

No Good Thing

by Chip Brogden

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of recognizing our own insufficiency and the sufficiency of Christ in our spiritual journey.

Scripture: John 3:30, John 15:5, Romans 7:18, Galatians 2:20, Philippians 3:3

Topics: "Human Depravity", "Christ Sufficiency"

Description

Chip Brogden preaches about the importance of recognizing that in our flesh dwells no good thing, emphasizing the need to surrender our self-righteousness and acknowledge our sinful nature before God. He highlights the journey of self-discovery and Christ-discovery, stressing the significance of knowing our insufficiency and Christ's sufficiency. Through the examples of Joseph and Peter, he illustrates the process of learning to decrease in self-confidence and increase in reliance on Christ, ultimately leading to a life of surrender, humility, and dependence on God's strength.

Transcript

"I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing" (Romans 7:18a).

It is a great day for the Lord when a disciple of Jesus learns this most basic lesson: that in "me", in myself, in my flesh, dwells no good thing.

This is a very difficult thing for people to learn. Jesus says that without Him we can do nothing. This verse is very well-known. Even so, Christians still attempt to do many things apart from the Lord. We feel like we simply must do something, anything. And even though the Bible says there is nothing good in our flesh, and the flesh profits nothing, we spend a lot of time doing fleshly things apart from the Spirit of Jesus, thinking they are good and profitable. It is impossible to say for sure just how many of the things we "feel led" to do and say are actually just things we feel like doing and saying. A lot of the time the Lord has very little to do with it.

This problem is part of our Adamic nature and it is at work in us long before we are born-again. Before a person becomes a Christian they sometimes believe that they are intrinsically good or moral. At least, they say, there are not as bad as others. But those who know God know that in order for a person to enter the Kingdom they must first see that their righteousness is as filthy rags, that all have fallen short of the glory of God, and that none are righteous in His sight. We protest that we are not so bad, but God says the imagination of man's heart is only toward evil from his youth (cf. Genesis 8:21). To be saved, a person

must stop claiming any righteousness of their own and accept God's verdict of them. No matter how good they may think they are compared to the rest of mankind, they are, nevertheless, sinners in need of a Savior. They cannot be born-again until and unless they recognize and acknowledge what the Lord says about them and their condition.

We who have received the Lord as Savior have come to this knowledge of ourselves at least once in our lives. There came a day when we despaired of saving ourselves, and instead of clinging to our righteousness, we confessed our sins and admitted our need for a Savior. At that moment, Christ accepted us as His disciples. Confessing our sinfulness did not hinder us from entering the Kingdom; on the contrary, it opened the door for us to go in. The self-righteous, on the other hand, are disqualified by their own good works. How differently the Lord judges things.

KNOWING CHRIST, KNOWING SELF

When we are new disciples we have truly entered the Narrow Gate but there is still much we do not know and there is still much we need to learn. We know very little about Jesus, and we know very little about ourselves. And so, the Lord begins to lead us along the Narrow Path. He primarily wants to show us two things: who we are, and Who He is. These go hand-in-hand. Self-knowledge is just as important as Christ-knowledge. The revelation of Christ begins when God opens our eyes to know Jesus. The revelation of Self begins when God opens our eyes to know ourselves. When we see the insufficiency of Self and the sufficiency of Christ we will naturally despair of ourselves and look away to Jesus. On the other hand, if we do not see ourselves correctly, we will invariably imagine ourselves to be quite a bit better than we really are. We will mistake fleshly strength for spiritual strength. We will confess with our mouth that we cannot do anything apart from Jesus, but in actual practice we will take it upon ourselves to perform many works. In time all of these works become nothing. We will fail hundreds or thousands of times until we learn the lesson - if it comes from me, if it comes from my flesh, it is no good.

Before he saw the Lord, Paul was self-confident and dangerous. Those who trust in themselves have neither seen themselves nor seen the Lord. I am afraid that many people have the idea that Jesus came only to lend them a hand and help them feel more successful and fulfilled. Today the most popular Christian books tell us how to have a better life, how to prosper, how to be a "winner", how to improve our circumstances, and how to think nice, positive, encouraging thoughts about ourselves. The focus appears to be on making life here on earth more enjoyable and making believers more self-reliant and self-confident. This may not be the stated intention but it is the inevitable result - and if a few Scriptures can be used in the process, so much the better. It would be a mistake to equate holiness with misery and drudgery; but it is an even greater mistake to tell someone how wonderful they are until they have first despaired of themselves and learned the lesson that Paul learned: "In me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing."

Positive thinking is appropriate so long as I am living according to the Truth, but if I am unsundered to Jesus and living life according to my terms then I am in no position to think about myself in a positive light: I am positively deceived. We do not need Self-Esteem, we need Christ-Esteem. The more we see of Jesus the less we will trust in ourselves. That is why, once Paul learned his lesson, he wrote, "We have no confidence in the flesh" (Philippians 3:3b). He then goes on to list quite a number of things that seem important in terms of religion, status, social order, education, and good works - all the things that tend to make one self-confident and self-righteous. With one grand stroke, Paul says, "Yet, I count them all as dung, that I may win Christ." He simply discards what some people spend a lifetime trying to achieve. Here

is a man who knows the sufficiency of God as well as the insufficiency of himself.

"That is fine for new believers," someone will say. "But I have been a Christian for many years now. I have a good relationship with God, I have had many spiritual experiences and have made great progress. This message is good for younger, less mature believers, but it does not apply to me." On the contrary, to lose all confidence in myself is the mark of spiritual maturity. Real spiritual growth is evidence by increased confidence in Christ and a decreased confidence in myself. "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). You never outgrow these spiritual laws. Anyone who thinks they do not need to hear it again did not really hear it the first time.

THE EXAMPLE OF JOSEPH

We have a fine example of this in the life of Joseph. When Joseph was younger he realized that God had appointed him for a special purpose. God confirmed this special calling by giving Joseph prophetic dreams about his future. Joseph should have treasured these things in his heart and quietly waited for God to bring about His Will. But being young and full of self-confidence, Joseph could not resist sharing these dreams with his father and brothers. As a result, his brothers became jealous and almost killed him. Joseph was sold into slavery and spent many years in prison. It appeared as though his dreams would not come true. Yet God was using all these circumstances to teach Joseph to have no confidence in the flesh.

After many seasons of God's dealings, Joseph was brought to the palace to interpret Pharaoh's dream. Here was an opportunity for Joseph to finally lift himself out of a terrible situation. Someone had finally recognized him for his gift and they had the power to reward him handsomely for it. But the younger, self-confident Joseph is gone. He has finally learned the basic lesson of "not I, but Christ." "Can you interpret my dream?" Pharaoh asked. "It is not in me," Joseph replied. "But God will give you an answer" (cf. Genesis 41:16). And so He did, because now Joseph, emptied of himself, could be trusted. Joseph demonstrated even more wisdom and maturity in dealing with his brothers, freely demonstrating supernatural grace and love towards the ones who meant him evil.

All of our circumstances, tests, and trials are designed to get us to the place that we can say along with Joseph, "It is not in me." God permits many things to come our way that we could otherwise avoid if we were not so cocky and self-confident. God has to work long and hard to get through to us, but what a wonderful day it is when we finally learn the lesson, bow our head, and surrender everything over to Him. Then He can really use us; but even if He does not use us, we are His nonetheless. Submitted to Him, we are equally content to be where He has placed us, whether we are sitting in the dungeon or sitting on the throne.

THE EXAMPLE OF PETER

Peter is another good example of how every true disciple eventually learns that there is nothing good in his flesh. Peter began his walk with Jesus just as we did, acknowledging his sinfulness by saying, "Depart from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Some will protest their own righteousness and feel as though they are doing God a huge favor by becoming a Christian. But Peter made a splendid beginning by frankly acknowledging himself as a sinner, and so the Lord took him just as he was and began to disciple him.

After making some progress, however, Peter started to lose touch with himself. He had followed Jesus for three years and enjoyed close fellowship with Him. He had both seen and performed miracles in Jesus' Name. To all outward appearances he was no longer a "sinful man", he was a "spiritual man". Before,

Peter considered himself unworthy to be in the presence of Jesus. In just a short period of time you find this "sinful man" arguing along with the other disciples about which one of them will be the greatest! This ought to show us that there is a deeper death for us to die, and the more "spiritual" we become, the more easily we are deceived by our own spirituality.

If a dentist offers to remove one of your good teeth you will probably refuse. But if that tooth develops a cavity it is only a matter of time before you seek out the dentist and have it removed. The greater the pain, the quicker you seek relief. Similarly, when the Lord first speaks of taking up the Cross, we are apt to respond as did Peter: "Not so, Lord! This will never happen to you!" We see no need for death because Self has not yet become painful enough to us. When we are tired of the pain that comes from living in the flesh then we will gladly ask God to decrease us so that He can be increased. Until then no amount of teaching, argument, or doctrine is enough to convince a person.

Peter held out until the very end. He was a very difficult case, but the Lord was patient. When Jesus said that all would forsake Him, Peter protested and announced that even if all the other disciples fled, he would never forsake Jesus. Outwardly he acted and spoke as a deeply committed believer and disciple. But when temptation came he could not even stay awake long enough to pray. Perhaps he did not feel prayer was necessary; he was strong enough to resist without praying! Then, when Jesus allowed Himself to be arrested, Peter tried to defend Him with a sword. All these examples demonstrate how very little Peter knew about himself.

It was not until Peter actually did deny the Lord three times that he came to learn the same lesson that Paul learned: "I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing." After he denied the Lord he went out and wept bitterly. Finally he was broken. He hated himself for what he had done. At last he had seen something of himself, and he was ashamed. If he was capable of denying the Lord Jesus then he was capable of anything. Strangely enough, the more unworthy Peter believed himself to be, the more the Lord sought to restore and encourage him! The Lord does not break the bruised reed. When Peter was strong and arrogant, the Lord weakened him with a rebuke. When Peter was sufficiently weak and humble, the Lord strengthened him with encouragement. What a glorious Lord we have, Who meets us exactly where we are and ministers to us accordingly!

FAILURE SERVES GOD'S PURPOSE

Jesus was not surprised or disappointed when Peter failed. In like manner, He is not surprised or disappointed when you fail. Rather, He is waiting for you to fail so you will be reduced to Him. He has no illusions about you and He knows you through and through. He knows however much your spirit may be willing, your flesh is weak. Our weakness is not the trouble - the trouble is our unwillingness to acknowledge the weakness. Paul has no confidence in the flesh, so he can say, "I rejoice in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (II Corinthians 12:9b). But we do not rejoice in our weakness the way Paul does. We either refuse to admit it, or we hide it, or we try to improve upon it, or we try to make up for it by overcompensating in some other area. People will fight and argue with me on this point because they desperately want to salvage something for themselves. They have a fragile self-esteem and this kind of news is too painful too bear.

But I bring you good tidings of great joy, dear Christian friend! This failure of Self is the very key to living the Christian life. As painful as it is, the bitter tears of failure provide the water for nurturing the Precious Seed that is planted in your heart of hearts and making it grow. To despair of ourselves is the very key that

opens the door to all the power, the victory, and fruitfulness in Christ that we seek. "I KNOW that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwells no good thing." I KNOW IT, Paul says. No good thing. I know that in me, in my flesh, in my Self, there is nothing. Apart from Him I am nothing. He is Everything. CHRIST IN ME is my only Hope. In one part of me, my flesh, dwells no good thing. In the other part of me Christ lives.

Why do you lack power? Why are you unable to walk in continual victory? Why do you not see fruitfulness? Because power, victory, and fruitfulness only comes to a person who is standing on resurrection ground. God's holy anointing oil was not to be poured out upon the flesh. God does not grant these things to people who are still living for themselves. Resurrection life is for those who have died already - how could it be otherwise? Unless a man has passed through death he cannot know anything about resurrection. If a person will not consent to the Cross then they will not die, and if they will not die then they cannot be resurrected. If they are not resurrected they cannot ascend with Christ and be seated with Him in the heavenlies, for "flesh and blood cannot enter the Kingdom of God" (I Corinthians 15:50).

If you have a Bible Promise Book one of your favorites is probably Philippians 4:13: "I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me." Keep in mind, however, that the same man who said this also said, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). I can do all things through Christ Who strengthens me, but this Strength is only perfected in my weakness (cf. II Corinthians 12:9). Also remember that "Apart from Me, You can do nothing" is a golden promise as well. Because I promise you that anything you do apart from Jesus will amount to nothing!

HOW TO ENTER IN

Why is it so difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God? Because wealth creates the illusion of control and this breeds self-confidence. Money is like a drug that makes one feel invincible. Once the money is gone the illusion is destroyed and there is a natural humility that follows. Those who are rich in spiritual experiences find it equally difficult to enter in. Often when a person considers himself to be "apostolic" or "prophetic" or "spiritual" or "called to the ministry" they present a formidable challenge. It is most difficult to teach them anything or even discuss something with them because they are not poor in spirit, they are rich in spirit. They like to argue, fuss, debate, and find fault with others. Like the younger Joseph they always have a dream, vision, or word to speak, but they lack wisdom and maturity. They are the type of people who will walk halfway around the world to preach a message but will not drive across the street to listen to one. They want to be seen and heard, but they cannot bear to see or hear others.

Friends, it may be difficult to enter in, but it is not impossible. It IS impossible with man, this is true; but with God, all things are possible. The quicker we accept man's impossibility the quicker we can accept God's possibility. The way we enter in is right here: "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me." (Galatians 2:20). God's solution to our problem is to nail us to the cross with Jesus. If we will accept this sentence of death all our problems will die right along with us. The problems will not die until we are thoroughly dead ourselves. But the day we cease striving and meekly accept the Cross we will find everything is settled. We can protest our innocence and die slowly like the two thieves, or we can quietly commit ourselves into God's hand and give up the ghost.

What shall we do to enter in? The first thing to do is to stop doing. Then, let us learn to breathe words along these lines: Today, Lord, I give up. I am finished. I surrender. I know now that in my flesh dwells no good thing. Apart from You I am nothing, and apart from You I can do nothing. I do not even know how to pray. I accept the sentence of death, and I trust you to raise me from the dead. As I am decreased, may

You be increased. I have learned that I cannot; therefore, I will not. Into Your hands I commit my spirit. You are the Resurrection and the Life, and I will wait for you to raise me from the dead. I will not raise myself. Let Your Strength be perfected in my weakness.

When this is a practical reality for a person, and not just a theory, it will sound like this: I used to be quite confident in myself and very sure, but today I have no confidence in myself. I used to be very active, but today I am content to be still. If God should rise within me, I will certainly obey Him; but if He does not move, I dare not step out ahead of Him. I will work, but I will not work according to the flesh. Instead, I will work according to His Power that works in me mightily, this power that strengthens me to do all things, this power that is perfected in my weakness. I no longer hide my weaknesses, I rejoice in them, and I look for Christ in me to overcome them all. I have surrendered myself over to Him as a bondservant, as a prisoner of the Lord. If I live, I am the Lord's. If I die, I am the Lord's. So in life and in death, I belong to Him.

Friends, Jesus did NOT say, "I am the Crucifixion and the Death." He said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life." Meditate upon the difference! Resurrection and Life is on the other side of this Cross that Jesus requires us to take up. The Cross is the Gate of Life that leads us into the Promised Land of Resurrection. Let us embrace the Cross and glory in the Cross, for it is the power of God for our salvation. Amen.

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