in the Christian life as a young man full of zeal and fervor, but you dwell among a people who count you hot-headed and self-conceited, and do their best to thwart you. You are like Joseph among his brethren, and the archers sorely shoot at you. You are looked upon as a dreamer, and a pretentious fool. Your companions are as rough to you as were David’s brethren when he came down to the host—they charge you with pride and willfulness.

Be comforted about this trial if you are indeed a true-hearted soldier of Jesus Christ, for if Paul heard that, in the judgment of many, his personal presence was weak and his speech was contemptible—and if many other eminent men have been frowned upon and misjudged—you need not wonder if the same thing happens to you. It is good for a man that he bears the yoke in his youth—bear it and profit by it.

The case is harder with older servants of God. After a long life of usefulness, the churches often forget all that a man was and did in his vigorous times, and now that the elasticity of his mind has abated, they treat him with indifference. His ministry is now more solid and full of experiential teaching—an ungenerous race of hearers do not say that his preaching has become weighty, but they complain that the old gentleman is “very heavy,” and they cannot endure his prosiness.

The good old man, who deserves to be honored by his congregation, runs the risk of being elbowed out, and reckoned as a worn-out nobody. You must not marvel, my dear brother, if foolish lovers of novelty should so treat you. It is inexcusable, and yet it is common. It wounds your heart, and makes you wish to be gone to the better land.

But do not let it too sorely vex you, for the same thing happened to him at whose feet you would be glad to sit—I mean the apostle of the Gentiles—who, when he was “such an one as Paul the aged,” knew that to many he was nothing.

In following up the subject, we observe that Paul was nothing, first, *in the estimation of hatred*. His Jewish brethren, when he was with them, the slave of their prejudices, and an advocate of their principles, thought him some great one. He was a leader among them, a Pharisee among the Pharisees, a man deeply taught in rabbinical lore, a scholar to be gloried in, a zealot to be trusted. Then Paul was something.

But when he went over to the hated sect, and became a worshipper of the Nazarene, he was nothing. The bigot spat at the very mention of his name. He was an apostate, a worthless fellow, a madman, a nothing. He became an alien and worse, a castaway and a curse. Such is in a measure the case when men become thoroughly and bravely followers of Jesus.

The world’s market price of them falls a hundred per cent. If a scientific man is of infidel principles, he is cried up as an eminent thinker and discoverer. But should he be a true Christian, and know twenty times as much as his fellows, he is a person of antiquated views and narrow notions. If a preacher proclaims novel heresies, then he is declared a man of advanced thought, a leader abreast of the times—though, indeed, there may be nothing in him but an affectation of singularity, and a lack of reverence for the Word of God.

He who is content with the exceeding broadness of the divine testimony, and asks no greater liberty than that of the truth, is in certain quarters reported to have narrowed his soul, and to be possessed of but slender intellect. Of course, it always has been so, but methinks it is easier to call a man a fool than to prove him to be so, and it is a great deal easier to boast of your own wonderful powers, and the expansiveness of your mind, and the great progress that you have made in thought, than it will be to convince really thoughtful and experienced men, who walk with God that, after all, the new is better than the old, and that the inventions of man’s fancy are better than the doctrines of divine revelation.

That is, however, the custom of men who, being short of arguments, seize upon the weapons of contempt. If you are not of their way of thinking, you are not a thinker at all. If you will chime in with their notions, you are worthy of all honor. But if you differ from them, you must be nothing. Paul was marked at zero by the measurement of those who hated him.

He was also *nothing in the valuation of envy*. There arose even in the church of Christ certain brethren who loved pre-eminence, and found the apostle already in the highest place. False brethren claimed to be apostles, and in order to maintain their pretensions, they questioned the apostleship of Paul. They strove to rise by pulling down one who was superior to themselves.

Who was Paul? they asked. He could write a weighty and powerful letter, but if you came to listen to him, his weak eyes, his short stature, and his cramped resolve to know nothing but Christ crucified, caused him to make a sorry figure as an orator. They themselves with enticing words and fair speeches boasted that they far excelled him.

Where was the excellency of his words? Where was the depth of his wisdom? He was nothing, and they sneered at him, and exalted themselves. The apostle knew all this, and was by no means crushed thereby, for he could stand even before envy. Ah, brethren, envy has a wonderful skill in the cruel arts of

slander and detraction. If the envious cannot quench the sun, they can at least point to his spots, or raise a dust to blind men's eyes to his brightness.

Many a hero of the truth has been despised, for the very reason which ought to have secured him honor. It is an unfortunate thing for some men, if they love their own ease, that they have risen to conspicuous usefulness, for in a middle place they might have been allowed to be something, but jealousy is now resolved to rate them as nothing.

If Paul had wanted to be comfortable, and repose had been his object, he had only to subside into the common ranks of the lukewarm Laodiceans, and then he would have been far less plucked at. Zeal and holiness, if they are accompanied with a measure of success, will secure a man that contempt among the envious which is the homage that evil hearts must of necessity pay to goodness.

Again, the apostle was, evidently, *nothing to those who desired that Christianity should make a fair show in the flesh*. Certain brethren had come among the believers who brought with them human wisdom, and thought to adorn the doctrine of Christ, and cause the offense of the cross to cease. Gnosticism was the "modern thought" of the apostle's age, and of the era which followed it.

It was a translation of the Gospel into the language of the schools, and the evaporation of its true life and meaning in the process. Our apostle abhorred the wisdom of words. "We use," says he, "great plainness of speech." He tore the mask from off those half heathens who made the cross of Christ of none effect by their philosophizing, and therefore they retaliated by declaring that he was not a man of a great mind—that in fact he was nothing.

Other teachers arose who were opposed to the philosophical way, but they must needs take the way of tradition and ritualism, declaring that men must be circumcised or else their faith in Christ would be of no avail. Such persons dwelt much upon the observance of holy days and months, and so on, and thus stirred up the spirit of the apostle till he came forth and cried, "I, Paul, say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. By the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified."

By declaring the plain Gospel of salvation by grace through faith, he laid the axe at the root of all ritualism, as he had before done at the root of all rationalism. Straightway the High Churchmen discovered that Paul was nothing. He might have decorated the Gospel with learning, and made it palatable to the Greeks, or he might have cramped it with tradition, and made it agreeable to the Jews, but he scorned to do either.

When Peter went a little in the Jewish direction, Paul "withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed," and therefore some cried up Cephas, but cried down Paul, and according to their account he was just nothing.

May the Lord grant to all of us who preach the Gospel a willingness to be lightly esteemed. The Lord give us all grace to be fools in the estimation of modern wise men. May we have enough backbone of holy firmness to be conservative of the old truth, and to be careless of the ridicule of the worldly wise. May we have enough loyalty to Christ to be willing to be despised for His sake, manliness enough not to care one atom whether we are in honor or dishonor, so long as our conscience is clear that we have faithfully preached Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

The day shall come when he who has borne the most obloquy for Christ will be esteemed the happiest and most honored man alive—and when he who was counted the greatest fool for Christ shall be acknowledged to be among the wisest of men, and shall shine as the stars forever and ever. Will we not cheerfully consent to be nothing for His sake who made Himself of no reputation for our sakes?

Will we not, with John, rejoice that He must increase and that we must decrease? It is our joy to see Him all in all, and if any shame or contempt borne by us could lift up His name but one hair's breadth, we would rejoice with joy unspeakable. What is man's opinion after all? The balances are not those of the sanctuary, and the weights are not those of justice.

The verdict of earth will be reversed by the judgment of heaven, for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. When any measure of injustice grieves us, we should console ourselves with the remembrance that so persecuted they the prophets that were before us, and

yet the prophets have lost no real honor, so also despised they the Master, and yet His throne has lost none of its glory.

Thus have we discussed a meaning which some have seen in the text, and if it be not the first sense of it, at any rate it is a truth which may be profitably remembered.

II. But now, secondly, we have here in the words of the apostle HIS OWN ESTIMATE OF HIMSELF.

“Though I be nothing.” Our first observation upon the apostle’s valuation of himself is that it is *a very great correction upon his original estimate of himself*, for in former days he carried a high sail, and would by no means lower his flag to any man. When he was on the road to Damascus to hunt the saints, he was on first-class terms with himself, and thought that he was doing God a great service. He was somebody then, both good and great, a Hebrew of the Hebrews—as touching the law, a Pharisee. You might have ridden many a mile to find his equal.

Saul was like his namesake of old, head and shoulders above all others. But Paul was of quite a different stature—short, and even diminutive. I refer, of course, to his height in his own esteem. He would not then have owned that he was nothing, for he was a student of the law, and a great deal more besides.

This corrected estimate very much resulted from the enlightenment which he received at his conversion. What a flood of light does the Lord pour in upon a man’s soul when he brings him to Himself! At first it almost blinds him, so that like Paul he owns, “I could not see for the brightness of that light.”

It was so in my own case. I had often been down into the cellar of my heart, and I rather admired the purity and order of the place. It seemed to me to be festooned and decorated, and it boasted a good share of vegetation and a considerable life of its own. A dim, flickering light sufficed to show me, as I thought, that it was by no means a very foul place, but rather the reverse. I could not be so vain as to say that I thought it absolutely perfect in cleanliness and beauty, but still it was as well as could be expected, and far better than the most of other hearts.

Now, it was ordained that this flattering illusion should be dispelled. One day, as I went into this vault, there came one with a larger candle than I had been wont to carry, and what I saw surprised me beyond measure. I saw that the festoons which I imagined to be special decorations were huge cobwebs heavy with dust. The vegetation, too, I saw was all blanched, and much of it a noxious growth, while the life which I had somewhat boasted of, I was ashamed to look upon or even to think of.

That candle shining in the cellar of my soul had wrought a melancholy change in my thoughts of myself, and foolishly I resolved never to permit so bright a light to enter there again, as if to hide the evil was to remove it. But things could not remain as they were, for one day there came another who did me a worse, yet better turn, for He descended into my cellar and removed certain shutters which had long excluded the light of day.

When next I entered the vault I was ready to swoon for very fright, for a dunghill was sweetness to it—it was the concentration of abominations. There were all manner of creeping things, loathsome and polluting. I was ready to die at the sight. Truth to tell, I did not even then see it all, for the window was still so much covered over with thick cobwebs and filth that the whole of the light did not enter.

Yea, I fear I have not even yet seen all the pollution of my nature, but I thank God I have seen enough to make me cry to Him who is able to cleanse. Hercules turned a river into the Augean stable and purified it, and my Lord Jesus has with His own blood purged my nature. But this I know, I am nothing, and less than nothing, in my natural state.

I have but given you a parable of what the apostle saw in himself when the law came with its condemning power into his soul. During those three days in which the scales were on his eyes and he was blind, not seeing the sun for a season, he turned all his sight within, and saw himself. Then great Saul dwarfed into little Paul, and the learned rabbi shriveled into a poor brother who was glad to receive humble Ananias, and to learn from him what he was yet to do.

He who hectored over the church of God now meekly arose and was baptized, calling upon the name of the Lord. Three days of glorious light, so bright that it made him blind, had corrected his estimate of himself—and it was in memory of that lesson, and of all that he had learned subsequently, that he said, “Though I be nothing.”

Beloved friends, *the force of that estimate had increased by a growing belief in the doctrines of grace*. If you wish to find the free will of man very much extolled, you must not read in the epistles of Paul. If any of you desire to write an essay upon the dignity of human nature, or to preach a sermon upon the glory which still remains in man despite his fallen state—the recuperative power of human nature despite its disease—you will gain little help from our apostle.

I could refer you to certain modern divines for a good deal of stuff of that kind, but the apostle of the Gentiles does not deal in that material. His indictment against humanity in the first chapter of Romans is as terrible as it is true. “Dead in trespasses and sins” is his description of man’s condition—sovereign grace is his only remedy.

He tells us of being born again, and of being newly created by the work of God, and of justification by faith through grace by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, but he has not a word to say of human power or merit. If ever a man could say, “Grace! Grace!” and did say it, and kept on saying it, most distinctly it was the apostle Paul.

In proportion as he learned the fullness, freeness, richness, and sovereignty of divine grace did he see, side by side with it, the nakedness, the filthiness, the nothingness of man, and so he who could best glory in the grace of God thought less and less of himself, and said, “Though I be nothing.”

In addition to this, *his own internal experience had very much helped him to feel that he was nothing*, for he had experienced great spiritual struggles. “Oh, wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” was not once or twice his cry, but he often felt the law of his old nature struggling against the law of his mind, and he lived in lifelong conflict with the evil which he saw within himself, therefore feeling daily that salvation must be of grace alone, and that he himself was nothing, and less than nothing.

Beloved, I feel sure that, when the apostle said that he was nothing, he meant that he was *nothing in comparison with his Lord*. He had seen the glory of His Master up yonder in heaven, and he had preached that glory among the sons of men, and as for himself, he could not find any figure to represent his own insignificance. The smallest of figures was too large for him. He dared not describe himself by the figure *one*, and so he put down a cipher, and declared, “I am *nothing*.”

When a man’s heart is filled with adoring reverence of the Redeemer, he shrinks into nothing, and feels a kind of self-annihilation passing over his spirit. And if you have never seen the Lord, but only heard of Him by the ear, you may aim at humility, but when your eye sees Him, then will you *have* it, for you will abhor yourself in dust and ashes. Our apostle had in the fullest sense seen the Lord, and for that reason, with emphasis he cried, “Though I be nothing.”

He meant, next, that he was *nothing to boast of*—that albeit he had been a night and a day in the deep, and had been stoned, and had been beaten with rods, and had been a faithful sufferer for Christ—albeit that he had preached the Gospel in the regions beyond, not building upon another man’s foundation, yet in all these he saw nothing whatever of which he could boast, but he was still nothing.

I remember well a talkative Christian, who supposed herself to possess very remarkable attainments, very much of the same character as those who swarmed around us a few months ago, people who were of very superfine hot-pressed quality. I wish them every blessing, but I am not at all enamored of their pretensions, wonderful as they are.

Now, this superior person was talking of the marvelous things which she had felt, known, and done. She was, if not quite perfect, in remarkable danger of becoming so. She turned to an aged Christian in the company, and said, “But you, dear brother, do not say a word.” Now, you know there are individuals who say little, who think all the more, and our old friend was one of them, but still remained silent.

“Come,” said she, “have you no religious experience?” The old man said very quietly, “I never had any to boast about.” That remark I heartily endorsed. If we attain to the highest experience, and rise very near to God, and conquer open sin, we shall still have to look within, and say, “I am nothing.” Boasting is a sure sign of failure wherever it is found—even a giant like Goliath had hardly done boasting before he fell beneath the sling and stone of a ruddy youth.

Restrain every feeling of pride. Nay, chase it from your soul, for it is foolish, and will lead to further folly. It is a noxious insect which will corrupt whatever it lights upon, gaudy though its wings may be. King Herod was soon eaten of worms when he began to be fly-blown with pride. Where there is the most precious grace, there is always a jewel-case of humility to keep it in.

Gilded wood may float, but an ingot of gold will sink. Diotrefes was a nobody, and loved the pre-eminence. Paul was not a whit behind the chief of the apostles, yet he said, “Though I be nothing.” If we reach the apostle’s point of conscious nothingness we had better stop there, for there is no place safer and happier, and none more consistent with the facts of the case.

Those who are lowly are excellent, but pride is pestilent. The possession of grace secures a measure of self-deprecation, and in proportion as that grace increases, the thermometer of self-estimation will fall. Below zero is the proper point for us—for in truth we are less than the least of all the saints.

The apostle meant, next, that he was *nothing to trust in*. “Though I be nothing.” We begin our Christian life by trusting in Christ alone, and we shall continue so to trust as to His merit. But we are very apt to get wrong in other matters. We begin with a sense of being very weak and foolish, and we look to Jesus only for strength and guidance.

But after a while we think ourselves growing into deeply-experienced and well-instructed Christians, and the temptation is to lean somewhat to our own understanding and stability. All this comes of evil, and will lead to further evil.

I recollect well a person asking a brother of my acquaintance to lend him a certain sum of money. This my friend was willing to do, but the man added, “You know you can trust *me*. I have been a Christian now five-and-thirty years and I am past temptation.” My friend, like a wise man, buttoned his pocket very quietly, and said he must decline to make him a loan. He had intended to do so till that vainglorious speech was made.

That boaster failed the next day, and was discovered to have been an errant rogue. Whenever a man says, “I am past temptation,” he reveals the pride of his heart. And whenever any of us even dream of such a thing about ourselves, we have need to tremble for fear that some terrible fall is near.

Yet that thought does come across us, though we do not utter it—we half think in our hearts that those inexperienced young men may go wrong, but that we who are middle-aged men are not so likely to be overthrown. Yet grievous sins in churches are as common among the more advanced as among the young. Most, if not all, the great falls recorded in the Bible happened to middle-aged and old people.

Think of the drunkenness of Noah and of Lot, and the sin of Reuben, and Judah, and David, and Peter, and you will see that these were not hot-headed boys, but experienced men, who should have acted better.

We must come to this—I am nothing—I am strong in the Lord when He strengthens me, but I am as weak as an infant without His aid. I may know a great many things as the Lord continues to teach me, but if His grace were removed I should be as foolish and ignorant as when I first came into His school. “In me, that is, in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.” Within my nature there is no stay for my confidence. I am nothing to trust in.

“Though I be nothing,” again, means this—I *am nothing worth considering*—as if he said, “If there is any good thing for me to do, I never calculate whether I shall be a loser by it or a gainer, for I am not worth taking into the account. If Christ’s kingdom will but come, it does not matter whether Paul lives or Paul dies. I am nothing in comparison with His glory.”

I think he meant this also, “I am of small consequence. Christ’s kingdom will go on without me. Souls will be won without me. His glory will be promoted in the world even if I am no more alive to

work for His cause. I do not count myself to be a person of such consequence to His church that the Lord needs me. He may use me, but if He does not use me, He will use somebody else.

“I am but a pen, and He can produce many such. If He does not write with one, He can write with another—I am nothing. If I am now a trumpet in His hand, He can blow through another if He chooses to lay me aside, for rams’ horns are common enough, and the walls of Jericho will not stand for want of them.” I think that was what he meant by, “Though I be nothing.” I pray God we may make a low estimate of ourselves, and never dream ourselves to be essential to God’s cause.

I shall yet spend a few minutes more in speaking of our own estimate of ourselves, dear brothers and sisters, and may we all be made by divine grace to say, “Though I be nothing.” I will tell you why I wish that we may come to this. It is because it will be exceedingly beneficial to us, if with deep sincerity we feel that we are nothing. It will prevent pride, and that which will prevent pride is worth a Jew’s eye.

It will prevent our being mortified, as we sometimes are, because notice is not taken of us when we have done something that we thought was greatly praiseworthy. If we say, “Though I be nothing,” we do not expect people to talk much about a nothing, nor do we wish them to do so—we are glad to get into the shade, and if we do not receive a single word of commendation we are content to have worked for the Lord in quietness. No man will look for honor among his fellows when he owns that he is nothing.

This humility will also prevent severe censures of others. We are all very handy at picking holes in our brethren’s coats, but when we are nothing we shall draw back our hand and say, “It does not become a nothing and a nobody to be finding fault with other people.”

I sometimes wish that those who criticize ministers would think of this. I do not believe that a public person can nowadays say five plain words which some critic or other will not misunderstand or misrepresent. I wish they would try to speak or write themselves, and see whether others could not pull them to pieces quite as readily. You will be greatly helped in avoiding censoriousness if you have a lowly view of yourself, so as to say, “Though I be nothing.”

This will also help you to avoid all self-seeking. Why should you seek your own if you be nothing? There is no good in seeking for great things for a nothing. If you be nothing, you will keep your motives clear. You will seek the glory of God, and not your own glory. If you be nothing, self-denial will become very easy to you. You will be willing to be a doormat to God’s temple for His saints to wipe their feet upon, if you can be more serviceable there than in any other capacity.

A man who feels himself to be nothing will be easily contented. He who is nothing does not want a thousand a-year to maintain his dignity. He who is nothing, having food and raiment, is therewith content. It would be a pity to spend a great deal upon nothing, so he that is nothing thanks God for what he has, and eats his bread and drinks his cup of water, and blesses God that he has all that, and Jesus Christ too.

Mr. Somebody wants a large estate and a heap of money, and when he has that, Mr. Somebody wants much more, and is never satisfied. Then, too, he has so many calls that he cannot afford to give anything away. While he who is nothing has his weekly tithe to bring, for he feels himself to be nothing but a steward, and must faithfully use his Master’s goods.

He who knows himself to be nothing is also full of gratitude. If you catch him alone, you will find the tears in his eyes, and if you question him, he will tell you that he was weeping to think that God should ever have loved him, for he is such a nobody.

He was wondering at his election, marveling that eternal love should have pitched upon him. He was wondering at redemption, admiring that the Lord Jesus Christ should have shed His blood for him. He was wondering at effectual calling, amazed that the Holy Ghost should ever have called him. He was wondering at the persevering love of God, that the Lord’s mercy should have endured his ill manners so long.

He was wondering that there should be a heaven for him, wondering that there should be eternal life for Him. “Though I be nothing,” he says, “yet infinite grace is mine.” How can there be all this for a nobody? Great God, how good You are! Is not all this a sweet commendation of a lowly spirit? He that

lives in the Valley of Humiliation, among the lilies, dwells where the birds sing all day, and the roes and the hinds of the field lie down in peace.

Now, I finish with this one thought. When the apostle says, “*Though I be nothing,*” that word shows that there was a fact in the background. He had been telling us that he was once caught up into the third heaven, and had enjoyed a special revelation of Christ.

Yes, beloved fellow believer, we have had our banqueting days when the banner over us was love. We have been very near the Beloved, and we have been made to drink the spiced wine of His pomegranate, and He has manifested Himself to us as He does not unto the world. All this you know, and I also know it, “*Though I be nothing.*”

In addition to this, “The Lord has done great things for us, whereof we are glad,” by enabling us to serve His cause. If we have not been stoned and scourged, yet we have borne something for Christ, and borne it cheerfully. If we cannot emulate the apostle in abundance of service, yet the Lord has not left us without fruit unto His glory, and this we are right glad of, though we heartily add, “*Though I be nothing.*”

We can also believingly say, “*Though I be nothing,*” yet the Spirit of God dwells in me. “*Though I be nothing,*” the Spirit of God uses me. I want you not to forget the background of mercy which sets out this poor nothing, and make it look all the less, albeit that it makes it all the sweeter for it to be so little.

Oh, yes, and there is a heaven for me, and there is eternal life for me, and there are the three persons of the divine Trinity sworn to save me. And heaven and earth may pass away, but I shall never perish, neither shall any pluck me out of Jesu’s hands, “*Though I be nothing.*” His angels are commissioned to keep me, and He Himself in covenant has given His oath and promise to preserve me, “*Though I be nothing.*”

“*Though I be nothing.*” Does it not make your soul laugh with inexpressible delight to think that you shall wear a crown of life that fades not away, and that your hands shall strike the strings of a harp which shall pour forth immortal melody, though you be nothing? My heart dances while I feel that the pearly gates, the streets of gold, the goodly company of angels, and the assembly of the firstborn are for me, “*Though I be nothing!*”

Dearly beloved, go away with “*Though I be nothing*” in your mouths, but yet say, “Yet has He loved me with an everlasting love, and because He has set His love upon me, He will deliver me and set me on high. Since I was precious in His sight I have been honorable, and He has loved me, and He gave more than Egypt and Ethiopia for me, ‘*Though I be nothing.*’”

The Lord bless you, and if there is a sinner here who is somebody, may the Lord turn him into nobody. But if there is a nobody here, may the Lord bless him, for he is the sort of man that Jesus saves. O soul, you must be nothing if God is to save you. You must come down from your high horse. You must give up your trust in works, and ceremonies, and natural goodness, and be nothing. And when you are nothing, then will Jesus Christ be all in all to you.

He is a full Christ for empty sinners. He gives life to dead sinners, healing to sick sinners, and clothing to naked sinners. But if you are full and rich, and lively in yourselves, you may go your way—He will have nothing to do with you.

If you are nothing, clean emptied out, and stripped, and done for, ground to powder, crushed, and rendered helpless, you are of those for whom Jesus shed His precious blood. Come, trust in Him, and find eternal life.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—
2 CORINTHIANS 11:13-33 AND 12:1-12**

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—625, 627

LETTER FROM MR. SPURGEON:

BELOVED FRIENDS—Yesterday I was gladdened by a telegram from our well-beloved deacon, Mr. Murrell. “All going well. Tabernacle crowded each service. All friends united and hearty, expecting great results this February.” This was more precious to me than a banknote for a large amount. I have no greater joy than to hear that the Lord blesses the work at home.

For myself, as you desire to hear frequently of my welfare, I can only say that the weather here is variable, and I have varied with it, but yet I am greatly refreshed, and in a fair way to recover strength. I still lean heavily upon my staff, and can only totter a short distance. But my spirits are revived and my mind is regaining its tone. Pray for me daily, as I also do for you with all my heart.

Your loving friend,

C.H. SPURGEON

Mentone, February 11, 1879

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.