



"Performance proves the man."
—Pindar

21-Feb-14

Without Me, You Can Do Nothing (Part One)

The *New Testament in Modern English*, commonly known as the "Phillips Translation," contains a salient rendering of [John 15:1-8](#):

I am the real vine, my Father is the vine-dresser. He removes any of my branches which are not bearing fruit and he prunes every branch that does bear fruit to increase its yield. Now, you have already been pruned by my words. You must go on growing in me and I will grow in you. For just as the branch cannot bear any fruit unless it shares the life of the vine, so you can produce nothing unless you go on growing in me. I am the vine itself, you are the branches. It is the man who shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful. For apart from me you can do nothing at all. The man who does not share my life is like a branch that is broken off and withers away. He becomes just like the dry sticks that men collect and use for the firewood. But if you live your life in me, and my words live in your hearts, you can ask for whatever you like and it will [be done] for you. This is how my Father will be glorified—in your becoming fruitful and being my disciples.

[Jesus](#) speaks this during His final Passover, after Judas has left the room. Part of the final instructions to His disciples, the discourse culminates in His prayer in John 17 for the disciples and for those who will believe through them—meaning us.

CGG Weekly: Without Me, You Can Do Nothing (Part One) (21-Feb-14)

In the New King James Version, verses 4-5 read: "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for *without Me you can do nothing*" (emphasis ours throughout).

There comes a point in the lives of all of God's children when we are brought face to face with this fact, forcing us to acknowledge our utter powerlessness and inability to carry out God's will on our own. This can be very uncomfortable and humbling, because so much of this world's culture is based on ideas of individualism, of personal achievement, and of living life under one's own power. So we tend to avoid acknowledging our weakness, our helplessness, and our absolute inability to accomplish spiritual things—on our own. Our human nature is disposed to glory in what it has done and can do on a physical level, yet that nature is wholly insufficient for producing spiritual fruit. But wherever pride remains, we bristle at the suggestion that we are not up to any task. All too often we may mentally—or even verbally—agree with Jesus' words here, but at the first opportunity, we try to do things without Him.

A strong, dramatic contrast to this appears in the example and words of Christ. We know that He was [God](#) in the flesh, and that He had all the resources of the universe at His disposal. Yet, the details and structure of that reality can easily slip from our minds. Consider this sampling of verses showing that Jesus harbored no notion that He was doing things by His own power:

- Then Jesus answered and said to them, "Most assuredly, I say to you, *the Son can do nothing of Himself*, but what He sees the Father do; for whatever He does, the Son also does in like manner." ([John 5:19](#))
- *I can of Myself do nothing*. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is righteous, because I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me. ([John 5:30](#))
- Then Jesus said to them, "When you lift up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am He, and that *I do nothing of Myself*, but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things." ([John 8:28](#))
- For *I have not spoken on My own authority*, but *the Father who sent Me gave Me a command*, what I should say and what I should speak. ([John 12:49](#))
- Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you *I do not speak on My own authority*, but *the Father who dwells in Me*

does the works. ([John 14:10](#))

Clearly, while Jesus was in the flesh, He had no ability in Himself that was different from any other man's. He was flesh and subject to the same limitations as any other fleshy human. What He did have, though, was a perfect union with the Father, which was the source of all that He accomplished. The source of His authority, His power, His life-giving words, His rebukes, His judgments, the miracles, His responses to carnal men, His ability to submit to all kinds of evil without being overcome by it, and His willingness to be tortured and killed by His own creations—everything that He said and did was a result of His being in perfect alignment and agreement with His Father. Because He knew the Father's will, all He had to do was ask the Most High God to do something that human flesh could not, and it was done.

However, as we read, He could do nothing of Himself, making us exactly like Him in this regard. We are made to depend on God. We are made for union with Him, and nothing works properly without that. Our carnality tries to assert and maintain a measure of independence, but Jesus did exactly the opposite. Not only did He proclaim that His Father was doing these things, but He also declared frequently that He and His Father were one. There was perfect union. In Him was no independent spirit, and consequently, the Father accomplished tremendous things through Him.

In [John 15:1-8](#), then, Jesus really means that without Him we can do *nothing*. Within the immediate context, the "doing" refers to bearing fruit that will glorify God. If we expand the context all the way back to the beginning of His discourse in John 13, we find other things He told them to do that cannot truly be done without Him. He instructed His disciples to keep His commandments, to keep His words, and to love one another as He had loved them. Trying to do those things without Christ will result in fruit that does not glorify the Father, because we are incapable of doing them correctly or fully on our own!

Consider verses 4-5 in the Phillips translation: "You can produce nothing *unless you go on growing in me*. I am the vine itself, you are the branches. It is the man who *shares my life and whose life I share who proves fruitful*. For *apart from Me you can do nothing at all*." This clarifies that producing spiritual fruit is not simply a matter of believing Jesus or being forgiven through His blood. He says we will not produce anything unless we "*go on growing in [Him]*."

If we really want to produce good fruit, it will require, not just an ongoing relationship with Christ, but one that is continually deepening and expanding—going on to perfection ([Hebrews 6:1](#)). Part Two will expand on what is necessary for a Christian to bear

spiritual fruit.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

Producing Fruit

by John W. Ritenbaugh

In this message, John Ritenbaugh, using the parable of Luke 11:24-28, admonishes that being cleaned up (or purged of leaven) is only the beginning of the growth process. To be made clean only prepares us for producing fruit. God's concern is for us to mature spiritually. If we stand still (resting on the laurels of our justification), the dark forces are going to pull us backwards. Uselessness invites disaster. We have to get away from the negative fixation of not doing and begin concentrating on doing. The consequences of not bearing fruit are graphically described in John 15:6. God's purpose, once we are cleaned, is to produce growth in us.

From the Archives: Featured Article

Growing to Perfection

by Charles Whitaker

Charles Whitaker shows that spiritual growth mimics our physical growth to maturity. If we continue in the process, we will "grow into" our potential as God's children.

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