

MAN, WHOSE BREATH IS IN HIS NOSTRILS NO. 1984

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AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON.*

*“Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for of what account is he?”
Isaiah 2:22.*

MAN, especially since the Fall, is a very unspiritual creature. His disposition is animal. He is made up, as the old writers used to say, of soul and soil. Alas, the soil terribly soils his soul! “My soul cleaves to the dust” might be the confession of every man in one sense or another. We bear the image of the first Adam, who was of the earth, earthy—and earthy enough are we.

One consequence of the prevailing materialism of our corrupt nature is our craving for something tangible, audible, visible, as the object of our confidence. We need something which can be touched, heard, seen, or felt—we cannot be content with that which appeals only to the soul or the spirit. It seems as if man is so unspiritual that he cannot believe in a spiritual God and yet, any other than a spiritual God is an absurdity! Man cannot *see* God, therefore he will not trust in Him. He cannot hear His voice, therefore he will not attend to the movement of the Holy Spirit upon his soul. Humanity is carnal, sold under sin, infected with idolatry—and this fact remains true, in a measure, even of the regenerate. Their old nature is not other than it was, save that it is held in check by the new nature. So long as sin remains in us—and this will be so long as we are in this body—our tendency will be to be weary of God, who is a Spirit and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth. We seek after something to worship, something to love, something to rely upon which is so near akin to the coarser part of our nature that we may commune with it through the senses. It is sad that it should be so, but it has always been so throughout the history of man—and sad traces of it are to be seen, even, in the history of God’s own Church.

Man is by nature an idolater. Under the most favorable circumstances he flies to his idols, even as the dog seeks after carrion, or the vulture hastens to its prey. The Lord’s people, Israel, were delivered out of Egypt with a high hand and with an outstretched arm. And by many signs and tokens, God’s Presence among them was abundantly certified. This was a noble beginning. The circumstances which afterwards surrounded them were especially helpful. They were placed in the wilderness where, if they lived at all, they must live through the special protection and provision of God, for they reaped no harvests and they gathered into no barns. The bread they ate fell from Heaven! The water they drank came from a Rock which had been smitten by command of God through the rod of Moses. All day long they were sheltered from the burning sun by a canopy of clouds. And at night the canvas city was made bright with that same canopy turned into a flame of fire! They were alone in the wilderness and apart—shut out from the rest of the world—surrounded, as it were, by the Lord, Himself, who was a wall of fire round about them and the Glory in their midst.

Nothing could have been more favorable for faith in God. Yet they must have a god that they can see! “Make us gods to go before us,” they cried with such furious clamor that Aaron yielded to their evil desires and made them the image of an ox. Behold the people of God, whom He had brought out of Egypt, bowing before the image of an ox that eats grass—an image which Moses, in sarcasm, styled a calf! They turned the Glory of the invisible God into that of a brute beast and said—“These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you up out of the land of Egypt.” Then they degraded themselves and laid their manhood prostrate on the ground in adoration of the image of a bull. How is humanity fallen!

For century after century this was always the tendency of Israel, the most spiritual race of men upon the face of the earth. This race, educated by miracle and instructed by Revelation, continually went aside after the gods of the heathen! Abraham, among his own descendants after the flesh, had few who were like he in his high spiritual faith. The world of spiritual realities seems to be too bright, too holy for the best of such gross and carnal beings as we are.

The people of Isaiah's day were like the rest of their race—they showed their unspiritualness and their inability to walk in the light of the Lord by making their own *wealth* their chief confidence. We read at verse seven—"Their land is also full of silver and gold, neither is there any end of their treasures." And then it is added, "Their land is also full of idols." Alas, this idolatry of wealth is common among God's people even at this day! "Give us this day our daily bread" is a prayer which falls far short of the general desires even of Christian people! Our demands are for luxuries—and plenty of them. Many would be coming down very terribly in the world if they had to receive from hand-to-mouth fashion—day by day their daily bread! Yet the Lord Jesus has put these words into our mouth. The Providence of God is, to some professing Christians, a mere dream—they cannot rest till they have something more substantial to rely upon than the care of Heaven. You think I am sarcastic? Is it not true? See how your professed Believers hunger to make sure of the main chance—as eagerly as the merest worldlings, they scrape and they hoard! I have not a word to say against that Scriptural prudence which bids us, like the ant, lay by in store for wintry times. But I speak of the hunger to be rich and of the selfish expenditure which entirely forgets that our substance is to be used for the Glory of God, and that we are only stewards. I ask again, do not many slave, hoard and grasp as if there were no promise in the Scriptures of temporal provision from God's own right hand—and no exhortation to lay up our treasures in Heaven? Are we liars? Do we say that all that we are and have is the Lord's—and do we, after saying this, live for ourselves as if there were no redemption and no hereafter? That there should be need for the preacher to raise such questions is an indication that there is a common tendency to worship wealth, or at least to regard it as a substantial support.

Nations also, like the Israelite people, are apt to idolize *power*. Yes, even power in the form of brute force. We read—"Their land is also full of horses, neither is there any end of their chariots." Cavalry and war chariots were as much in repute in that age on land as ironclads are at this day upon the sea! And Israel trusted to these. Jehovah was the guardian of His people, the Lord of Hosts is His name. He, alone, was a match for Egypt and Babylon, but the kings of Israel and Judah did not think so! They could not feel secure without great armies. They must multiply their horses and their chariots. They forgot that "a horse is a vain thing for safety"—they knew not that only in the Lord is the salvation of His people.

The same feeling crops up among God's people at this day. We pine for visible power—it may be physical or mental—as the case requires, but we thirst to have it available, embodied in some human form. We cannot rest upon God, alone, and feel that when we are weak we are strong. The Lord takes no pleasure in the strength of the horse nor in the legs of a man, but His people often do. Eloquence, cleverness, intellect—these are still the idols which the Church dotes upon! She has not yet understood the words, "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord." Still we make too much of the instrument and too little of the Divine Worker! Still is there more expected from music, architecture and oratory, than from the simple Gospel and the attendant working of the Holy Spirit! How can men be brought to trust in the invisible God! Alas, it is still true, "Their land is also full of idols: the mean man bows down and the great man humbles himself." O Church of God, how long will it be before you believe your God?

These people, in the heat of their idolatry, set up *many idols*. They made *anything* into a god. He that was so impoverished that he could not make a god of silver, would make an idol out of a tree which would not rot—and having carved and gilded it—he prostrated himself before it! To what a height of folly has a man come when he can do this? You tell me that this idolatry is confined to heathen countries—alas, it is not so—idolatry is common even here! "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," is a text that still needs to be preached from—yes, to be preached in Christian congregations, for idols will intrude themselves into the sanctuary of the Lord! The forms and shapes of modern idols are many and crafty. We see no elephant-headed deity such as is the fear of the Hindus, and no absurd fetish such as the African dreads—but more dangerous because more subtle and secret—forms of idolatry are allowed to remain in our midst! Oh that the Lord would fulfill in His people the Word, "The idols He shall utterly abolish"!

May we not easily make idols of *ourselves*? Almost before we are aware of it, we may be thus debased. What more degrading than for a man to worship himself? We read of some whose god is their belly—this is the grosser part of self. What heathen ever worshipped his own belly? Yet we all too much trust in ourselves at times—what is this but idolatry? Do we not seek ourselves in a measure—is not this idolatry? Do we not reverence our own achievements and attainments—in what does this differ from idolatry? Many gods and many lords have men made unto themselves. Like a child that must have a toy, man must have a visible trust and confidence. For this purpose, "he has sought out many inven-

tions.” He will even worship reptiles of the river and plants of the garden rather than be without a visible deity! Alas, poor foolish creature!

I need not enlarge upon this. You all know how true it is that, one way or another, man gets away from the spiritual life which would make God everything to him. And he wanders into the sensual region where he either finds another god, or else allows some symbol or priest to stand between him and God. Our nature is so twisted and biased through sin that we seem to be under the witchery of idolatry!

As I have already said, there is nothing more absurd in the history of human nature than the fact that man is apt to trust in *man*. To worship something superior to myself is bad enough if it is not God—but to begin to put my dependence upon a man like myself or upon myself and so to allow man, who at the best is a sorry creature—to take the place of God is, indeed, a wantonness of evil! Do you wonder that God has pronounced a curse upon this provoking folly, this insult to His Divine Majesty? Hear the words of this anathema—“Cursed be the man that trusts in man and makes flesh his arm.” The sin is none the less accursed because of its commonness. That which God blesses is blest, indeed, and that which He curses is cursed with an emphasis!

Concerning that sin so common and so accursed I have to speak at this time. May the Lord bless the word that we may be kept from the transgression! Here is the text—“Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for of what account is he?”

We will handle the text thus—First, *What is man?* Answer—“His breath is in his nostrils.” Secondly, *What is to be our relation to man?* “Cease you from man.” And thirdly, *Why should we cease from him?* It is answered by another question, “For of what account is he?” This puts the question—What is there in him or about him that renders him a proper object of reverence or confidence? May the Holy Spirit send us a profitable meditation!

I. Our first enquiry is, WHAT IS MAN? This question is asked many times in Scripture and it has been frequently answered with a copiousness of instruction. David even asks of Heaven, “Lord, what is man?” I will not, however, go over all that wide expanse of thought which the Bible puts before us, but simply answer the enquiry from the point of view of our text.

What is man? *He is assuredly a very feeble creature.* He must be weak, for, “his breath is in his nostrils.” We measure the strength of a chain by its weakest link. If other links are strong, yet if one is ready to snap, we judge that the whole chain is far from strong and is not to be depended upon. See, then, how weak man is, for he is weakness, itself, in a vital point! He has bones that may be hard and durable. And he has many a strong sinew, tough and wiry, as we sometimes say. But there is a weak point about him which is found in a matter on which his life depends, namely, his breath! And what is our breath? A vapor which we scarcely see—a thing so unsubstantial that when we have it, we scarcely see it—and yet when we lose it, life is gone from us! Our earthly existence depends upon our breath and that breath is mere wind!

How feeble must that creature be whose vitality rests on a foundation so airy and unsubstantial as mere breath! A vapor is not more fleeting! We talk of strong men. Is *any* man strong? We speak of the strength of our constitutions—how is that strong which depends upon a puff of air? It is a marvel that so frail a life is not sooner ended. That we live is miraculous! That we die is but *natural*. Readily enough may that house fall which is built, not on sand, but on air! Dr. Watts has well said—

***“Our life contains a thousand springs
And fails if one is gone!
Strange that a harp of a thousand strings
Should keep in tune so long!”***

Dust we are and that dust hastens to dissolve—and so to return to the kindred dust of the earth. Under our feet are our graves and above us are the stars which will soon look down upon our silent tombs. The trees cast their leaves, but they grow green, again. We shed our life’s glories once and they return no more! Thus the trees outlive us and beneath their shade we are reminded that man is far more frail than the tree which he fells with the axe. Yes, the very grass which he mows outlives the mower! Man is a mere shadow—we have scarcely time to say that we are before we are not! Are we not foolish if we place our reliance upon such a feeble creature—so weak that his *breath*, his unsubstantial breath—is essential to his life? Who are you, O man, that trusts in man? If you have half a grain of wisdom left, how can you quit the ever-living God and put your reliance upon a poor creature who is as the grass—that today is and tomorrow is cast into the oven? Go, rest on a reed, or ride on a moth, or build on a bubble—but rely not on a man!

Moreover, *man is a frail creature*, for his strength must be measured by his fleeting breath, and that breath is in his nostrils. It seems as though his life in his breath stood at the gates, ready to be gone, since it is in his nostrils. The text says not that his breath is in his lungs, deep, hidden below, but in his *nostrils*—at the door—in the most exposed part of the face. It is at two open portals which can never be shut—as if it meant to secure an easy exit at any moment. Brothers and Sisters, there are 10,000 gates to death! One man is choked by a grape. Another dies through sleeping in a newly whitewashed room. One receives death as he passes by a reeking sewer. Another finds it in the best kept house, or by a chill taken on a walk. Those who study neither to eat nor to drink anything unwholesome, nor go into quarters where the arrows of death are flying, yet pass away all of a sudden—falling from their couch into a coffin—from their seat into the sepulcher!

The other day one of our own Brothers sat down in his chair to sleep a moment, but it was his last sleep. Another stumbled in his own room, never again to rise! These men were apparently in good health. Life is never sure for an instant. How can we place our trust in a creature which is so soon gone? Shall we make the insect of an hour the object of our fond affection and our chief dependence? How can we be so foolish as to trust our treasure in a purse made of such a spider's web? The vault should be fit for the treasure—do you mean to trust your *soul's* confidence to a man who shall die—that may die in an hour? I asked, What is man? But before the question is answered, I have to ask, “Where is he?” He is gone like a watch in the night! How can we make a dying man the object of a living trust? “Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.”

Man is a weak and frail creature—*he is also a dying creature*. Need I further enlarge upon this? To our sorrow, many of us know that it is so. Some of you had fathers of your flesh, but they passed away and you were fatherless before you could earn your bread. Had not God preserved the orphan, you had been miserable, indeed. Some of you once leaned upon a manly arm and looked up into the smiling face of a husband. But the dear one has been laid in a grave wet with floods of tears—it is well for you that your Maker dies not. There are those here who once enjoyed dear friendships—these seemed essential to your lives—but ruthless Death has torn Jonathan away from David. It has come closer and stolen the child from its mother and the wife from the husband. Man is always dying while he lives. Oh, set not all your love, or much of your confidence, or *any* of your worship upon a creature that will soon be worms' meat!

Contemplate the dead! What do you think, now, of your idol? You who could sit down by the hour together and revel in the sight and company of your beloved object, what think you now of that which you doted on? If you could see it uncovered after a few days you would say, “Deliver me from this noisome smell, this horrible corruption, this dreadful mass of decay!” How could you ever be so vain and foolish and bereft of reason as to make a thing that comes to this, your trust and confidence? The Prophet asks, “Who are you, that you should be afraid of a man that shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass; and forgets the Lord your Maker, who has stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundations of the earth?” In this he rebukes our fears, but equally rebukes our carnal trusts.

But I think that the text also reminds us that *man is a very fickle creature*. His breath is in his “nostrils.” That is where he wears his life and this hints to us that he is sadly changeable. As his breath is affected by his health, so is he changed. Today he loves and tomorrow he hates! He promises fair, but he forgets his words! He swears that he will be faithful unto death, but soon he betrays the confidence reposed in him. No dependence can be wisely placed in him. O man! O woman! Change is written on your brow! The lapse of years alters you! Yes, the flight of days and hours suffices to transform you! We may better trust the winds and waves than you!

David said in his haste, “All men are liars.” That may not be quite true and may bear the mark of hasty judgement, but it is a rough-hewn truth which is far more accurate than flattering compliments. David might have deliberated and then have said very much the same thing with great certainty. In some senses the broad verdict is correct as it stands, for if we make an arm of flesh our trust, to whomever that arm belongs, we shall find that we have rested on a broken reed! In the time of our calamity, when we most need help, we shall find that mortal assistance is either gone through falsehood, or is incompetent through feebleness. Then shall we know the curse of trusting in man, whose breath is in his nostrils!

Who will stand by us when we are slandered? Does not winter make all the swallows take to their wings? Who can help us when the soul is in despair? O my Brothers and Sisters, who can help us when our spirit is wounded, when the arrows of grief pierce our heart? Who can help us when we come to die? When the mysteries of eternity darken around us

and we quit the light of day, what friend or fond one can be at our side as we enter the unknown land? There are certain points of life in which every man must tread a lonely pathway. We then need *God*—and if we have made a god of any man, what shall we do? Ah me, what reason we have to look to Him who is always the same! Remember how He says, “I am the Lord, I change not; therefore you sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

If you read the chapter through, you will also find that man is *a trembling creature*, a cowardly creature, a creature who, indeed, if he were not cowardly, yet has abundant reason to fear. Read from the 19th verse—“They shall go into the holes of the rocks, and into the caves of the earth, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth. In that day a man shall cast his idols of silver, and his idols of gold, which they made, each one, for himself to worship, to the moles and to the bats; to go into the clefts of the rocks and into the tops of the ragged rocks, for fear of the Lord, and for the glory of His majesty, when He arises to shake terribly the earth.”

Think of the days of Divine wrath and especially of the last dread day of Judgement—and of the dismay which will then seize upon many of the proud and the great! Are you going to make *these* your confidants? Are you going to give up Christ for the sake of the smile of these who will wail in terror when He comes? Is it so, that for the sake of some young man or woman who loves not God—and one day must quail before the coming Judge—you will let your Lord and Savior go? It is concerning such a temptation as this that the text thunders at you—“Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils,” who will fear and fly and lose his breath in very dread at the appearing of the Lord. Cease to regard these as the fond objects of your love and trust, lest the curse of God should lie upon your soul throughout eternity! O my Hearers, hearken to this!

So much concerning what man is, according to our text. Is it not a powerful argument against placing man where only God should be?

II. Secondly, WHAT IS TO BE OUR RELATION TO MAN, or what does the text mean when it says, “*Cease you from man*”?

It implies, does it not, that we very probably already have too much to do with this poor creature, man? We cannot “cease” from that with which we have nothing to do! The text implies that in all probability we have catered into connections with man which will need changing. We may even require to reverse our present conduct, break up unions, cancel alliances and alter the whole tenor of our conduct.

“Cease you from man” means, first, *cease to idolize him in your love*. Do any of you idolize any living person? Answer honestly. It is very common to idolize *children*. A mother who had lost her babe fretted and rebelled about it. She happened to be in a meeting of the Society of Friends and there was nothing spoken that morning except this word by one female friend who was moved, I doubt not, by the Spirit of God to say, “Verily, I perceive that children are idols.” She did not know the condition of that mourner’s mind, but it was the right word and she to whom God applied it knew how true it was! She submitted her rebellious will and, at once, was comforted! Cease you from these little men and women, for, though you prize them so, they are of the race from which you are to cease! Cease you from them, for their breath is in their nostrils and, indeed, it is but feebly there in childhood. A proper and right love of children should be cultivated, but to carry this beyond its due measure is to grieve the Spirit of God. If you make idols of children, you have done the worst you can for them, whether they live or die. Cease from such folly!

I will not go into the many instances in which men have been idolized politically, or idolized by a blind following of their teaching. You can idolize a minister, you can idolize a poet, you can idolize a patron—but in so doing, you break the first and greatest of the commandments—and you anger the Most High. He declares Himself to be a jealous God and He will not yield His Throne to another. Upon any who are thus erring, let me press the text home—“Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for of what account is he?”

Next, “Cease you from man”—*cease to idolize him in your trust*. There is a measure of confidence that we may place in good and gracious men, for they are worthy of it. But a blind confidence in *any man* is altogether evil. I care not who he may be, you cannot read his *heart*—and some of the greatest deceptions that have ever been worked in this world have been accomplished by persons who seemed to be self-evidently honest and sincere. I remember conversing with a person who was concerned in one of the great speculations which brought loss and ruin to many—and as I looked into his honest face and heard his open-hearted talk, I said to myself—“This is not a man who is capable of robbery. He is a plain, blunt, farmer-like sort of man who might even be the *victim* of the confidence trick.”

I afterwards learned that this is the usual style of the man who puffs a company, or betrays a trust. Of course, if a man *looks* like a thief, you button up your pockets and smile if he invites you to take shares! But you are off your guard when the man appears to be the embodiment of simple honesty. The woman in the omnibus who picks your pocket looks like the last person to be capable of such a thing—and this is why she is able to do it. Transfer this knowledge to other matters and it may save you sorrow. If you get to trusting anybody with a blind confidence beyond what you ought to give and, especially, if you trust your soul with any priest or preacher, whoever he may be, you are a fool and your folly may turn out to be an everlasting mischief which can never be undone! Hear this and learn what God would teach you—“Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for of what account is he?” Do not idolize man by laying yourself at his feet, or following him in the dark, for it will not only be, in itself, a folly, but it will bring you under the curse of my text.

Cease to idolize any man by giving him undue honor. There is an honor to be paid to all, for the Apostle says, “Honor all men.” A measure of courtesy and respect is to be paid to every person—and peculiarly to those whose offices demand it—therefore is it written, “Honor the king.” Some, also, by their character, deserve much respect from their fellow men and I trust we shall never refuse “honor to whom honor is due.” But there is a limit to this, or we shall become sycophants and slaves and, what is worse, *idolaters!* It grieves one to see how certain persons dare not even think, much less *speak*, till they have asked how other people think. In some congregations there are weak people who do not know whether they have liked the sermon till they have asked a certain venerable critic to whom they act as echoes! The bulk of people are like a flock of sheep—there is a gap—and if one sheep goes through, all will follow.

If the ringleader should happen to be an infidel or a new-theology man, so much the worse! If he should happen to be orthodox, it is much better in some ways, but then it is a pity that people should follow the Truth of God in so thoughtless a manner. Public opinion is a poor substitute for conscience and is *no* substitute at all for righteousness and truth! Because the general opinion bids you bow down before this man or that, will you do so? Will you forget God, conscience, right, truth—and ask another man to tell you when you may breathe? God’s people should scorn such groveling! If the Son shall make you free, you will be free, indeed. Jesus loves that the soldiers in His host should acknowledge His supremacy—but once acknowledging Him as Lord, He would have them feel that no man or *set of men* shall draw them away from His Word, either in doctrine or in precept. Worship is for God only! Render it to Him and, “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.”

Equally does the text bid us *cease from the fear of man*. Oh, how many are kept from doing right through some man or some woman, wealthy relative, or influential friend! Are there not men in workshops who join with others in their ribaldry because they are afraid to speak out lest they should be laughed at and marked as hypocrites? Are there not persons in well-to-do circles who must attend a certain place of worship because all the respectable people go there? No matter which way conscience would take them, they are bound to follow the fashion—the *fear of men* is upon them. They do not want to be despised and remarked upon. But, my dear Friends, if any of you are doing wrong under fear of men, do not excuse yourselves, but at once obey the Word of God which says, “Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.” Who are you that you should set *man* before God? Is not this a grievous presumption? The fear of God ought so to be before your eyes that the fear of man will not weigh with you in the least. “I fear man,” said one, “but I fear God infinitely more”—this was near the mark. Our Lord said, “Fear not him that can kill the body, but afterwards has no more that he can do; but fear Him who can cast both body and soul into Hell; yes, I say unto you, Fear Him.” Dismiss the cowardly fear which would make you false to your convictions in any degree! And thus, “cease from man.”

Once more, *cease from being worried about men*. We ought to do all we can for our fellow men to set them right and keep them right, both by teaching and by example. But certain folks think that everything must go according to their wishes—and if we cannot see eye to eye with them—they worry themselves and us! This is not right and that is not right and, indeed, *nothing* is right but what is hammered on their anvil. Let us please our neighbor for his good, for edification—but let us not become men-pleasers, nor grieve inordinately because unreasonable persons are not satisfied with us. To our own Master we stand or fall! And interfering brethren must be so good as to remember that we are not their servants, but we serve the Lord Christ.

Moreover, Brothers and Sisters, let us not be unduly cast down if we cannot set everybody right. Truly, the body politic, common society and especially the Church, may cause us great anxiety. But be still, the Lord reigns—and we are

not to let ourselves die of grief. After all, our Lord does not expect us to rectify everything, for He only requires of us what He enables us to do. We are not magistrates, nor dictators—and when we have done our best and kept our own garments clean, and given earnest warning and cried unto God by reason of the evil of the times—then this Word comes in, “Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils: for of what account is he?”

“*But they say.*” What do they say? Let them say! It will not hurt you if you can only gird up the loins of your mind and cease from man. “Oh, but they have accused me of this and that.” Is it true? “No, Sir, it is not true. And that is why it grieves me.” That is why it should *not* grieve you! If it were true, it ought to trouble you, but if it is not true, let it alone! If an enemy has said anything against your character, it will not always be worth while to answer him. Silence has both dignity and argument in it. Nine times out of 10, if a boy makes a blot in his copybook and borrows a knife to take it out, he makes the mess 10 times worse and, as in your case, there is no blot, after all. You need not make one by attempting to remove what is not there. All the dirt that falls upon a good man will brush off when it is dry—but let him wait till it is dry—and not dirty his hands with wet mud. “Cease you from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.”

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, let us think more of God and less of man! Come, let the Lord our God fill the whole horizon of our thoughts. Let our love go forth to Him. Let us delight ourselves in Him. Let us trust in Him that lives forever, in Him whose promise never fails, in Him who will be with us in life, in death and through eternity! Oh that we lived more in the society of Jesus, more in the sight of God! Let man go behind our back and Satan, too. We cannot spend our lives in seeking the smiles of men, for pleasing God is the one objective we pursue. Our hands, our heads and our hearts—and all that we have and are—find full occupation for the Lord and, therefore, we must, “Cease from man.”

Cease you from man because you have come to know the *best* of men, who is more than man, even the Lord Jesus Christ! And He has so fully become the beloved of your souls, that none can compare with Him. Rest in Christ as to your sins—and cease from priests! Rest, also, in the great Father as to your Providential cares—why rest in men when *He* cares for you? Rest in the Holy Spirit as to your spiritual needs—why do you need to depend on man? Yes, throw yourself wholly and entirely upon the God All-Sufficient—El Shaddai, as Scripture calls Him. Some read it, “The Many-Breasted God,” who is able to supply from Himself all the needs of His creatures. He will do for us exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or even think! “O rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him,” and cease you from man!

That was a wise and tender word of our Savior to the woman who had washed His feet. He said to her, “Your sins are forgiven you.” And then, as they began to quibble at her and talk about the expense and the waste of the ointment, He added to her, “Your faith has saved you; *go in peace*”—as much as to say, “They are going to have a discussion about you, but you go out of earshot of it. They are going to criticize what you have done. Do not tarry to hear them, but go home. I have accepted you. Let *that* be enough for you—never mind *them*. You do not need to know their opinions.”

Oftentimes to a child of God it is the best advice that can be given—“Go in peace.” Certain doubters are about to argue. Let them argue to themselves, but you go in peace! Why do you need to know the last new doubt? Would you like to taste the last new *poison*? “Prove all things,” but when it has been proved to be evil, have done with it. You do not need to hear that which can only tend to stagger your faith and defile your conscience! You have heard enough of that stuff already—go in peace. When men begin to quibble at Christ and the Doctrines of Grace, cease from them! Steal away to Jesus in private prayer. Five minutes’ communion with your Lord will be worth five years of this idle talk! Go in peace and, “Cease from man, whose breath is in his nostrils.”

Do you hear that professor declare that there is no God? And another that there is no Providence? And another that there is no atoning Sacrifice—and another that there is no hereafter? Now that we know that a mad dog is about, let us keep out of his way! It does not matter who he is—we have nothing to do with him. When a thief meets me, I need not stay to say, “Good night” to him. Cease you from such a man, for the very breath of his nostrils breathes death to that which is good!

III. We finish with that last question—WHY ARE WE TO CEASE FROM MAN? The answer is, *because he is nothing to be accounted of.* Begin, dear Brothers and Sisters, by ceasing from *yourselves*. Every man must cease from himself, first, and then he must cease from all men as his hope and his trust because neither ourselves nor others are worthy of such confidence. “For of what account is he?” If his breath is in his nostrils, see how short his life is—“Of what account is he?” If his breath is in his nostrils, see how weak he is—“Of what account is he?” If his breath is in his nostrils, see how fickle he is—“Of what account is he?”

What figure shall I put down for man? Some men would wish to have themselves written down at a very high figure, but a cipher is quite sufficient! Write man at *nothing* and you are somewhat *above* the mark. “For of what account is he?” Compared with God, man is less than nothing and vanity! Reckon him so and act upon the reckoning. If there were no men on the face of the earth, how would you live? If only God filled all your thoughts and all your heart, how would you live? Live just so! Then if there are a trillion men upon the face of the globe—or more—they will not sway you. If the city teems with them and if the forum is disturbed with their noise—and if they ride up to the capitol in triumph—what of it? We have ceased from them and we shall never have cause to regret it, for they will be no loss to us! If we try to reckon up what the loss might be if we lost their aid, it comes to nothing, “For of what account is he?” Cease from them and go straight on in the path of faith and duty, resting in God and believing in Him. Care nothing for the vanity of vanities, but trust in the Verity of verities, even God, Himself!

This is a special subject and someone will ask, “Can such a text as this be useful for the ungodly?” Yes, it hits the nail on the head! Some of you have been trying to save yourselves. “Cease you from man.” You have been looking to your feelings. You have been looking to your works. You have been looking to this and that of your own—cease you altogether from that evil man—*yourself!* “For of what account is he?” Some of you have kept back from Christ because you have made much of this poor nobody that is crushed before the moth—this worm of the earth—this mere vapor! Now, rise above your dead selves and think more of God! Believe that He is and that He is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him—and may His Holy Spirit help you, now, to come and commit your souls into the hands of the risen Redeemer, even He who is able to save you and keep you to the end! God so help you, for Jesus Christ’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—Isaiah 2.
HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—63 (SONG III), 688, 39.

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