

NOT SUFFICIENT AND YET SUFFICIENT

NO. 2160

A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, AUGUST 24, 1890,
 BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God, who also has made us able ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”
2 Corinthians 3:5, 6.

Read also the Revised Version of the same text, for it will be often used in this discourse—

“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves; but our sufficiency is from God; who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the Spirit: for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.”
2 Corinthians 3:5, 6.

PAUL had given some account of what God had done by him and had described the work in these words—“You are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.” Before he had worked out that charming figure, he had asked the question in the 16th verse of the second chapter—“Who is sufficient for these things?” I seem to hear that question repeated as he finishes the description. The more wonderful the work, the more intense the inquiry—“Who is sufficient for these things?”

Who can turn hearts of stone into flesh? Who can write without ink? Who can write on the heart? Who can so write that what is written shall be eternal? “Who is sufficient for these things?” The more we study the work of Grace worked by God through his ministers, the more are we forced to ask, “Who is sufficient for these things?” To raise the dead, to turn a stone to flesh—who is sufficient for these? To give eyes to the blind and ears to the deaf. To subdue the proud will and enlighten the darkened heart. To deliver men from the fascinations of sin and Satan. To bring them out of darkness into God’s marvelous light. To turn rebels into sons of God—who is sufficient for all these things? Yet nothing less than this will bring salvation! Here we have a chain of miracles—an Alpine range of wonders piled upon each other—yet no one marvel can be dispensed with and we are to be the ministers by whom such miracles are worked! “Who is sufficient for these things?”

Having asked the question, Paul now gives an answer to it in the words of my text. All these wonders have been worked—men have had their minds written upon by the finger of God and the stony heart has become a tablet of flesh—and all this has been done by the agency of men! Ministers have been, in God’s hands, the means of working stupendous wonders of Grace, yes, of turning the world upside down and of saving men from going down into the Pit! Since these things have been done, there must have been some kind of sufficiency, or adaptation in the means by which they were done. From where did it come? Was it natural to the men, or did they acquire it by education, or by practice, or by imitation? The Apostle goes on to answer the question by telling us what that sufficiency was *not* and what it was. He replies to his own inquiry—“Who is sufficient for these things?”

I. By your leave we shall first of all regard the text as AN ANSWER TO THE MINISTER’S QUESTION, “Who is sufficient for these things?” The answer is given first in the negative and secondly, in the positive. “Who is sufficient for these things?” *The negative reply* is—“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.” In this instance *the best of preachers denies self-sufficiency*. Remember who it is that is writing. It is Paul, called to be an Apostle, to whom the Lord Jesus had *personally* appeared—a man of singular zeal and activity—and of remarkable ability in the things of God.

He was not a whit behind the chief of the Apostles, an expounder of the Truth of God, a founder of Churches, a father of myriads of souls! Yet he says, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.” He was, when he wrote this Epistle, no beginner in holy oratory, but a well-exercised Evangelist. He had been deeply taught of God. He had preached the Word fully and had gained an experience unrivalled. Beginning with a wonderful conversion, going on through sufferings, persecutions, journeys and labors, he had become a man of great weight and influence. Although long dead, his word would be law to us at this moment. And yet he confesses, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.”

Here was a man, too, who had been inspired by the Holy Spirit—a man to write Epistles to Churches—a man who spoke with Divine authority and would not allow that authority to be questioned, for he felt that he was truly sent of God. And yet you see him bowing humbly down before the Throne of heavenly Grace and admitting his own impotence in these words—“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.” I cannot leave this point, for here we have a most successful soul-winner making his lowly acknowledgment. How many were already in Heaven, converted under the ministry of the Apostle Paul?! How many on earth were on the road to Glory, led there by his teaching? How many had he inspired with the courage of martyrs, with the holiness of saints? He was a mine of spiritual wealth to the Churches. I know no man who did more for the propagation of the faith than the indefatigable Paul! And yet he cries, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.”

Brethren, if Paul is not sufficient of himself, what are you and I? Where are you, you lay preachers and Sunday school teachers, and workers for God in different ways? Do you indulge the dream of self-sufficiency? Be ashamed of your folly in the presence of a great man who knew what he said and who spoke under the direction of the Spirit of God who wrote deliberately, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves.” And this negative is strengthened by the fact that *he did not feel sufficient in a very necessary point*—“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves *to think anything* as of ourselves.” I believe that our old translation is as good as good can be and that it sets forth the meaning of the Greek better than any other—“We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves.”

I do not intend to insist upon this meaning as the only one, for I will bring in the Revised Version directly. Still, our version is to be defended and in any case its meaning must be retained. What? Was not the Apostle able to do his own thinking? Must he receive thinking-Grace—help to think aright? In these days we are rather overdone with “great thinkers.” Wherever you go you hear of “advanced thinking,” “modern thought” and so forth. It is true that ten bushels of the stuff are not worth half a farthing in the estimate of those who hunger for spiritual food—but chaff takes up much room—and as the wind blows it about it excites great attention. A fourth part of a cab of doves’ dung, worth nothing in ordinary times, fetched a long price during the famine in Samaria. And today, when there is a famine of true theological learning, a great fuss is made concerning the crude speculations of vainglorious “thinkers.”

I do not believe the Apostle ever tried to think upon religious matters otherwise than as the Spirit of God taught him. He was content to abide within the circle of Inspiration. I pray that we may never travel beyond our orbit and quit the Divine circuit of Revelation. I find enough in my Bible to think about without going beyond that sphere. If we should ever exhaust Holy Scripture, we might then try to think something “as of ourselves.” But as we shall never do that, we may be satisfied to tarry in Revelation as in a land which flows with milk and honey. Let us not aim at being original thinkers, but at being witnesses and heralds of what God says to men.

Our Lord Jesus strove not to be an original thinker, for he said, “My doctrine is not Mine, but His that sent Me.” The Holy Spirit does not speak as an original thinker, for the Lord Jesus said, “He shall take of Mine, and shall show it unto you.” As we have reminded you before, the original thinker of the Bible is one of whom it is said, “When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own.” We are not wishful to emulate him in such originality! We are not sufficient to think anything as from ourselves! Yet, thinking is the preacher’s domain. He has to think of the fitness of a subject for his discourse, but he will not find his right subject by mere thinking—he must wait upon his Master for guidance. When he has found his subject he must work it out in his own mind and yet he is so insufficient in and of himself that he will not work it out aright unless he cries to the Holy Spirit to aid his thought and open to him the Scriptures.

When the time has come for him to tell out what he has thought, he has to think over his subject aloud and speak with the mouth that which he has molded in his mind—and in this he is greatly dependent upon the help of God. In pouring from one bottle into another how much is spilt! How often does it happen that as the neck of a bottle may be too small to receive what is abundantly poured out, so the mind to be filled may not be sufficiently receptive! To think aloud,

which means to speak instructively, is no easy thing—and so to speak that men are *saved* by our speaking is quite beyond us! In this matter “We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves.” This impotence even in thought puts the preacher into a very low condition. In that position let him be content to remain! Let him look to the Lord for his thinking and speaking—and then he will do well!

In the whole matter we are of ourselves insufficient. The Revised Version puts it—“Not that we are sufficient of ourselves, to account anything as from ourselves.” Now this declaration has a further and wider sweep than the former for, as I understand it, it includes all that I have said about thinking and with it every other matter which is involved in our holy service. “We are not sufficient to account anything as from ourselves”—we have not enough sufficiency to be able to reckon any *part* of our ability as coming from ourselves! Does a man wish to reach the human mind with heavenly Truth? He must do it by the sufficiency of God! Does he wish to get at peculiar cases? He must be instructed by the Spirit of God! Does he desire to awake the careless? Let him look to the quickening Spirit! Does he wish to comfort the disconsolate and cheer the despairing? He is not sufficient of himself for this—let him call upon the Comforter, even the Spirit of God!

As to that deep mystery of our holy faith which is called regeneration, or the new birth, the preacher may not *dare* to think that he can perform this! Into that secret chamber where men are born from above none can intrude. He that works the new birth is God alone. In the new creation, as in the old, He takes counsel with none. Of this, especially, all must say, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to account anything as from ourselves.” *Thus all must be of God.* Our thought of Divine doctrine; our preparation for the delivery of that thought; the choice of words for utterance—the very tone and especially the spirit, the feeling, the faith with which the preacher delivers his message—all these are essential things and in none of them is the preacher sufficient of himself. You see, then, what the great Doctor of Grace, the grand teacher of the New Covenant, thought of human sufficiency! If he felt that for the least as well as for the greatest thing in our ministry we must look to God, surely our experience confirms his statement! Let us take the lowest place and in humble consciousness of inability, let us look to the Strong for strength—but never be so foolish as to rely upon ourselves.

We will now joyfully consider how the question is answered *positively*. There is an answer to the question, “Who is sufficient for these things?” The answer is, “All who trust in the Lord are made sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.” This is explained to us in the first sentence, “*Our sufficiency is from God.*” In God there is all the wisdom, all the thought, all the love, all the power, all the conquering energy which a minister can require! And to work upon the hearts of men there lies in the Omnipotent Grace of God a fullness of might so that the stony heart shall be transformed and on its fleshy tablet shall be written the will of the Lord! That our sufficiency should be of God is infinitely better than if it were of ourselves, for then our sufficiency cannot be questioned, cannot be suspended, cannot be exhausted!

If you had to bear your own charges, you might soon be bankrupt. But now you are like a child that travels with his father and his father pays for everything. He has no care about cost. He is not called upon to exercise a pinching economy. He draws upon an inexhaustible purse for all he needs and leads a princely life—for his father pays for all. Our sufficiency is of God—let us practically enjoy this Truth of God. We are poor, leaking vessels and the only way for us to keep full is to put our pitcher under the perpetual flow of boundless Grace. Then, despite its leakage, the cup will always be full to the brim! “Our sufficiency is of God.” “I do not feel able,” cries one, “to win a soul. I feel it is a work too hard for me.” Continue to feel that Truth of God, but at the same time let faith balance the feeling by reminding you that “Our sufficiency is of God.” Brother, if God sent you He will go with you! And if God gives you a message to deliver, He will prepare the ears and the hearts for that message. Blessed words are these for every minister of Christ and for all of you who in any way are working for His dear name! “Our sufficiency is of God.”

In very deed *we are made sufficient*, for the Apostle says, “Who also made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.” The Lord makes His servants sufficient for the work required of them. If we had to change the heart, we should not be sufficient—if we had to write upon the heart by the power of the Spirit, we should not be sufficient, for the Spirit of God is not at our command. But if we occupy only this position—that we bear witness to God’s New Covenant promises—then His Grace makes us sufficient! There is a little valve in an engine which if it is touched will set its whole machinery in motion. That engine may be turning a number of wheels and we should not be able to do the work of all this machinery—and yet, in another sense, we are quite capable of doing all the work—for by turning a certain handle

the engine puts forth its power, the wheels move and the work is done. A little child with a trembling finger can set loose tremendous forces and so accomplish enormous results.

Beloved, we are made much of by God, but we of ourselves are *nothing*. I said to myself, as I came here this morning—What is my part in the matter? Set in a valley of dry bones, I ask myself, “can these dry bones live?” If I had to make them live, “Who is sufficient for these things?” But my work is not to make the dry bones live! The breath from the four winds will do that! My work is not even to put the bones together, bone to its bone. I could not refashion the scattered anatomies. What have I to do, then? I have but to prophesy and say, “Thus says the Lord.” Now, for this, Divine Grace has given me a sufficiency. It is not, “Thus I say.” Not “Thus I think.” But, “O you dry bones, hear the Word of the Lord.” For that proclamation I have received ability from the Holy Spirit and I do not fear to exercise it! We are made sufficient to be ministers of the New Covenant.

Hear a lesson. Dear Christian lady, you have been lamenting, “Alas, I am not sufficient for my class.” You are sufficient if this is what the Lord has called you to do. To pray for those girls—to tell them the way of salvation and with loving heart to weep them to the Savior—the Lord can make you sufficient for this. Yonder dear Friend says, “I have been preaching in a village and the people are so dull that I cannot move them. I am not sufficient for the task.” Go and confess that fact to your Lord and then begin again with the sufficiency of God—and you will mark a change come over the spirit of the scene! I pray you, do not despair! The painful discovery of your own insufficiency ought to be the means of leading you to the Lord and so of girding you with new strength!

The Apostle evidently means that *through Grace we are adapted to the work*—“He has made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.” We are not ministers of the Old Covenant of command and threats—if we were so, we might exceedingly fear and quake. We are sent to be ministers of the Spirit of that Covenant which says, “A new heart, also, will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.” We are ministers of a Covenant of pure Grace in which God, and not man, is the worker! We are, by the Truth spoken in love, to convey to men’s hearts the Holy Spirit. We are ministers, not of the letter of the Law, which kills—but of the Spirit, that gives life.

“Oh!” says one, “that is hard work.” It seems to me, on the contrary, to be the easiest of work when Divine power works in us! Shall I tell you what is needed to make a man sufficient for it? He must be able to bear personal witness to the Truth of God. Were you ever filled with life by the Spirit of the New Covenant—the Covenant of gracious promise? Then you can tell poor sinners where life is to be had. Were you slain by the Law and are you made alive by the Spirit of God? Then you will preach of the Law of God tremblingly and you will speak of life in Jesus Christ with living certainty! Do you know in your own soul what it is to be quickened by the Holy Spirit? If not, hands off the ark of God! But if Divine power has come upon you and you have been made to live the life of faith in Christ Jesus, then you have one point of ability to be a minister.

Beyond this, a living, loving heart is a great necessity. Have tender sympathy with those who have not so learned Christ and feel an intense desire that they may obtain eternal life. Bring your spiritual life into contact with their spiritual death and as one candle lights another, so may the Lord convey life into other hearts by your testimony! If our part were other than it is we might despair—but if we are called upon to be witnesses for God and sympathizers with God, then this ability is to be had—yes, we trust the Lord has already “made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.”

Dear Friends, there must be in us great longing of heart to be of service to our fellow men. He that can come into his pulpit and preach, saying to himself, “I do not care whether souls are saved or not,” will win no hearts for Jesus. But, oh, if God the Holy Spirit makes you tender towards never-dying souls and eager to snatch them from the eternal burnings, then you have that kind of ability which will fit you for the Master’s use! You see those wires which pass along our roads—they are nothing but dead metal. Are they sufficient of themselves to spy out what is happening in the capital of France and to report it here? No, not of themselves.

Yet that unconscious wire is quite sufficient to accomplish the transmission of news from Paris. Information is obtained and the wires flash the message under the sea to our door! The wire is quite sufficient, though not sufficient of itself. The Lord uses us as His telegraph wires to communicate between Himself and fallen men. And we, by His almighty power, are made to convey to them the Truth with power. It flashes from our heart and tongue to the ears and heart of the man whom the Lord intends to bless. The words which we speak are not ours, but the words of our Lord who said,

“The words that I speak unto you, they are Spirit, and they are life.” May many of my hearers know this in their own cases!

II. I have worked out my first point and we have viewed our text as the answer to the minister’s question. Secondly, we must view the text as A DIRECTION TO THE HEARER’S THOUGHTS. These thoughts must again be both negative and positive. The first negative counsel I suggest to you is this—*trust not your own sufficiency*. If we who preach to you and if those who were far greater than we are felt bound to say, “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves,” how little must *your* sufficiency be!

It is very wonderful how fully in Scripture the inability of man is set out. Here we see our inability to *think* aright—“We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves.” In another passage we find that a good will is of the Lord. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.” To will aright is more than to think aright—but we never make so distinct an advance as to will that which is good until we are made willing. When we get as far as that, we pull up all of a sudden and make a dead halt, finding, with the Apostle, “To will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not”—then are we driven to God for power to turn our willing into acting.

In this going to God we are brought to a stand-still again, for we read and feel that, “We know not what we should pray for as we ought.” What can we do, if even in prayer we fail? Suppose we are taught to pray and, helped by the Spirit of God, we begin to work—yet we cannot keep on working without fresh Grace—for David, when he had worked up the people to a very high degree of consecration, thought it necessary to pray that the Lord would “keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Your people.” Our Savior prayed, “Father, keep them,” for we soon go back to the old deadness and lethargy unless He that first made us alive *keeps* us alive.

Are any of you carelessly saying to yourselves, “I can be saved just whenever I like. I shall put off thought upon religious matters for I can believe and pray and live rightly at my own option. My salvation lies in my own power and the keys of Heaven swing at my belt. I can delay as long as I please and then at last cry, ‘Lord have mercy upon me!’ and go straight away from the sewers to Heaven.” You will find the Truth of God to be quite another thing. “It is not of him that wills, nor of him that runs, but of God that shows mercy.” I shall pray God that this wicked self-sufficiency of yours may be driven out and that you may learn the meaning of Jonah’s words, “Salvation is of the Lord.” I think this is a plain teaching of our text.

The next lesson I suggest to you is, *seek not another ministry*. It may be right, as far as I am concerned, that you should choose another *preacher*—but do not so on the ground that we are not sufficient—for He “made us sufficient as ministers of a new covenant.” Some run about from one preacher to another hoping to find a peculiar something in one which they have not found in another—but in all true preachers the sufficiency is one—for “our sufficiency is of God.” Try the spirits and hear only the man who preaches the Truth of God, but look for nothing in the *man*. Anxiously wish to find eternal life and if you are so seeking, our preaching is sufficient to bring it to you, for it has already brought it to thousands. In this house of prayer so many have found eternal life in Christ Jesus that we seek no letters of commendation as to our sufficiency in God. He has used us and can use us again—and you, by earnestly hearing the Gospel, if you are willing and obedient—shall eat the good of the land. But if you do not bow your necks to the scepter of Divine Grace, it shall not be through *our* deficiency that you are lost, but through your own rejection of the Savior!

The next negative lesson that the hearer should learn is, *rely not on your own thoughts*. Here the Apostle says, “We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves.” Do not, I pray you, therefore, indulge the *thinking* faculty at the expense of *believing*. Some are always trying to dive deep into things and they go so far down into mysterious subjects and debated doctrines that they stir up the mud at the bottom and cannot see anything themselves—neither can we see what they are doing. What do you think? A man is perishing. A life belt is thrown to him and he will not touch it till he knows in what shop the belt was made and whether the workpeople are paid good wages. Poor soul! He will die because his mind is so enquiring and his senses have gone wool-gathering at an unseasonable time.

Jesus Christ is the Savior for sinners. Believe in Him and you shall live—be washed in His blood and you shall be whiter than snow. Continually raising critical questions and prying into the infinite nothingness will surely land you on the dark shores of despair and death. Happy are they who believe, take the Word of God and rest thereon. “Still,” says one, “surely you would have us think?” Yes, think as much as ever you can, but I am not authorized to preach to you,

“He that *thinks* and is baptized shall be saved.” I am commanded to tell you, “He that *believes* and is baptized shall be saved.” “But is there not such a thing as honest doubt?” cries one. I suppose there may be, but all that doubt which is now so popular and ostentatiously labels itself, “honest doubt,” I am a little suspicious of.

If I were walking over lonely fields at night and should meet a man and he took the trouble to assure me over and over again that he was an honest man, I should not feel much reassured. If a man were cutting a pane of glass out of my window, in the middle of the night, and when challenged answered that he was an honest man, I think I should let my dog loose and leave *him* to decide the question. When a sect everlastingly prefaces all it has to say by claiming to be honest, I am rather inclined to suspect that it needs to give assurance. The Chinese trader who put up over his shop, “*No cheat here,*” turned out to be the biggest rogue in the street. If you are honest, you will confess that you have sinned and then you will come to Jesus for that remission of sins which comes through His sacrifice. Look to Jesus and live! He has borne away the sin of all Believers. He suffered in the sinner’s place and whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. Oh, if you believe in Him, that act of believing shall do more for you than seven ages of thinking could accomplish so long as you refuse to accept the Savior whom God Himself has provided!

Once more, as a negative direction to the hearer, *let none of us be content with the letter.* Let no man rest in the hearing of the Law and the trying to keep the Commandments, for by the works of the Law there shall no flesh be justified in God’s sight. What is meant by the letter here is evidently the Law, if you note the context. The Law condemns and so is the ministration of death—the Gospel brings the promise of the Spirit and so is life. Be not satisfied with merely knowing the letter of even the New Testament. Be not content with knowing the Doctrines of Grace and being called orthodox. Seek to feel the power of Gospel Truth. There is a dead orthodoxy as well as a dead heterodoxy. You must have the Spirit as well as the letter, or else the letter will be a savor of death to you. Power must be present as well as form, or else “having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof,” you shall be no nearer Heaven than if you had not even the form.

Now, gather direction positively. First, *look beyond us who are preachers—yes, look to the Spirit of God.* In the meetings of the Society of Friends they sometimes sit still and nobody speaks. It would do us good to have an occasional silence, if so the people would learn to look clean away from human agency to the power of God. I think we may continue speaking and yet if you are wise you will put no reliance upon us or our speaking apart from the Lord our God. Think not that you have done a good deed in merely coming to hear us talk. O Friends, there must be more than words in the Gospel ministry or all will be in vain! There must be a secret heavenly power in our testimony or it is no better than dead. Our Gospel is not a sword that glitters, but an edge that cuts, wounds, and kills! Do you know the power of the Word? If not, I pray God you may know it, for without the Spirit of the Lord you are nothing and have nothing. If you hear the preacher and his thoughts, but have never felt the Holy Spirit revealing to you Truth in the love of it, and in the power of it, you are in an evil case.

Further, *look beyond thought by faith.* Think, as we have already said, but still labor most after believing. To believe is to follow the way of salvation. Evermore it is written, “The just shall live by faith.” “He that believes on the Son has everlasting life.” “Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God.” “He that believes on Him is not condemned, but he that believes not is condemned already.” O my Hearer, your chief business is to *believe* on the Son of God! To speak plainly, you have to believe in Christ or to be damned! Whatever your own thoughts may be, you must accept God’s thoughts and yield your understanding, yours affections and your will—and accept God’s terms of Grace which are that you are nothing, and that Christ is everything. Oh, I pray you, dear Hearers, if you do not, by our ministry, get help in the matter of *faith*, do not think that you have been helped at all! All mere thinking out of problems and working out of propositions will leave you where you were. It is believing that brings eternal life into the soul and the more believing there is, the more does that life abound.

Next, *look beyond the outward command even of the New Testament.* I need not exhort you to look beyond the commands of the Old Testament—you have done so—but even with the New Testament you must not rest in the outward form of it. To believe that *faith* will save you, will not save you—you must *exercise* faith itself. To recognize that the Believer should be baptized will not save you, but you must yourself believe and be baptized. Neither will the Baptism save you unless you are buried with Christ in it. You must come and take Christ and be washed from your sins in His precious blood or you will die in your sins. To believe that the Holy Spirit can new-create you will not new-create

you—you must in very deed be made a new creature in Christ Jesus by the Holy Spirit! Get beyond the mere shells of doctrine and taste the heavenly kernel which is the true food of the soul.

My dear Hearers, I am terribly afraid lest I should be ministering to your comfort while you are out of Christ. I come not here to be a fiddler at your feast of sin. I would not set the tune for you to dance by. My music is of another sort—it is a certain sound which calls you to do battle for your lives against your sins. I pray you, put no reliance upon the externals of religion, but seek the inward and spiritual Grace of which they are meant to be the channels. Repent! Believe! Lay hold on Christ and quit your hold of sin! Let not this exhortation be mere words to you. May the Spirit of power go with the command that you may repent and believe the Gospel and so may be saved! I beseech those of you who are regular hearers of the Gospel to get beyond even the best of hearing. I will not say, “If you do not mean to lay hold on Christ do not come to hear, and thus increase your condemnation,” for you might take me at my word and then I should be sorry for your absence.

I should like you to remain within gunshot of the Gospel, for you may yet feel its power. But there are persons coming here regularly and sitting in their pews, who are, I fear, deceiving their own souls by the very fact of their coming here. They think because they have heard a sermon that they must be the better for it. Alas, they may be all the worse for their hearing, for it may have flattered them in their self-righteousness and made them more secure in their pride! Is it not foolish for any man to say, “I must be a good fellow for I hear nothing unsound. I keep to the old Gospel and I am a constant attendant on the means of Grace”? If you do not get the Grace of the means, the means of Grace will be of no use to you! May God the Holy Spirit help you to get away from the mere letter to the real soul and Spirit of the whole business! May you feel, believe and actually yield your heart to Christ!

I have known some who were brought up to hear the Truth of God from their childhood and almost as a matter of course they joined the Church in their youth and stood well as to moral character for years. But after a while they grew indifferent to Divine things and gradually wandered away into sheer worldliness, almost blaming others for allowing them to make a profession. In their case the Holy Spirit never wrote upon the tablets of flesh but I scratched a letter or two on the unchanged stone. The work was never done by the Holy Spirit, but by parental influence and pastoral persuasion—and so in due season it all vanished. I pray God to save you from the religion which is born of excitement and revivalism and shows itself in spasms. Come to close work with God by confessing your sin and laying hold on Christ Crucified with a real, living faith! May the Truth of God be written on your hearts by the Spirit. God grant it!

III. I finish, now, by A LESSON TO THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH. To you people of God, in your endeavor to spread the Gospel, I say, first, whispering it in your ear, *trust no man who is self-sufficient*. Oh, yes, he can do it! It is easy for him to preach fine sermons. Bless you! He can do it at any time and anywhere. He can convince and convert souls in any quantity. Did you read in the paper, “Glorious meeting! Eighteen souls out for salvation”? He was speaking that evening. *He* can fetch them. Certain other preachers doubt him, but that is all jealousy. He can do it—that he can.

Let such a man go where pride is at home. Our lowly Lord will not have him. Christ’s men are more apt at weeping than at bragging—they feel their inability rather than their ability. The man who does everything *for* the Lord is the man who cannot do anything *without* the Lord. The man that knows he is nobody, God will make somebody—but he that is strong and mighty, king and lord, master in the realm of thought, who can make his own theology and so forth—he shall wander on till he loses himself among the dark mountains to his sure destruction! Do not be in a hurry to put self-confidence into a leading position—he will be better in the rear rank—if in the army at all.

Next, *doubt not the sufficiency of the Gospel in any case*. Since our sufficiency is of God, you may take the Gospel down that dark, horrible slum where there are none but thieves and harlots—and it will do its work. Since our sufficiency is of God, with God all things are possible. You have a horrible neighbor who seldom speaks without an oath—he is as wicked a man as ever lived and therefore you never give him a sermon, or speak to him about Christ, for you fear that your Gospel is not suitable for him. He is just the very man that God may bless! Go and try the unlikely one! Behold how the Pharisees and scribes enter not into the kingdom but the publicans and harlots, conscious of their guilt, welcome the Savior! Despair of nobody. If there is a spot on earth where the Missionary Society has no chance, to that place it ought first to send! Difficulties should be invitations and impossibilities should be attractions. For “our sufficiency is of God.” Is it not so?

The next lesson is *value the New Covenant*. See how Paul puts it—“We are sufficient ministers of a new covenant.” In some congregations people never hear the word, “covenant” and yet he that understands the two Covenants has the key of theology! The Covenants are the diamond hinges on which the golden doors of Grace are made to turn. Dear Christian people, I pray you, value Covenant blessings. Value the New Covenant of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ—the Covenant, not of *works*, but of *Grace* which runs after this fashion—“I will, and they shall”—the Covenant which secures the salvation of the chosen by guaranteeing all that is needed for eternal life. Prize the New Covenant and often speak of it!

Next, *let life be seen in all we do*. If our ministry is not of the letter, but of the Spirit, and of the Spirit that gives life, our hearers ought to have an abundance of life! Many professors seem to have life only in a part of them. Some have life in the jaw and can talk religion, but none in the hands, for they cannot act it. Some have life in the head, but they have none in the heart. Some I know have never much life in their hands, especially that hand which goes into their pocket, for it goes in dead and comes out empty. Perhaps there would be some life in it if you made them an offer of a guinea—then they might stretch out their hand to *receive* it. We need to be filled with life to the fullest! Give me a Christian man all alive! Every bit and particle of us should respond to the Gospel. Let but the Gospel whisper and we should be awake to hear it!

When joy is the note, let us be glad. When faith is the note, let us believe up to the hilt. And when love is spoken of, may coals of juniper burn in our hearts. I hope many of that sort are here—yet there are some who are dead and cold. If they give you a shake of the hand you feel as though a dead fish were touching you—they are as cold as icebergs. Warm-hearted fellowship is a sweet sign of life. And lastly, *glorify God, you members of the Church, in all that is done*. If the will of God is written on any heart, praise God for it. When any are converted, they should let the minister know—the instrument will have a rich reward in knowing that a soul is brought to Christ! But above all, there should be joy in the Church and praise to God over every soul that is saved.

And shall there not be some souls saved this morning? O my Hearer, I pray God it may be *your* soul! Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ? Then you are born of God! Do you believe in your heart that God has raised Christ from the dead? Then you shall be saved! Will you yield yourself up to Jesus that He should be your Savior and your Lord? Do you lie at the feet of the All-Merciful One, confess your sin and plead the blood of Christ? Go your way—your sins, which are many, are forgiven you—and let God have the glory of it forever and ever.

Brothers and Sisters if God has blessed you, *pray for us*. We are not sufficient of ourselves even to *think* anything from ourselves. Therefore pray the Lord to be our sufficiency. Brethren, when God has blessed us, praise with us, for if the Lord has done it all, He must have all the glory forever and ever. Amen.

PORTIONS OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—2 Corinthians 2:14-17; 3.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—906, 407, 455.

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307.