

A CALL TO THE LORD'S OWN FLOCK

NO. 1807

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

*“Thus shall they know that I the Lord their God am with them, and that they, even the house of Israel, are My people, says the Lord God. And you My flock, the flock of My pasture, are men, and I am your God, says the Lord God.”
Ezekiel 34:30, 31.*

THE sermon of this morning is intended for the flock of God, and it will be directed very pointedly to that particular part of it here gathered in fellowship. God has been coming very near to us of late, for a considerable number of brothers and sisters have fallen asleep during the last few days, nearly all of them persons of ripe age, who have been gathered as sheaves in their season. Others are evidently upon the eve of departure, for their infirmities are multiplied, and their strength is small. When the Good Shepherd is taking one and another into His bosom, and bearing them away from us, the rest of us ought to recognize His presence with holy reverence. Let us feel that the ground whereon we stand is holy, and that the time is most suitable for increased devotedness of life. Let us number our days and apply our hearts unto wisdom. If we do not live when life is seen to be so short, how foolish we must be! If we do not awaken ourselves when the Lord is calling home our brethren, we must be sluggards indeed. Let us spend the time of our sojourning here in fear, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God.

This is the special matter of which I would speak today. God has in great mercy gathered to Himself a church in this place for these many years. He has multiplied the people and increased their joy, and we have joyed before Him as with the joy of harvest. Nothing has happened to mar our unity or prevent our success, for God has been with us. Many have been added to us of such as are saved, and we have gone from strength to strength in Christian enterprise, never failing to accomplish our work. But the tendency of all human things is to deteriorate, there is a down-dragging influence in the world, and we ourselves are such creatures of the earth that we all too easily yield to its attractions. If we run well for a time, yet we grow weary, and slacken our pace. This we do all the more readily, and unconsciously, if we are surrounded by those whose pace is slow. We are apt to think that our running is faster than need be, and that we shall be quite as well thought of if we keep up with the many, or are just a trifle in advance of them. Oh, how soon shall we lag in the rear if we listen to this evil suggestion! The voice of the Spirit to the church of Philadelphia was, “Hold that fast which you have, that no man takes your crown.” It is a great thing to have done so well as to have a crown; it is a greater thing to hold it fast. Men of the world tell us that it takes much wit and industry to make a fortune, but that it is far more difficult to keep it when it is made. I am sure that in spiritual things it is so. For a church to be thoroughly prosperous in the life and work of God is difficult enough, but to continue so—this is the work, this is the labor. Hence our cries to God that He will be pleased to keep us as a church faithful to His truth, united with one another, earnest in the glorifying of God, and diligent in the winning of souls. It would be a calamity of no small order if this church should decline. For the sake of those unpopular truths which we uphold, it is a matter for daily prayer that this church may be maintained in honorable usefulness evermore. To that end I wish to speak with you this morning, my own dear brothers and sisters. Strangers must pardon me if I make much of you, and even seem to be egotistical in my address. I risk all that for the sake of the necessary truth which I must put before you.

To my mind, this day is a day of good tidings. The Lord has done great things for us of which we are glad. Let us glory in His holy name, and let us walk worthily of the Lord unto all pleasing, so that we

may enjoy a continuance of His favor. May the outstretched arm of the Most High still be with us, that we may see more and more of the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ towards fallen man.

I. Calling your attention to our text, I shall notice, first, what the text rather suggests than declares, namely, OUR PROFESSION TOWARDS GOD. Read on—"Thus they shall know that I, Jehovah, am their God." It is implied, then, that *we avow Jehovah to be our God*. So many of us as are joined together, in church fellowship here, have declared that Jehovah is the one only living and true God. He has revealed Himself to us in these latter days as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we unfeignedly accept the triune God as our God forever and ever. Other lords have had dominion over us, but now we yield ourselves unto God without reserve. The God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob is the God of believers to this day. We do not wish to have any other God, although in these days the carnally wise have set up another. Their god is a god who has no justice or righteousness; he takes small account of sin, and mainly seeks to make things pleasant all round. This effeminate deity now occupies the place once given to Apollo or Venus, and he is as much a false god as they were. Our God does not suffer one attribute to eclipse another; He has all excellences in perfection. Remember how Moses spoke concerning our God, and said, "The Lord is long-suffering, and of great mercy, forgiving iniquity and transgression, and by no means clearing the guilty"? "This God is our God forever and ever; He will be our guide even unto death."

A second profession we have made is this, that *we are His people*. "That they, even the house of Israel, are My people, says the Lord God." This is involved in the first profession, but it is not always sufficiently thought of. We are, as believers, in common with all the people of God, separated unto His service, consecrated to His glory. We believe that He chose us, before ever the earth was, to be a peculiar people unto Himself. We believe that He has redeemed us from among men, according to that word, "Christ loved the church and gave Himself for it." We believe that by the decree of God we are adopted into the divine family and acknowledged to be the children of the living God, even we who were once heirs of wrath even as others. We are His people because the Holy Spirit has worked upon us, and we have been turned from darkness to light, from the power of sin and Satan unto God. Our song is, "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." We acknowledge the claim founded upon our redemption, "You are not your own; for you are bought with a price." To glorify God in our spirits and in our bodies, which are alike redeemed, is our reasonable service. Our bands are loosed; we are no more the servants of men, new bonds are about us, for we are now the servants of the living God. In Jehovah is our trust, our joy, our glory. Each one of us can say, "He is all my salvation and all my desire." To serve Him is its own reward. To dwell with Him is heaven. Is it not so with you, my brethren? Have you not lifted up your hands unto the Lord so that you cannot go back? Do you not wish to realize that promise, "I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people"?

Further than that, we have also professed and avowed *our joyful confidence, in our Immanuel—God with us*. It is an interesting thing to me that this name should be in my text. Look carefully at the English and you will see it in the very first sentence—"that I the Lord their God am with them." Leave out the word "am," which is in italics, and you get it, "God with them." What is this but "God with us?" Today we believe in the Lord Jesus, who is God with us. God has come down among men, He has taken upon Himself their nature, so that the Lord Jesus Christ is God and man in one ever-blessed and indivisible person, and therefore He is very near to us, yes, next of kin to us. We rejoice in Him as "God with us"—our brother, friend and husband. Have we not found it so? Has there not been a divine nearness between our souls and Christ since that first day when we touched His garment's hem and were made whole? Why, brethren, we have gone on to lean our heads upon His bosom in heavenly rest, like John of old, yes, some of you have emulated Simeon, for you have taken up the Lord's Christ into your arms and said, "Lord, now let Your servant depart in peace." Through Christ Jesus we do not only believe in God as yonder in heaven, but in God by His Holy Spirit dwelling here among men, stirring our hearts, ruling our lives, enlightening our understandings, hallowing our affections, and sanctifying our whole being unto God. Is it not so? You do so confess.

This is a very large profession. We are not inclined to start back from it, but when we take it in its threefold character—this God our God, ourselves His people, and Himself, by His Son Jesus Christ, "God with us"—oh, then I say it is a very solemn avowal, and one which calls us to a lofty form of life.

Blessed are they who stand to this confession, and walk worthily of it, for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto them.

Jehovah is our God, in opposition to Romanism and Ritualism, with their idols of one form or another, to which they bow the knee. The invisible Jehovah is our God, and not the host, the virgin, the crucifix, or any visible thing. Jehovah is our God in opposition to the new gods of "modern thought," which your fathers knew not. Our faith finds light as well in the majesty of the Old Testament as in the mercy of the New. Jehovah is our God in opposition to the "no God" of infidelity. We believe in a personal God, and we put our trust in Him as hearing our prayers. We are His people, and on Him we call, He has come very near to us, and with Him we have sweet communion through Jesus Christ His Son. This is our profession; we dare not say less, we could not say more.

Now every profession of so solemn a sort should be backed up with proof, where shall the proof be found?

II. That shall be our second subject of discourse—OUR PROOF FROM GOD. "Thus shall they know that I, Jehovah, am with them, and that they are My people, says the Lord God." How shall they know it? In this one way—by the presence of God among us; if God works among us, then even our adversaries shall say, "Jehovah-Shammah," The Lord is there. A tree is known by its fruit, and the rule applies even to God Himself. God is known among us by the acts that He does. He reveals His presence unto His people by His deeds of grace. I want you to look back through the chapter and then ask whether we have or have not as a church the marks of Jehovah's presence by which we are attested to be His people.

The first mark is *the gathering in of the scattered*. See verse eleven. "Thus says the Lord God; Behold, I, even I, will both search My sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep." I am bound to bear witness that in the midst of us many have been sought out and saved who but a little while ago were wandering far away from Christ. Whenever I give notice that I will see friends who wish to join the church, I am cheered by the many who present themselves. They fly as doves to their windows. They tell me glad news of their conversion—news which makes my heart leap for joy. The Lord calls some who were grossly ignorant of the gospel, to whom it came as a fresh light from heaven, and He calls others who knew the truth, but slighted it, and turned away from it year after year. He removes hard-heartedness and indifference by His grace. His own voice calls men, and they come to Him. Very many conversions are among us at this time, not only from my own preaching of the word, otherwise might I speak with less freedom, but from the school, the mission-stations, the street-preaching, the tract-distributing, and from every form of effort. Frequently, when I have spoken with a number of new converts, I have found the larger proportion not brought to Jesus Christ by my words from this platform, but brought to Him by you, dear brothers and sisters, who have laid yourselves out to win souls. I am but one and you are many, there should be more fruit to the Lord from five thousand of you than from me. I have desired this, and prayed for it, that you all may be useful. May God multiply you, and make you spiritual parents, every one of you, till we may quote the words of Solomon's Song, and apply them to you—"They are like a flock of sheep which go up from the washing, of which every one bears twins, and there is not one barren among them." "Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit," so said your Lord, and you will not forget His words. Conversion is the sure sign of the immediate presence of the Lord. I pray Him to give us a token of His being with us this morning in your conversion, O wounded heart! May some poor trembler come to Jesus, some penitent plead the promise, "I will heal that which is broken," some wanderer look to the cross and live. The Lord has promised that He will search His sheep and seek them out, and He has fulfilled that word in our midst, therefore He is with us. If I had to stand here and say to you, "Brethren, there are no conversions, none are brought to repentance and faith," then we might hold days for fasting and humiliation, and we might each one weep his eyes out, because the glory has departed. But the Lord has not left us. No ear has heard the awful words within the holy place saying, "Let us go hence." Glory be to His name, His hand is still stretched out for miracles of grace.

A second token of the Lord's presence is *the feeding of the flock*. The Holy Spirit seems to lay great stress upon that, for thus says the Lord in verse fifteen, "I will feed My flock, and I will cause them to lie down. There shall they lie in a good fold, and in a fat pasture shall they feed." Have we not found it

so? Have not our Sabbaths been times of holy festival? Has not the King Himself banqueted with us? At the communion table have we not been transported with such joys as can never be excelled until we behold the Chief Shepherd face to face? When we speak with one another at the close of the Sabbath day is not the greeting habitual to some of us, "The Lord has been with us again today"? You have wished that there were six Sundays and only one workday in the week. I know that many of you have fed upon the word with great delight. Value greatly this gift, for it comes not from man, but is a choice gift of God. There are congregations where the sheep look up and are not fed. There are places where the Sabbath is the most wearisome day of the week, because the people want the gospel and the gospel is withheld from them. Saints of God cannot feed upon the husks of philosophical systems or semi-rational speculations. The speech which is half of Ashdod and half of Jerusalem suits not the inhabitant of Zion; it is a strange language to him. God grant to this flock, whoever may be their pastor in years to come, that they may relish the gospel, and find it sweet to their palates, and strengthening to their hearts.

Another token of the presence of the Good Shepherd is *the healing of the sick*, I mean the spiritually sick, for there is this promise given, "I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was sick." It is a rare joy to restore such as have been overtaken in a fault. Lately I have received several brethren and sisters who before had gone from us through laxity of life or through falling into novelties of opinion. I am glad to see among those who come to unite with us familiar faces which for a while had been missed. Those who have lived where Jesus dwells do not feel easy till they return to such society. They are saying, "We will return to our brethren, with whom we assembled before, for it was better with us then than now." The presence of the Lord acts like a charm upon the wanderers, and they hasten to return at His bidding. It is pleasant to hear the returning penitent confess how cold in heart he grew, and how he sought to find satisfaction in the things of the world, and to hear him tell how he has been brought back to be in the future more resolutely faithful, and more humbly dependent upon God. The showers of grace which have fallen upon us have caused many withered branches to bud forth again. Many are singing, "He restores my soul: He leads me in the paths of righteousness for His name's sake." If there should have strayed in here this morning any who once were among believers, and happy in the Lord, but have been away for a while, and have lost the fervor of their love, let me entreat them to hasten their return. O, my brother, come back! O, my sister, come back! We shall welcome you with intense delight. Like as the man who lost one sheep left the ninety-nine to find it, and rejoiced more over the finding of the one lost sheep than over the ninety-nine that had not gone astray, so will it be with us. If backsliders are not brought back in any church, I would conclude that God is not there, but when they do come back, we rejoice in this evidence of His presence. The God of our salvation has devised means to bring home His banished, and therefore He is still in the midst of us. Glory be to His condescending love!

A further proof of the presence of God in a church is when *the Lord Jesus Christ is greatly honored*, for here it is written, "I will set up one shepherd over them, and He shall feed them, and He shall be their shepherd. And I, Jehovah, will be their God, and My servant David a prince among them; I the Lord have spoken it." O brothers and sisters, if we did not gather to the name of Christ, our gathering would not be a church of God. If the testimony which issues from our midst were not of Jesus, and of His precious blood, and of His kingdom, and of His coming, then we might know that the Lord was not with us, for only as we know Christ will God know us. If your faith rested anywhere but in the glorious person and finished work of the Son of God, it is a worthless faith. If I preached any other gospel than that which you have received, I should be an Anathema, and not a servant of God. And if you did not labor with all your might to bring souls to Jesus rather than to any sect or party and to set Jesus forth rather than any peculiar *ism*, then might we rest assured that the Lord was not with us. But in this matter we are clear, for to us Christ is all. Do you not love Jesus? I appeal to your hearts, you that have been baptized into the thrice holy name of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—

*"Is not His name melodious still
To your attentive ear?
Does not your heart with pleasure bound,
Your Savior's voice to hear?"*

If a Sunday should roll by without Christ, would it not be the reverse of a Sabbath to you? You would sadly miss the risen One on His own resurrection day. If we should gather together, and there should be no discourse concerning Him, and no savor of His name, would you not go away disappointed? He is the first and the last of our hope, the author and finisher of our faith, the chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely, and just in proportion as it is so, the Lord is with us. He will never forget those who honor His Son, and seek to advance His kingdom.

Jesus is our prince; His authority is supreme among us. No popes, bishops, or councils may legislate for us. Jesus is our king. If He is indeed the Lord of whom we are the loyal subjects, then the Lord our God is with us, and we are His people. Where Jesus is, there dwells the fullness of the Godhead bodily. As he that believes in Him has everlasting life, so he has fellowship with the living God. You shall judge for yourselves whether this is not the token among us that our profession is no lie, but that Jehovah is our God, and we are His people.

A further evidence of the Lord's presence with a people is found in *their prevailing peace of mind*. "I will make with them a covenant of peace, and will cause the evil beasts to cease out of the land: and they shall dwell safely in the wilderness, and sleep in the woods." Do not many of you realize that deep peace, the peace of God which passes all understanding, so that you are free from all fear, and happy amid grievous poverty and trial? By reason of your great numbers, I cannot converse much with you personally while you are in health, but I do have the sorrowful privilege of speaking with many brothers and sisters in the time of sickness and death, and my uniform experience is most joyful. To this statement I can remember no exception whatever within my memory. When our members come near to die they exhibit peace—deep, profound, and frequently joy is mingled therewith, and a holy exultation. I have said, again and again, as I have left the sick chamber, "Let me go that I may die with him." Though emaciated, and perhaps full of agonizing pain, each one of our friends has said, "I know that my Redeemer lives." They have had no more doubt about the divine truths than about their own existence, and they have had no more fear when looking into eternity than they had in going upstairs to their bed—no, not as much, for they have had a longing to depart and to be with Christ. "Our people die well," said Wesley, and I can say the same. They pass away in sure and certain hope of a blessed resurrection. Not long ago, one who preaches far other doctrine than mine complained bitterly that he could make no headway with people of your sort, because those who have once fallen under the influence of our doctrine are settled in it, and cannot be rescued from it. He said that no headway could be made against our views, for men become so desperately enamored of them that they cannot be weaned from them. Blessed be God for that. Let a man once know the living God, and feel His eternal love within his bosom, and all the devils in hell cannot make him leave the doctrine which is life unto his soul. Argument is useless against the truth written upon the heart. Sophistry cannot persuade us out of our consciousness. The truth of God has been sealed upon our hearts, and it is not possible that we should renounce it. In this I do rejoice, that the evil beasts cease out of the land. When the doctrines of grace flame forth in the midst of a people, doubters and heretics quit the place in disgust. "No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up there on." Wolves shun the flock when the Chief Shepherd is in the midst of it. So may it be even to the end of the chapter—sure evidence that God is with His people, giving them deep peace of mind, and solid rest as to the things of God. These tokens we have, and many others which we cannot now mention, read the chapter through and judge for yourselves.

I desire to speak to you with no flattering words, but wish soberly to testify what I have seen, desiring always to be taught of the Spirit of God, that I may speak no further than I can justify by fact. I can say, and do say, "The Lord of hosts is with us." What then? Then it seems to me that *it becomes every member of this church*, as indeed of every other, *to be very careful how he lives and walks*. If the Lord is with us, remember there is a discipline going on in the church every day, not only that which the church can execute by itself, but that which God in providence executes. "His fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly purge His floor." Good men, if they hinder the work of God, are not dealt with as the ungodly, and suffered to go on their evil way, but frequently they are laid aside, and their influence is taken from them. Even more than this, I doubt not that many are removed by death when they become obstacles to the truth, or fall into sin. "For this cause," said Paul to the Corinthians, "many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep." Thus believers are chastened of the Lord that they should not be con-

demned with the world. God will not have His own child transgress the rules of His house without chastising him; hence the need of careful behavior on the part of church members. If any of you who are God's children are walking carelessly, if your garments are spotted with the world, if you are dishonoring the name of your Lord by an unhallowed conversation, the Lord will not walk with you in joyful fellowship. "Many walk, of whom I have told you often," said the apostle, "and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ," these were inside the church, and yet enemies. None can hinder the work of God as much as God's professed people if they are not true to their profession. Beloved, to live up to that which I laid down at the commencement of this sermon will require more power than we possess. We shall need the Spirit of God abundantly to rest upon us, that our walk may be close with God and our actions such as become the gospel of Christ.

In addition to this, it seems to me that if God is with us, *now is the time for abounding activities*. In evil days we tug the laboring oar to small purpose, for the vessel makes no progress against the tide. But now that a favoring wind is with us, let us spread every yard of sail. "Crowd all your canvas on, cut through the foam." Now is the mariner's happy hour, and he must avail himself of it. If there is anything more that we can do, if there is any forgotten enterprise which we can revive, if there is a possibility of greater ardor, and more intense zeal, in the name of God let us rise to it. Let us withhold no power from the Lord's service, lest measurably upon us also should come the curse pronounced of old, "Curse you Meroz, said the angel of the Lord, curse you bitterly the inhabitants thereof; because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty." It is a day of good tidings; we do not well if we sit still. See to it, you servants of God, that you prove by your activity that the Lord is among you.

Again, *let our prayers be more fervent*. Nothing comforts my heart like the prayer meetings which are so continual among us. Even the little gathering for prayer which meets on Thursday before my sermon has grown to larger proportions, and we have delightful seasons of communion with God. As for our Monday-evening assemblies, what a benediction from the Lord! Now that our hundreds at prayer are growing into thousands it delights my heart to see them. I had hardly hoped to see so many constantly coming to pray. May your prayerfulness at home, in your families and in your closets, be increased continually. What cannot the Lord do with a church if it will but be ready to be used? All things are possible to Him, and all things are possible to him that believes. In general the Lord says to His people, "You have not, because you ask not, or because you ask amiss," but when the spirit of supplication is poured out, then, verily, the Lord is there. We love each other with a pure heart, fervently, therefore let us remove everything that could mar our perfect unity in Christ Jesus, for then shall we have continually abundant evidence that we have taken the Lord to be our God, that we are His people, and that He is God with us, and that His glory dwells among us. Thus I have tried to press the matter home upon you. The Lord bless the exhortation.

III. A very interesting part of our discourse this morning lies in OUR DESCRIPTION BY GOD. How does God describe His own church? Read the last verse of the text. "You, My flock, the flock of My pasture, are men, and I am your God, says the Lord God."

First, in this description God calls His church *His flock*. A flock is the shepherd's treasure, it is his living wealth, but it is also the shepherd's care, it is his constant anxiety. Ask a shepherd what he prizes most, and he tells you, of course, his flock. Demand what he cares for most, and he replies, "I have no other care but this, my flock; for this I spend my days in the heat and my nights in the damp and the cold." Only think of the Lord's looking down upon His people here and saying, "You are My flock." Some Christians try to go to heaven alone, in solitude, but believers are not compared to bears, or lions, or other animals that wander alone, but those who belong to Christ are sheep in this respect that they love to get together. Sheep go in flocks, and so do God's people. The Lord loves them best as a company—

*"He likes the tents of Jacob well,
But still in Zion loves to dwell."*

Christ is the good Shepherd who lays down His life for His sheep, and He folds them, guards them, protects them as His flock. A true church is therefore a very precious thing, it is not a mere human society banded together for certain objectives, but it is a community which God Himself has formed, and over

which He does watch with an unsleeping eye. It is a flock which He cares for, so that heaven and earth shall be ransacked but what He will have provender for them. This flock is so well preserved that at the last the great Shepherd will say, "Of them which You gave Me I have lost none."

Observe that it is added, "*The flock of My pasture.*" There is a different idea here. It shows that God's people are not only peculiar in other things, but they are peculiar in their feeding. You may know a child of God by that which his soul lives upon. Many professors can feed on any mortal thing, so long as it is cleverly put. "Have you heard So-and-So preach?" "No, I have not, but I have heard that he has departed from the truth." "But," says one, "he is a wonderfully clever man," and if a man is only clever, the generality of people will accept anything he likes to bring, from heaven above, or from the earth beneath, or from the waters under the earth. It does not matter to most people so long as the man can deliver his opinions fluently and poetically. But such are not Christ's sheep, for they have not the discernment of the faithful. "The sheep follow Him, for they know His voice; and a stranger will they not follow, for they know not the voice of strangers." I remember hearing a brother tell how he disproved the notion that sheep only know the shepherd by his dress. When in Palestine he asked a shepherd to allow him to put on his clothes. Then he began to call the sheep, but never a one would come, not even a lamb. The most sheepish of the flock had sense enough left to know that he was not the shepherd, and even the youngest kept aloof, heedless of the stranger's voice. He might have called till he was hoarse, but they would not come. So God's people know their Lord, and they know the kind of food which He gives them. They know the truth from a lie. Men put the falsehood so prettily that they would deceive, if it were possible, the very elect, but that "if it were possible" guards the chosen flock of God's pasture. They will not graze on the hemlock, nor feed on poisoned grain. They will have nothing but clean provender, and the more evidently it comes from the great Shepherd's own hand the better it is to them.

It is a very singular thing, but it is added, "You My flock, the flock of My pasture, *are men.*" This was inserted, some commentators think, lest the reader should think that the Lord was really speaking of sheep. This cannot be true, for no rational being could be so foolish as to fall into that mistake. The language is used for a much higher purpose. "You are men," then God knows what kind of persons we are, whom He has loved with an everlasting love. We are Adams, not angels. If you come into the church of God, and expect to get among angels, you will be mightily mistaken, and if the brethren should receive you, and hope that they are receiving angels unawares, they will be mistaken, too. We make absurd mistakes through foolish expectations. We shall not find that our brethren and sisters are male and female cherubim, for they are men and women, and nothing more. They are fallen men too, bearing about them traces of the ruin of their nature; they went astray like lost sheep, even the best of them. They are men, that is to say, they are only men, for the best of men are but men at the best. Somebody once wrote me a letter of denunciation for using that sentence, and as far as I could make out from his letter, the friend thought himself to be something more than a man. I did not agree with his judgment, but fancied that he was rather less than more than a man; from the bitter spirit of his letter I thought him more human than humane. The best men I have ever seen are but men, and generally, the better men are the more ready they are to confess their imperfection. Some are tall by the measurement of conceit, but short when brought to the standard of wisdom. God's people are but men, yet they are men and not brutes. There are in human form many who are hardly as good as brutes, but the saints are gentle, compassionate and gracious. God's people are true men, when the Spirit of God is in them they quit themselves like men. They come to the front and bear the brunt of the battle. "You are men"—it is a bad word in one sense, but a good one in another. God make us men in the better sense, and may we rise superior to the infirmities of "men" in the worse sense, by being humble, yet brave.

But then He adds this blessed assurance, "*And I am your God.*" God is not a man, that He should lie; nor the son of a man, that He should repent. I hear that poor soul seeking after God, say, "Oh, but I am so unworthy." Just so, the Lord knows it. He says you are men. But then He is not unworthy, He is worthy to receive honor and power divine, for He is our God. "Alas," says one, "I feel myself so weak." Just so, you are men, but then He is your God, your strength is in Him. "But I am so changeable." Just so, for you are men; but then He says, "I am the Lord, I change not, therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed." "But I am so faithless." Just so, for you are men and men are fickle and frail, but God changes not, He is the same, and of His years there is no end. If the promises rested on you for keeping, then they

would never be kept, for you are men. If your salvation depended on your own merits you would be lost, for you are men, but inasmuch as the whole covenant, and the whole weight of salvation rests with God, here is our joy, "I am your God, says the Lord God."

I have two words to say. One is to the poor sinner. He says, "I am afraid to come to God in Christ Jesus." Do not be afraid to come, for He knows what you are. "Oh, but I am so vile." He knows how vile you are. "But I am everything I ought not to be." He knows that. That is why He sent a Savior. If you had not been lost, there would have been no need for Him to seek you out. Come to Jesus just as you are, poor trembler, and let this word beckon you to Him, "You, My flock, the flock of My pasture, are men." You are poor, weak, feeble, erring, undeserving men, but your God is full of mercy, and His thoughts of love are as high above your thoughts as the heavens are above the earth. Come now and reason together with Him, and He will put away your sins as a cloud and your transgressions as a thick cloud, and you shall sing, "Who is a God like unto You?"

The other word is to you that ought to be members of the church, who know the Lord and love Him, but have never confessed Him. You say, "I shall join the church when I feel better." When will that be? Are you any better than you were a year ago? How much better are you going to be before you obey your Lord? I should like to hang up a sort of thermometer so that when you did reach the point you might come out, obey your Lord's command, and join with His church. Do you want to be perfect, and to join with perfect men? If you do, do not come to this church, because I will guarantee you there is not one perfect member in it, though there are many of the excellent of the earth in our midst. We had some perfect brethren once, but they went to their own place after having proved to us that their boasted perfection was very poor stuff. When workers get that proud notion into their heads they become both useless and unloving. We are sorry to say that we are a company of imperfect men and women, but we shall be very glad to receive you if you love the Lord and are prepared to obey His commands. That is all we require. Do you want to join a perfect church? You must die. You will not do it otherwise. And if you were to join a perfect church, I am sure it would not be perfect after you had been admitted into it. You had better give up that idea, and just believe what God says about His own church, "You, My flock, the flock of My pasture, are men." Come, then, with us, and we will do you good. "I am afraid," says one. Is this like a man? Can we say of such cowards, "You are men"? We cannot give you the good side of the word, surely. But come with us. If you believe that Jesus is the Christ, confess Him. The gospel message is, "He that believes and is baptized shall be saved." Faith and Baptism are here placed very closely together, do not divide them. "He that with his heart believes, and with his mouth makes confession of Him, shall be saved." Neglect not one command of Christ; confess your faith at once. "There is nothing saving in it," you say. Selfish wretch, so you will do nothing except to save your own skin? If you are a saved man, you will loathe such meanness, and you will say, "Now, for the love I bear my Master's name, whatever command He gives to His believing people, I am ready to obey—

*"Through floods or flames, if Jesus leads,
I'll follow where He goes;
'Hinder me not,' shall be my cry,
Though earth and hell oppose."*

God grant you His blessing in so doing, for Christ's sake. Amen.

**PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—EZEKIEL 34:11-31.
HYMNS FROM "OUR OWN HYMN BOOK"—100 (VERS. 3), 955, 957.**

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

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