

THE SHEEP AND THEIR SHEPHERD

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A SERMON
DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON,
 AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.

“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me.”
John 10:27.

CHRISTIANS are here compared to sheep. Not a very flattering comparison you may say. But then we do not wish to be flattered, nor would our Lord deem it good to flatter us. While far from flattering, it is, however, eminently consoling, for of all creatures there are not any more compassed about with infirmity than sheep. In this frailty of their nature they are a fit emblem of ourselves—at least, of so many of us as have believed in Jesus and become His disciples. Let others boast how strong they are. Yet if there are strong ones anywhere, certainly we are weak. We have proved our weakness, and day by day we lament it. We do confess our weakness—yet may we not repine at it, for, as Paul said, so we find, when we are weak then are we strong.

Sheep have many needs, yet they are very helpless, and quite unable to provide for themselves. But for the shepherd's care they would soon perish. This, too, is our case. Our spiritual needs are numerous and pressing, yet we cannot supply *any* of them. We are travelers through a wilderness that yields us neither food nor water. Unless our bread drops down from Heaven, and our water flows out of the living Rock, we must die. Our weakness and our need we keenly feel—still we have no cause to murmur since the Lord knows our poor estate—and succors us with the most tender care.

Sheep, too, are silly creatures, and in this respect, likewise, we are very sheepish. We meekly admit it to Him who is ready to guide us. We say, as David said, “O God, You know my foolishness.” And He says to us as He said to David, “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you shall go.” If Christ were not our Wisdom, we should soon fall a prey to the Destroyer. Every grain of true wisdom that we possess we have derived from Him. Of ourselves we are dull and giddy—folly is bound up in our heart. The more conscious you are, dear Brethren, of your own deficiencies, your lack of stamina, discretion, sagacity, and all the instincts of self-preservation—the more delighted you will be to see that the Lord accepts you under these conditions—and calls you the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand.

He discerns you as you are. He claims you as His own. He foresees all the ills to which you are exposed, yet tends you as His flock. He sets store by every lamb of the fold, and so feeds you according to the integrity of His heart and guides you by the skillfulness of His hands. “*I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down, says the Lord God.*” Oh, what sweet music there is to us in the name which is given to our Lord Jesus Christ of “the Good Shepherd”! It not only describes the office He holds, but it sets forth the sympathy He feels, the aptness He shows, and the responsibility He bears to promote our well-being.

What if the sheep are weak? The shepherd is strong to guard his flock from the prowling wolf or the roaring lion. If the sheep suffer privation because the soil is barren, yet is the shepherd able to lead them into pasturage suitable for them. If they are foolish, yet he goes before them, cheers them with his voice, and rules them with the rod of his command. There cannot be a flock without a shepherd—neither is there a shepherd, truly, without a flock. The two must go together. They are the fullness of each other.

As the Church is the fullness of Him that fills All in All, so we rejoice to remember that “of His fullness have all we received, and Grace for Grace.” That I am like a sheep is a sorry reflection. But that I have a Shepherd charms away the sorrow and creates a new joy. It even becomes a gladsome thing to be weak, that I may rely on His strength. To be full of needs, that I may draw from His fullness. To be shallow and often at my wit's end, that I may be always regulated by His wisdom.

Even so does my shame redound to His praise. Not to you, you great and mighty, who lift your heads high, and claim for yourselves honor—not for you is peace, not to you is rest. But unto you, you lowly ones, who delight in the valley of humiliation, and feel yourselves to be taken down in your own esteem—to you it is that the Shepherd becomes

dear. And to you will He give to lie down in green pastures beside the still waters. In a very simple way, we shall speak about the Proprietor of the sheep. “*My sheep*,” says Christ. Then we shall have a little to say about the marks of the sheep. After that I propose to talk awhile about the privileges of the sheep. “*I know My sheep*”—they are privileged to be known of Christ. “*My sheep hear My voice*.”

I. Who is the Proprietor of the sheep? They are all Christ’s. “*My sheep hear My voice*.” How came the saints to be Christ’s? They are His, first of all, because He chose them. Before the worlds were made, out of all the rest of mankind He selected them. He knew the race would fall and become unworthy of the faculties with which He endowed them and the inheritance He had assigned them. To Him belonged the sovereign prerogative that He might have mercy on whom He would have mercy. And He, out of His own absolute will, and according to the counsel of His own good pleasure, made choice severally and individually of certain persons—and He said, “*These are Mine*.”

Their names were written in His book—they became His portion and His heritage. Having chosen them of old so many ages ago, rest assured He will not lose them now. Men prize that which they have long had. If there is a thing that was mine but yesterday, and it is lost today, I might not fret about it. But if I have long possessed it, and called it my patrimony, I would not willingly part with it. Sheep of Christ, you shall be His forever, because you have been His from ever.

They are Christ’s sheep, because His Father gave them to Him. They were the gift of the Father to Christ. He often speaks of them in this way, “*As many as You have given Me*.” “*You have given them to Me*,” says He, over and over again. Of old, the Father gave His people to Christ. Separating them from among men, He presented them to Him as a gift, committed them into His hands as a trust, and ordained them for Him as the lot of His inheritance. Thus they become a token of the Father’s love to His Only-Begotten Son, a proof of the confidence He reposed in Him and a pledge of the honor that shall be done unto Him.

Now, I suppose we, most of us, know how to value a gift for the donor’s sake. If presented to us by one whom we love, we set great store by it. If it has been designed to be a love token, it awakens in our minds many sweet memories. Though the intrinsic worth may be of small account, the associations make it exceedingly precious. We might be content to lose something of far greater value in itself rather than that which is the gift of a friend, the offering of his love. I like the delicate sentiment of the poet, as it is expressed in that pretty verse—

*“I never cast a flower away,
The gift of one who cared for me.
A little flower—a faded flower,
But it was done reluctantly.”*

Yet, oh, how weak the words of human passion! But, oh, how strong the expressions of Divine ardor, when Jesus speaks to the Father of, “*the men whom You gave Me out of the world*!” “*Yours they were*,” He says, “*and You gave them to Me*. And those that You gave Me I have kept.” You sheep of Christ, rest safely. Let not your soul be disturbed with fear. The Father gave you to His Son, and He will not lightly lose what God Himself has given Him. The infernal lions shall not rend the meanest lamb that is a love token from the Father to His best Beloved. While Christ stands defending His own, He will protect them from the lion and the bear that would take the lambs of His flock. He will not suffer the least of them to perish. “*My sheep*,” says Christ.

They are His, furthermore, because in addition to His choice and to the gift, He has *bought* them with a price. They had sold themselves for nothing. But He has redeemed them, not with corruptible things as with silver and gold, but with His precious blood. A man always esteems that to be exceedingly valuable which he procured with risk—with risk of life and limb. David felt he could not drink the water that the brave warriors who broke through the host of the Philistines brought to him from the well at Bethlehem because it seemed to him as though it were the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives.

And so he poured it out before the Lord. It was too precious a draught for him, when men’s lives had been hazarded for it. But the Good Shepherd not only hazarded His life, but even laid it down for His sheep. Jacob exceedingly valued one part of his possessions, and he gave it to Joseph—he gave him one portion above his Brethren. Now, you may be sure he would give Joseph that which he thought most precious. But why did he give him that particular portion? Because, he says, “*I took it out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow*.”

Now, our blessed Shepherd esteems His sheep because they cost Him His blood. They cost Him His blood—I may say He took them out of the hand of the Amorite with His sword and with His bow in bloody conflict—where He was Victor, but yet was slain. There is not one sheep of all His flock but what He can see the mark of His blood on him. In the face of every saint the Savior sees, as in a glass, the memorial of His bloody sweat in Gethsemane, and His agonies at Golgotha. “You are not your own, for you are bought with a price.”

That stands as a call to duty, but it is at the same time a consolation, for if He has bought me, He will have me. Bought with such a price, He will not like to lose me, nor suffer any foe to take me out of His hands. Think not that Christ will suffer those to perish for whom He died. To me the very suggestion seems to draw near to the verge of blasphemy. If He has bought me with His blood, I cannot conceive He cares nothing for me, will take no further concern about me, or will suffer my soul to be cast into the pit. If He has suffered in my place, where is justice gone that the Substitute should bear my guilt, and I should bear it, too?

And where is mercy fled, that God should execute twice the punishment for one offense! No, Beloved, those whom He has bought with blood are His, and He will keep them. “*My sheep,*” says Christ. They are His, or in due time they shall become so through His capturing them by sacred power. As well by power are we redeemed as by price, for the blood-bought sheep had gone astray even as others. “All we, like sheep, have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.”

But, my Brethren, the Good Shepherd has brought many of us back with infinite condescension—with boundless mercy He followed us when we went astray. Oh, what blind slaves we were when we sported with death! We did not know then what His love had ordained for us—it never entered our poor, silly heads that there was a crown for us. We did not know that the Father’s love had settled itself on us, or ever the day-star knew its place. We know it now, and it is He that has taught us. For He followed us over mountains of vanity, through bogs and miry places of foul transgression. He tracked our devious footsteps on and on, through youth and manhood, till at last, with mighty Grace, He grasped us in His arms and laid us on His shoulder—and is this day carrying us home to the great fold above—rejoicing as He bears all our weight and finds us in all we need.

Oh, that blessed work of effectual Grace! He has made us His own. He has defeated the enemy—the prey has been taken from the mighty—and the lawful captive has been delivered. “He has broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron asunder,” to set His people free. “O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!” “*My SHEEP,*” says Christ, as He stands in the midst of His disciples. “*My Shepherd,*” let us one and all reply! All the sheep of Christ who have been redeemed by His power become His by their own willing and cheerful surrender of themselves to Him.

We would not belong to another if we might. Nor would we wish to belong to ourselves if we could. Nor, I trust, do we want any part of ourselves to be our own property. Judge whether this is true of you or not. In that day when I surrendered my soul to my Savior, I gave Him my body, my soul, my spirit. I gave Him all I had, and all I shall have for time and for eternity. I gave Him all my talents, my powers, my faculties, my eyes, my ears, my limbs, my emotions, my judgment, my whole manhood, and all that could come of it—whatever fresh capacity or new capability I may be endowed with.

Were I at this good hour to change the note of gladness for one of sadness, it should be to wail out my penitent confession of the times and circumstances in which I have failed to observe the strict and unwavering allegiance I owe to my Lord. So far from regretting, I would gladly renew my vows and make them over again. In this I think every Christian would join—

*“It is done! the great transaction’s done—
I am my Lord’s, and He is mine—
He drew me, and I followed on,
Charmed to confess the voice Divine.
Now rest, my long-divided heart;
Fixed on this blissful center, rest—
With ashes who would grudge to part,
When called on angels’ bread to feast?
High Heaven, that heard the solemn vow,*

*That vow renewed shall daily hear—
Till in life's latest hour I bow,
And bless in death a bond so dear."*

And yet, Brethren, though our hearts may now be all in a glow, lest they should presently grow cold, or the bleak atmosphere of this evil world should chill our devotion, let us never cease to think of the Good Shepherd in that great, good act which most of all showed His love when He laid down His life for the sheep.

You have heard the story told by Francis de Sales. He saw a girl carrying a pail of water on her head, in the midst of which she had placed a piece of wood. On asking her why she did this, she told him it was to prevent the motion of the water, for fear it might be spilt. And so, said he, let us place the Cross of Christ in the midst of our hearts to check the movement of our affections—that they may not be spilt in restless cares or grievous troubles. "*My sheep*," says Christ, and thus He describes His people. They are Christ's. His own, a peculiar property. May I hope that this Truth of God will be from now on treasured up in your soul!

It is a common Truth, certainly—but when it is laid home by the Holy Spirit it shines, it beams—not merely as a lamp in a dark chamber, but as the day-star rising in your hearts! Remember this is no more our shame that we are sheep, but it is our *honor* that we are *Christ's* sheep. To belong to a King carries some measure of distinction. We are the sheep of the imperial pastures. This is our safety—He will not suffer the enemy to destroy His sheep. This is our sanctity—we are separated, the sheep of the pasture of the Lord's Christ. This is sanctification in one aspect of it—for it is the making of us holy, by setting us apart to be the Lord's own portion forever. And this is the key to our duty—we are His sheep—then let us live to Him, and consecrate ourselves to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Christ is the Proprietor of the sheep. And they are the property of the good Shepherd.

II. Now, let us commune together awhile upon the marks of the sheep. When there are so many flocks of sheep, it is necessary to mark them. Our Savior marks us. It has been very properly observed that there are two marks on Christ's sheep. One is on their ear, the other is on their foot. These are two marks of Christ's sheep not to be found on any other. But they are to be found on all His own—the mark on the ear—"My sheep *hear* My voice." The mark on the foot—"I know them, and they *follow* Me."

Think of this mark on their ear. "My sheep hear My voice." They hear *spiritually*. A great many people in Christ's day heard His voice who did not hear it in the way and with the perception that is here intended. They would not hear. That is to say, they would not hearken or give heed, neither would they obey His call or come unto Him that they might have life. These were not always the worst sort of people—there were some of the best that would not hear Christ, of whom He said, according to the original, as translated by some, "You search the Scriptures. For in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me. And you will not come to Me, that you might have life."

They would get as far as curiosity or criticism might allure them. But they would not go any farther—they would not believe in Jesus. Now, the *spiritual* ear listens to God. The opening of it is the work of the Holy Spirit, and this is a mark of Christ's chosen blood-bought people—that they hear not only the hollow sound, but the hidden sense. Not the bare letter, but the spiritual lesson. And that, too, not merely with the outward organ, but with the inward heart. The chief point is that they hear *His* voice.

Oh, if all that heard *my* voice heard Christ's voice, how would I wander down every street in this city to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ! But, alas, the voice of the minister is utterly ineffectual to save a soul, unless the voice of Christ reaches the conscience and rouses its dormant powers. "My sheep hear My voice." The voice of Jesus—His counsel, His commands—clothed with the authority of His own sacred sovereign utterances. When the Gospel comes to you as Christ's Gospel, with demonstration of the Spirit, the invitation is addressed to you by Him. You can look upon it in no other light—so, by God's Grace you must accept and receive it.

When His princely power comes with it—being mighty to save He puts saving power into the Word. Then you hear Christ's voice as a fiat that must be obeyed! As a summons that must be attended to! As a call to which there must be a quick response! O Beloved, do not ever rest satisfied with hearing the voice of the preacher. We are only Christ's speaking trumpets—there is nothing in us—it is only *HIS* speaking *through* us that can do any good. O children of God, some of you do not always listen to Christ's voice in the preaching of His Word.

While we comment on the Word, you make your comments on us. Our style, or our tone, or even our gesture is enough to absorb—I might rather say, to distract—your thoughts. “Why look you so earnestly on us?” I beseech you, give less heed to the livery of the servant and give more care to the message of the Master. Listen warily, if you please. But judge wisely if you can. See how much pure grain, and how much of Christ there is in the sermon. Use your sieve—put away all the chaff—take only the good wheat. Hear Christ’s voice!

Well were it if we could obscure ourselves that we might manifest Him. I could wish so to preach that you could not see even my little finger—might I but so preach that you could get a full view of Jesus only. O that you could hear His voice drowning ours! This is the mark, the peculiar mark of those who are Christ’s peculiar people—they hear His voice. Sometimes, truly it sounds in the ministry. Sometimes it thrills forth from that Book of books, which is often grossly neglected. Sometimes it comes in the night watches. His voice may speak to us in the street.

Silent as to vocal utterance, but like familiar tones that sometimes greet us in our dreams, the voice of Christ is distinctly audible to the soul. It will come to you in sweet or in bitter Providences. Yes, there is such a thing as hearing Christ’s voice in the rustling of every leaf upon the tree, in the moaning of every wind, in the rippling of every wave. And there are those that have learned to lean on Christ’s bosom till they have looked for all the world as though they were a shell that lay in the ocean of Christ’s love, listening forever to the sonorous cadence of that deep, unfathomed, all-mysterious main.

The billows of His love never cease to swell. The billowy anthem still peals on with solemn grandeur in the ear of the Christian. O may we hear Christ’s voice, each one of us for ourselves! I find that language fails me, and metaphors are weak to describe its potent spell. One point is worth noticing, however. I think our Lord meant here that His sheep, when they hear His voice, know it so well that they can tell it at once from the voice of strangers. The true child of God knows the Gospel from the Law. It is not by learning catechisms, reading theological books, or listening to endless controversies that he finds this out.

There is an instinct of his regenerate nature far more trustworthy than any lessons he has been taught. The voice of Jesus! Why there is no music like it! If you have once heard it, you cannot mistake it for another, or another for it. Some are babes in Grace—others are of full age, and by reason of use have their senses exercised. But one sense is quickly brought out—the sense of *hearing*. It is so easy to tell the joy-bells of the Gospel from the death-knell of the Law. For the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. “Do, or die,” says Moses. “Believe, and live,” says Christ—you must know which is which.

Yes. And I think they are equally shrewd and quick to discriminate between the flesh and the Spirit. Let some of the very feeblest of God’s people sit down under a fluent ministry, with all the beauties of rhetoric, and let the minister preach up the dignity of human nature and the sufficiency of man’s reason to find out the way of righteousness, and you will hear them say—“It is very clever. But there is no food for me in it.” Bring, however, the best and most instructed, and most learned Christian man, and set him down under a ministry that is very faulty as to the gift of utterance, and incorrect even in grammar.

But if it is full of Jesus Christ, I know what he will say—“Ah, never mind the man, and never mind the platter on which he brought the meat. It was food to my soul that I fed upon with a hearty relish. It was marrow and fatness, for I could hear Christ’s voice in it.” I am not going to follow out these tests. But certain it is that the sheep know Christ’s voice and can easily distinguish it. I saw hundreds of lambs the other day together, and there were also their mothers. And I am sure if I had had the task of allotting the proper lamb to each, or to any of them, it would have kept me till now to have done it.

But somehow the lambs knew the mothers, and the mothers knew the lambs. And they were all happy enough in each other’s company. Every saint here, mixed up as he may be at times with parties and professors of all sorts, knows Christ, and Christ knows him, and he is therefore bound to his owner. That is the mark on the ear. You have seen sometimes in the country two flocks together on the road, and you say—“I wonder how the shepherds will manage to keep them distinct? They will get mixed up.” They do not. They go this way and that way. And after a little commingling they separate, for they know their master’s voice, “and a stranger will they not follow.”

You will go tomorrow, many of you, out into the world, some to the Exchange, others to the market, and others again into the factory—you are all mixed. Yes. But the seeming confusion of your company is temporary, not real and

permanent. You will come right again, and you will go to your own home and your own fellowship. And at the last, when we shall have ended our pilgrimage, the one shall wend his way to Heaven, and the other to the abyss of woe. There will be no mistake. You will hear the Master's call and obey. There is a mark on the ear which identifies every saint. Christ's sheep hear His voice *obediently*.

This is an important proof of discipleship. Indeed, it may serve as a reproof to many. Oh, I would that you were more careful about this! "He that hears My commandments, and keeps them," said Jesus, "he it is that loves Me." "He that loves Me not keeps not My sayings." How comes it to pass, then, that there are certain commands of Christ which some Christians will suffer to lie in abeyance? They will say, "The Lord commands this, but it is not essential." Oh, unloving spirit that can think anything unessential that your Bridegroom bids you do! They that love think little things of great moment, especially when they are looked upon as tokens of the strength or the tenderness of one's regard.

It may not be essential, in order to prove the relation in which a wife stands to her husband, that she should study his tastes, consult his wishes, or attend to his comfort. But will she the less strive to please, because love, not fear, constrains her? I think not. And can it be that any of you, my Brethren, would harbor such a thought as your negligence implies? Do you really suppose that after the choice of Christ has been fixed on you, and the love of Christ has been plighted to you, you may now be as remiss or careless as you like?

No, rather might we not expect that a sacred passion, an ardent zeal, a touch of inspiration would stir you up, put you on the alert, make you wake at the faintest sound of His voice, or keep you listening to do as will? Be it ours, then, to act out with fidelity that verse we have often sung with enthusiasm—

*"In all my Lord's appointed ways
My journey I'll pursue."*

However little the precept may appear in the eyes of others. However insignificant as compared with our salvation, yet—does the Lord command it? Then His sheep hear His voice and they follow Him.

Christ has marked His sheep on their feet as well as their ears. They *follow* Him—they are gently led, not harshly driven. They follow Him as the Captain of their salvation. They trust in the power of His arm to clear the way for them. All their trust on Him is abiding. They lean all their hope on Him. They follow Him as their Teacher. They call no man "Rabbi" under Heaven, but Christ alone. He is the infallible source of their creeds. Neither will they allow their minds to be ruled by conclaves, councils, nor decrees. Has Christ said it? It is enough. If not, it is no more for me than the whistling of the wind.

They follow Christ as their Teacher. And the sheep of Christ follow Him as their Example. They desire to be in this world as He was. It is one of their marks, that to a greater or lesser degree they have a Christ-like spirit. And if they could, they would be altogether like their Lord. They follow Him, too, as their Commander, and Lawgiver, and Prince. "Whatever He says unto you, do it," was His mother's wise speech. And it is the children's wise rule—"Whatever He says unto you, do it."

Oh, blessed shall they be above many of whom it shall be said, "These are they that have not defiled their garments." "These are they which follow the Lamb wherever He goes." Some of His followers are not very scrupulous. They love Him. It is not for us to judge them. Rather we place ourselves among them and share in the censure. But happiest of all the happy are they who see the footprint—the print of that foot that once was pierced with the nail—and put their foot down where He placed it, and then again, in the selfsame mark, follow where He trod, till they climb at last to the Throne.

Keep close to Christ! Take care of His little precepts unto the end. Remember, "Whoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of Heaven." Do not peril being least in the heavenly kingdom though it is better to be that than to be greatest in the kingdom of darkness. O seek to be very near Him, to be a choice sheep in His chosen flock, and to have the mark distinctly upon your foot! I will not stay to apply these truths, but leave each one of you to make such self-searching enquiries as the text suggests. Have I the ear mark? Have I the foot mark? "My sheep hear My voice," "and they follow Me." I hope that I am among the number.

III. The last point, with which we now proceed to close, is—THE PRIVILEGE OF CHRIST'S SHEEP. It does not look very large, but if we open it we shall see an amazing degree of blessedness in it. "I know them." "I know them." What does it mean? I have not time now to tell you all it means. "I know them." What is the reverse of this but one of the

most dreadful things that is reserved for the Day of Judgment? There will be some who will say, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, and in Your name cast out devils?”

And He shall say, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, *I never knew you*. Depart from Me, you cursed.” Now measure the height of that privilege by the depth of this misery. “I never knew you.” What a volume of scorn it implies! What a stigma of infamy it conveys! Change the picture. The Redeemer says, “I know them.” “I know them.” How His eyes flash with kindness! How their cheeks burn with gratitude, as He says, “I know them”! Why, if a man had a friend and acquaintance that he used to know, and some years after he found him a disreputable, abandoned, wicked, guilty criminal, I feel pretty sure he would not say much about having known such a fellow, though he might be driven to confess that he had some years ago a passing acquaintance with him.

But our Lord Jesus Christ, though He knows what poor unworthy ones we are, yet when we shall be brought up before the Lord, before the Great White Throne, He will confess He knew us! He *does* know us—we are old acquaintances of His—and He has known us from before the foundation of the world! “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many Brethren. Moreover whom He did predestinate, them He also called.”

There are riches of Grace in this. But we will consider it in another way. Our Savior knows us, our Shepherd knows us. Beloved, He knows your person and all about you. You, with that sick body, that aching head—He knows you and He knows your soul with all its sensitiveness. That timidity, that anxiety, that constitutional depression—He knows it all! A physician may come to see you and be unable to detect what the disease is that pains or prostrates you, but Christ knows you through and through. All the parts of your nature He understands. “I know them,” says He. He can, therefore, prescribe for you.

He knows your sins. Do not let that dismay you, because He has blotted them all out. And He only knows them to forgive them, to cover them with His righteousness. He knows your corruptions. He will help you to overcome them. He will deal with you in Providence and in Grace so that they shall be rooted up. He knows your temptations. Perhaps you are living away from your parents and Christian friends, and you have had an extraordinary temptation, and you wish you could go home and tell your mother. Oh, He knows it, He knows it! He can help you better than your mother can!

You say—“I wish the minister knew the temptation I have passed through.” Do not tell it—God knows it. As Daniel did not want Nebuchadnezzar to tell him the nature of his dream, but gave him the dream and the interpretation at the same time, so God can send you comfort. There will be a word as plainly suited to your case as though it were all printed and the preacher had known it all. It must be so. Depend upon it, the Lord knows your temptation, and watches your trials.

Or is it a sick child, or is it a bad matter of business that has lately occurred? Or is it a slander that has wounded your heart? There is not a pang you feel but God as surely sees it as the weaver sees the shuttle which he throws with his own hand. He knows your trial and He knows the meaning of your groans—He can read the secret desire of your heart, you need not write it nor speak it—He has understood it all. You were saying—“O that my child were converted! O that I grew in Grace!” He knows it—He knows it every whit. There is not a word on your tongue, nor a wish in your heart, but He knows it altogether.

O dear Heart, He knows your sincerity! Perhaps you want to join the Church, and your proposal has been declined because you could not give satisfactory testimony. If you are sincere, He knows it. He knows, moreover, what your anxiety is. You cannot tell another what it is that is bitter to you—the heart knows its own bitterness—He knows it. As His secret is with you, so your secret is with Him. He knows you—He knows what you have been trying to do. That secret gift—that offering dropped so quietly where none could see it—He knows it. And He knows that you love Him.

“Yes,” you are saying in your soul, “if ever I loved You, my Jesus, it is now.” No, you cannot tell Him, nor tell others. But He knows it all. So, now, in closing, let us say that in the text there is mutual knowledge. “I know them, but they also know Me, because they hear My voice, and recognize it.” Here is mutual confession. Christ speaks, else there would be no voice—they hear, else were the voice not useful. “I know them.” That is, His thoughts go towards them. “They follow Me.” That is, their thoughts go towards Him.

He leads the way, else they could not follow. They follow, however, when He leads the way. Being the counterpart of each other, what the one does the other returns through Grace. And what Grace puts into the sheep the Shepherd

recognizes, and makes a return to them. Christ and His Church become an echo of each other—His the voice, theirs is but a faint echo of it. Still it is a true echo, and you shall know who are Christ's by this. Do they echo what Christ says? Oh, how I wish we were all sheep! How my soul longs that we may, many of us who are not of His fold, be brought in. The Lord bring you in, my dear Hearers. The Lord give you His Grace, and make you His own. The Lord comfort you, and make you to follow Him. And if you are His, show it.

These dear Brothers and Sisters here at this time desire to confess Christ in your presence. If they are doing right, and you are not doing as they do, then you are doing wrong. If it is the duty of one, it is the duty of all. And if one Christian may neglect making a profession, all may do so, and then there will be no visible Church whatever, and the visible ordinances must die out. If you know Him, own Him, for He has said—"Whoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in Heaven. But whoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in Heaven." God bless you, for Christ's sake. Amen.

*Letter from Mr. Spurgeon, read at the Tabernacle on Lord's Day, June 18, 1871—MY BELOVED FRIENDS—*As soon as the Church had resolved to meet for special prayer for me, I began rapidly to recover. It pleased God to turn the wind at the beginning of this week, and the change in the temperature has worked wonders. We may truthfully say of the Wednesday meeting for prayer, that the Lord fulfilled His Word—"Before they call, I will answer. And while they are yet speaking, I will hear."

For all this great goodness I pray you to unite with me in sincere and intense gratitude to the Lord our God. I feel bound publicly to express my happiness of heart. This week has furnished me with the liveliest proofs of your true love. I have been deeply touched with the various ways in which the affection of so many of you have sought to find expression. I value this not only for my own sake, though it is very sweet to be the object of such hearty love, but because I see in it the evidence that our union has been cemented by years, and the earnest of future years of united effort, if God spares us. The absence of unity is weakness—its indisputable presence is strength.

On the closing day of my thirty-seventh year, I find myself the pastor of a beloved Flock who have borne the test of twelve Sundays of their minister's absence, and the severer test of more than seventeen years of the same ministry, and are now exhibiting more love to him than ever. I bless God, but I also thank you, and assure you that I never felt happier in the midst of my people than I do now in the prospect of returning to you. I am still weak, but the improvement in strength has been this week very surprising.

I hardly dare speak of the future. But I earnestly hope we shall look each other in the face on the first Sunday of July. The collection today is to enable the London Baptist Association to build a new chapel in the Wandsworth Road. *We* are to carry out the project so that it will not become us to be slack in our collection. London grows so rapidly that much must be done to keep pace with its spiritual needs. Our Association does something, but ten times more would be little enough.

You will, I am sure, give as God has prospered you. The College, of course, will be less helped. But I must beg to thank you for the continued series of noble contributions which have made each week remarkable. Peace be with you and the Lord's own anointing. May those who speak to you today be filled with the Spirit. May the soft south wind of the Spirit's love be among you, and may you pour forth praise as flowers breathe perfume.

Yours very truly, *C. H. SPURGEON.*

Adapted from *The C.H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307