

IDOLS ABOLISHED

NO. 1339

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

“Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?”
Hosea 14:8.

IDOLATRY was the great sin of the ten tribes represented by Ephraim. Indeed, it is the sin of the entire human race. When we speak of idolatry we need not think of blocks of wood and stone and men bowing down before them, for our native land swarms with idolaters. Neither need you go into the streets to find them. Stay where you are and look into your own hearts and you shall find idols there. This is the one easily besetting sin of our nature—to turn aside from the living God and to make unto ourselves idols in some fashion or another. For the essence of idolatry is this—to love anything better than God, to trust anything more than God, to wish to have a God other than we have or to have some signs and wonders by which we may see Him, some outward symbol or manifestation that can be seen with the eye or heard with the ear rather than to rest in an invisible God and believe the faithful promise of Him whom eye has not seen nor ear heard. In some form or other this great sin is the main mischief in the heart of man and even in saved men this is one of the developments of remaining corruption. We may very easily make an idol of anything and in many different ways. No doubt many mothers and fathers make idols of their children, and so many husbands and wives idolize each other, and we may even make idols of ministers, even as there were idol shepherds of old. Equally is it certain that many a thoughtful man makes an idol of his intellect, and many another makes an idol of his gold, or even of that little home wherein he enjoys so much content. The ignorant papist holds up his crucifix and worships that and that is his idol. But men who are better instructed often take the Bible and read it and failing to get through the letter into the spirit, they trust in the mere act of Scripture reading and make even the Word itself to become an idol to them through their resting in a mere creed or in bare Bible reading and not pressing through it to spiritual hearty worship of God Himself. Anything, however holy, which comes between us and the personal dealing of our soul with God, as He is revealed in Christ Jesus by faith and love and hope, becomes an idol to us.

There are idols of all sorts, more or less intrinsically valuable. Just as in material substances one idol is made of wood and another of stone and another of silver and another of gold so that these idols differ in value and yet they are all idols, so may men, according to their different grades of mind, make an idol of this or of that or of the other, every man according to his own fancy. Many of these idols may in themselves be considered good enough, but when they are made into idols they are none the better for that. A golden idol is just as obnoxious to God as a wooden one. And so the dearest and best thing on earth, if it is allowed to come between us and God, as an idol, it becomes an abomination in the sight of the Most High. O brother, when you cannot trust the providence of God, but feel as if you must have something of visible substance to lean upon, you idolize your savings or the money you covet. When you cannot take the bare promise of God and dare not risk everything for God, but want something over and above the Word of God to rest in, you idolize your own selfishness. When you must have marks and signs and evidences of the things which God has plainly declared, and will not believe God unless you have corroborative proof, you are playing the idolater's part. Yet human nature continually craves for more than God all-sufficient because it is so carnal that it will not trust the Invisible One. It is, therefore, a supreme work of grace when God brings any man to say, “What have I to do any more with idols?” I ask your attention to four points.

I. And the first is this—I want you to notice THE SOVEREIGNTY OF THIS PREDICTION. “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?” God speaks of Ephraim as if Ephraim

would do and must do what He declared he should do. “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?” But who was this Ephraim? If we look at him as an individual, he represents the ten tribes of Israel at the time when they were wedded to strange gods. Ephraim is a man and therefore he has a will of his own. He is a depraved man and therefore he has an obstinate will and yet God speaks about Ephraim as positively as if he had no will and states that he shall say, “What have I to do any more with idols?” It would be very hard to say what the wind shall do—very hard to say what the waves shall do, but man’s will is more changeable and uncontrollable than the winds and the waves. Yet God speaks as if Ephraim were absolutely in His hand and He tells us what Ephraim shall say, and in fact, what Ephraim shall feel. It is wonderful, is it not, that God who knows human inconstancy and willfulness, thus speaks about the mind of man and declares what he shall say and what he shall feel?

Now, in all this it is to be observed that there is no violation of the human will. Men are not blocks of wood, nor lumps of unconscious clay. God has made man a creature that wills and determines and judges for himself and He deals with him as such. There are persons who seem to fancy that whenever we speak of God as being omnipotent in the realm of mind, and speak of His declaring what men shall do and feel, that we therefore deny free agency. By no manner of means. We are never prepared for the sake of one truth to deny another, and we do as heartily believe in free agency as we do in predestination. It has never been our custom to murder one truth in order to make room for another. There is room enough for two truths in the mind of the man who is willing to become as a little child. Yes, there is room in a teachable heart for fifty truths to live without contention.

God treats men as men and as intelligent creatures. Having granted them power of judgment and will, He treats them as such, and He does not use that force upon the soul which it would be legitimate to use upon a piece of metal, if it had to be bored or to be melted, nor even such force as it is legitimate to use upon “an ox and an ass which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto you.” No, no. Under heaven there is no man whose will God has ever violated. He has made the saved man’s will all the freer by the constraints which grace has put upon it. Grace does not enchain the will, but frees the will, and when a man sincerely says, “What have I to do any more with idols?” though that speech is totally contrary to all the intent of his former life, yet he says it with the full consent of his heart, nay, he never said anything more willingly than he says this, when God by divine power has “made him willing in the day of His power.”

I wonder whether you are able to grasp, dear brethren, and lay hold of these two great truths—first, that man is made a creature responsible for all his actions and a free agent, so constituted that God Himself will not violate that free agency, and yet this other truth which we will maintain with all boldness—that God is as omnipotent in the region of mind and free agency as He is in the realm of mere matter. He looks upon the hills and they smoke. He touches the earth and it trembles. The sea obeys Him and pauses where He bids it stay. Yes, earthquake and tempest are entirely under His control. Nobody who believes in an omnipotent God doubts these things, but it is equally true that the dark understanding God enlightens with a flash of His Spirit, the iron sinew of the obstinate will God removes. As to the affections—when the heart is like stone, cold, dead, heavy, immovable—He has a way of turning the stone to flesh. He can do what He wills with men, and when His Spirit puts forth all His power, though men may resist, yet there is a point beyond which resistance absolutely ceases and the soul is led in joyful captivity to the conquering Spirit of the blessed God.

Now, somebody will again say, “But how do you make this consistent? You now talk contrary to the statements you made before.” No, my dear brother, I do not so. They are both true—man is free, yet God is a sovereign in the world of free minds—working His own way and speaking thus positively, without if or but or an. Know you not that He will have His will and man’s will shall willingly bow to His will, for He is Lord alone? Let me read you God’s wills, God’s wonderful wills, as they stand in this chapter, “I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely for My anger is turned away from him. I will be as the dew unto Israel. He shall grow as the lily and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. His branches shall spread and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon. Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?” God speaks about men as if they were absolutely puppets in His hand and yet at the same time in other places He puts them upon their personal responsibility—both the doctrines

are true. It is not yours or mine to ask how they are to be reconciled, much less to cast either of the truths away, but let us hold them both fast, for these two shall be a clue through many a mystery of intricate doctrine and lead us into the light of God on many a dark saying. I rejoice to hear the almighty Lord speak thus divinely of what man shall do, and I adore the amazing wisdom and power which can rule over free agents.

II. But now, secondly, in our text we see A MARVELLOUS CHANGE. “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?” Who is this Ephraim? Why, if you read the book of Hosea through you will find him turning up continually. Ephraim—Who was he? Who is this that says, “What have I to do any more with idols?” I will tell you. It is that same Ephraim of whom the Lord had said, “Let him alone: he is given unto idols.”

This is different talk, is it not? At one time he is “glued” to his idols, for that is the word used in the original—glued to them as if he was stuck to them and you could not get him away at all. Now here he is saying, “What have I to do any more with them?” What a change it is! Is that the same man? Yes, the same man. But mark what the grace of God has done for him. See also how resolute he is. He speaks plainly and positively, “What have I to do any more with idols?” Is this the same man that we read of in a former chapter, “Ephraim is a silly dove without heart”? Yes, he was “a silly dove without heart,” and now this same Ephraim is saying, “What have I to do any more with idols?” speaking as if he had received a new, enlightened, bold, and decided heart. This is a change, is it not? The man who was glued to his idols, and full of vacillation whenever better things came before him, is now clean separated from his former trusts and made to hate them, and no longer vacillates and hesitates, but takes his stand and asks with glorious promptitude, “What have I to do any more with idols?” It is a great change, but it is such a great change as many of us have undergone, and it is such a change as everybody here must undergo or else they shall never see the face of God with acceptance. Conversion, which is the first fruit of regeneration, makes such a difference in a man that it is as though he had been dead and buried and were now raised from the dead into newness of life. It is as much a change as if the man were destroyed and then were made a new creature in Christ Jesus.

I wonder whether you have all felt such a change as this? I sometimes meet with persons who claim to be Christians and believers and all that, but they have never experienced any change that they can remember from their babyhood. Well, dear friend, there must have been such a change if you are a Christian. I will not say that you ought to know the day and the hour, but depend upon it, if you are now what you were when you were born, you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity. If there has not been a turning, you are going the wrong way. Every man must be turned from the way in which father Adam set his face, for our face is towards sin and destruction, and we must be turned right round so as to have our faces towards holiness and everlasting life. Where there is not such a turning, there is the most solemn cause for heart-searching and humiliation and for the seeking of salvation. Have you undergone a great transformation? The necessity for it is no make-up of mine, remember. It is that most solemn word of the New Testament, “You must be born again.” There must be a complete and total change in you, so that the things you once loved you come to hate and the things you hated you are made to love—as great a change as there was in Ephraim who was formerly glued to his idols and then came to abhor them. I pray you all search and see whether such a difference has been made in your hearts by the Holy Spirit—for a mistake here will be fatal.

If you have never undergone such a renewing, let the prayer be breathed that the Holy Spirit may now renew you in the spirit of your mind. And if you hope that such a change has taken place upon you, then may God grant it may be a real abiding conversion, so that you may remain in grace and go from strength to strength till the idols are utterly abolished and your whole nature shall become the temple of the living God. Thus, then, we have two remarks—a sovereign prediction and a marvelous change.

III. Thirdly, there is in our text AN IMPLIED CONFESSION. “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?” “Any more with idols?” Then, Ephraim, you have had a good deal to do with idols up till now? “Yes,” says he, with tears in his eyes, “that I have.” Hypocrites mean less than their language expresses, but true penitents mean much more than their bare words can convey. The confession of the text is all the more hearty because it is tacit and as it were slips out unintentionally.

Attend earnestly dear hearers, for perhaps some of you may be worshipping idols now. We will go into the temple of your heart and see whether we can find a false god there. I go into one heart and as I look up, I see a gigantic idol. It is gilded all over and clothed in shining robes. Its eyes seem to be jewels and its forehead is “as bright ivory overlaid with sapphires.” It is a very lovely idol to look upon. Come not too close, do not examine too severely, nor so much as dream of looking inside the hollow sham. Within it you will find all manner of rottenness and filthiness, but the outside of the idol is adorned with the greatest art and skill, and you may even become enamored by it as you stand and gaze upon it. What is its name? Its name is *self-righteousness*. Well do I remember when I used to worship this image which my own hands had made, till one morning my god had his head broken off and by-and-by I found his hands were gone. And soon I found that the worm was devouring it and my god that I worshipped and trusted in turned out to be a heap of dross and dung, whereas I had thought it to be a mass of solid gold with eyes of diamonds. Alas, there are many men to whom no such revelation has been given. Their idol is still in first-rate condition. True, perhaps, at Christmas time it gets a little out of order and they feel that they did not quite behave as they ought when the bottle went round so freely, but they have called in the goldsmith to overlay the idol with new gold and gild the chipped places afresh. Have they not been to church since then? Did they not go on Christmas morning to a place of worship and make it all right? Have they not repeated extra prayers and given a little more away to charity? So they have furnished their god up again and he looks very respectable. Ah, it is easy to tinker him up, my brethren, until the ark of the Lord comes in and then all the smiths in the world cannot keep this god erect. If the gospel of Jesus Christ once enters into the soul, then, straightway, this wonderful god begins to bow himself and like Dagon, who was broken before the ark of the Lord, self-righteousness is dashed to pieces. But there are thousands all over this world who worship this god and I will tell you how they pray to it. They say, “God, I thank you that I am not as other men are,” and so on—not exactly in the Pharisee’s language, but after the same style. “Lord, I thank you that I pay everybody twenty shillings in the pound and have brought up my children respectably. God, I thank you that I have been a regular church-going or chapel-going man all my life. God, I thank you that I am not a swearer, nor yet a drunkard, nor anything of that kind. I am far better than most people and if I do not get to heaven, it will be very bad for my neighbors, for they are not half as good as I am.” In this manner is this monstrous deity adored. I am not speaking of what is done in Hindustan, but of an idolatry very fashionable in England. The god of self-righteousness is lord paramount in millions of hearts. Oh, that every worshipper of that god may be led to say, “What have I to do any more with this abominable idol?”

Another sort of god I have seen in the human heart is the idol of darling sin. A person not long ago said, “Well, I suppose there is a good deal in religion, but you see, I am on the turf and I could not leave it. How could I? I could not, of course, become a Christian, and yet be known to be a betting man.” Yes, the betting ring was his god. The running horse is as favorite a deity as were the calves of Bethel.

Another man says, “Yes, yes. I should be glad to be a Christian, but you see, I love the bottle. I must occasionally enjoy a drop too much. Not often, you know, but now and then at convivial meetings, holidays, and bonfire nights. A man must be drunk sometimes, must he not? And where’s the harm? I could not give it up.” They do not say so in actual words, but that is what they mean, thousands of them. They must still keep Bacchus for their god and offer him their sacrifices. And, ah, what sacrifices they make! How they ruin health and destroy life itself, beggar their children, make their wives wretched, and all to worship this dunghill god of drink.

Others have some other darling sin. I need not mention all. In fact, I could not, for the cheek of modesty would tingle if we were to mention certain of the vices which men and women feel that they could not cease from. They would gladly be saved in their sins, not from their sins. They would worship God after a fashion, but the first place must be given to this darling lust of theirs. O sir, I care not what idol it is, but if there is anything in this world that you love better than Christ, you can never see the face of God with joy. If there is any sin that you would persevere in, I beseech you change your mind about it and cut it off though it is a right hand, and pluck it out though it is a right eye. It were better for you to enter into life maimed and with one eye than having both hands and both eyes to be cast into hell fire. Darling sins must be renounced if Christ is to be enjoyed.

Behold how idolaters disagree—one adores righteous self and another worships sinful self, but both idols must be utterly abolished. In some men's hearts I see the love of pleasure. That god is seated on the throne of many hearts. They are overcome, not so much by the grosser sins as by their natural levity and trifling. They cannot think. They do not want to think. They say they are, "dull," if they have to be quiet for awhile. They like to be always amused, gratified, excited. Now, there is a measure of recreation which is as good as medicine to both body and soul, and there are proper recreations to be had. God has provided innocent pleasures and we shall do well to accept them with gratitude from our heavenly Father, but to be a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God is to be dead while you live. To make your belly your god, to live to eat and drink, to be just meat-digesters and wine-strainers, to be living here merely to enjoy yourself—butterflies flitting from flower to flower, gathering no honey, but merely seeking pleasure—this is evil. Sirs, this is a god that will not be worshipped by one who knows the love of the real God, for his God is his pleasure and pleasure is not his god. He casts aside full often things that he might otherwise have allowed himself to enjoy, that he may honor and glorify his Savior the more.

Many worship the golden calf. They indulge no vice and pursue no pleasure except their one vice and their one pleasure which is their greed of gold. If you want to awaken all their energies, jingle a guinea near them. This they pursue as the hounds pursue the fox, hot foot and never resting. For fear they should be poor when they are old, they make themselves poor when they are young. And lest they should be starved at last, they starve themselves to the last. We have known some to whom honor, love, uprightness, integrity, religion have all been nothing whatever, so long as gain could be had by sacrificing them. The great fabric of their fortune has rolled along, like the car of Juggernaut, crushing everything that has been in its way. Widows might weep and orphans might lament, the groans of those whom they oppressed might go up to heaven, and the iniquities which they have perpetrated might go before them unto judgment, but it was nothing to them. They were adding field to field and house to house and getting richer and richer—for they lived for that and for that they seemed content to die. O God, convert the man who worships gold! Milton, you know, describes the demon of greed as—

*Mammon the least erected spirit that fell
From heaven, for even in heaven
His looks and thoughts
Were always downward bent, admiring more
The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,
Than anything divine or holy else enjoyed
In vision beatific."*

This vice is very degrading and well does Milton place Mammon in hell and say—

*"Let none admire
That riches grow in hell.
That soil may best
Deserve the precious bane."*

Now, when the Lord delivers a man from the power of the devil, he cries, "What have I to do any more with making wealth my idol?" He grows content, becomes the Lord's steward and uses his substance in the service of Jesus.

We must go round these temples as quickly as we can and not stop long in any one of them, for they are not very sweet—some in the temple of their hearts have set up unlawful attachments. They form connections which are forbidden by the Word of God. For instance, I have known some who profess to be Christians—God knows whether they ever were or not—who have put altogether out of court the command of our Lord not to be unequally yoked together with unbelievers, and have followed the dictates of the flesh by joining in marriage with the ungodly. It is a dreadful thing to be married to one from whom you know you must be soon separated forever—one who loves not God and therefore can never be your companion in heaven. If that is your case already, your prayers should day and night go up to heaven for the partner of your bosom, that he or she may be brought to Christ. But for any young person

willfully to form such a tie is to set up an idol in the place of God. Weeping and wailing will come of it before long.

Any form of love which divides the heart from Jesus is idolatry and alas, I fear the idols are as many as the trees of the field. Lord, remove them far from us. A great number of persons worship an idol called the praise of men. They speak after this fashion, "Oh, yes, you are right enough, but you see, I could not do it." Well, why not? "Why, I do not know what my uncle would say about it or I could not tell how my wife would like it. I am not sure if my grandfather would be pleased with me." The fear of relatives and the dread of public opinion hold many in mental and moral bondage, and the fear of men holds many more. I pity those who dare not do what they believe to be right. It seems to me to be the grandest of all liberties, the liberty wherewith Christ makes us free, the liberty to do and dare anything which conscience commands in His name. But numbers of people have to ask other people to allow them to breathe, to allow them to think, to allow them to believe anything. And there is nothing they are so frightened of as Mrs. Grundy. The little society in which they live is all in all to them. What will So-and-So think of it? The working man dares not go to a place of worship because the carpenters in the shop would be down upon him. The men that work with him would be saying to him, "Halloo! What? Are you one of those methodistical fellows?" Many men who are six feet high are cowards and are afraid of some little body half their height. They are afraid that some worthless fellow would make a joke at their expense, and to be joked at seems to be something dreadful. O poor souls! Poor souls! All the jokes they are likely to get will be very lukewarm water compared with the scalding hot cauldron into which some of us have been plunged from year after year—when we could not speak a word without having it misinterpreted and could not utter a sentence without being belied. Yet they shrink from their little persecutions as if they were a great martyrdom. We are alive after all the assaults which were made upon us, and not much the worse for them—and so will you be, too, dear friends—if you have the heart and the courage to do and dare for the Lord Jesus Christ. This idol of the fear of man devours thousands of souls. This is a bloodthirsty idol, as cruel as any of the idols of the Hindus—this "fear of man which brings a snare." Some of you know that you are altogether mean in spirit and dare not do what you know you ought to do for fear somebody or other should make a remark about how strange and how odd you are. God help you to have done with that idol.

Thus we have considered the implied confession that we have had most evil dealings with idols.

IV. The last point is to be THE RESOLUTE QUESTION, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Let us put it this way, "What have I to do any more with them? I have had enough to do with them. What have my sins done for me already?" Brothers and sisters, look at what sin has done for us and all our race. It made that beautiful Eden, which was our garden of delight, to be a wilderness, and made us to be the children of toil and sorrow. What has sin done for us? It has stripped us of our beauty. It has put us away from God. It has set the flaming cherubim with the drawn sword to keep us back from coming near to God as long as we live in sin. Sin has wounded us, spoiled us, killed us, corrupted us. Sin has brought disease into the world and dug the grave and bred the worm. O sin, you are the mother of all the griefs and groans and sighs and tears that ever befell men and women in this world. O wretched sin, what have we to do any more with you? We have had more than enough of you.

And have not you and I, personally, had quite enough to do with our idols? I had enough to do with my self-righteousness, I do boldly say, for, oh, how I loathe to think that I should ever have been such a fool as to think that there was anything good in me—to think that I could ever have dreamed of coming before God with a righteousness of my own. Oh, how I abhor the thought! God forbid for one single moment that I should ever be other than ashamed of having boasted in anything that I could do or feel or be. Do you not feel yourselves humiliated at the remembrance of such pride and presumption? What have you to do any more with the idol of righteous self? Nothing. We can never bow down before that any more.

With regard to other idols, have you not smarted enough about them? The convert who was once a drunkard will say, "I have had enough to do with the cup of intoxication. Who has woe? Who has redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine. The men of strength to mingle strong drink." The wine-bibber has had enough to do with that. He has paid heavy smart money and now he has done with rioting

and excess forever. The man who has plunged into vice will often have to say, “It has injured me in body, mind, and estate. What more can I have to do with it?” “Ah,” said one to me the other day, “when I lived in sin it was so expensive to me that it will take me years to recover what I have wasted upon the devil and myself. I am not the man for the service of God that I could have been if it had not been for that.” Ah, we have all had enough of it—more than enough of it. There is no cup of sin, however sweet it was in the day of our unregeneracy, but we feel that we want no more of it, not even with all its beaded bubbles sparkling on the brim when it moves itself right. We are sick of it—sick to the death and the very name of it causes nausea in our soul. What have I to do any more with idols when I consider what idols have done for me?

But there is another view of it. “What have I to do any more with idols?” Do you see and can you bear to look upon that strange sight yonder—three crosses set upon a hill, and on the center one a wondrous man, in fearful agony, nailed to the wood. If you look at Him, you will see that there is such a mixture of majesty in His misery that you discover Him at once to be your Lord. Lo, it is the Bridegroom of your soul—your heart’s best Beloved, and He is nailed up there like a felon hanged to die. Who nailed Him there? Who nailed Him there, I say? Where is the hammer? Where did the nails come from? Who nailed Him there? And the answer is—Our idols nailed Him there! Our sins pierced His heart! Ah, then, what have I to do any more with them? If I had a favorite knife and with it a murderer had killed my wife, do you think I would use it at my table or carry it about with me? Away with the accursed thing! How I should loathe the very sight of it. And sin has murdered Christ! Our idols have put our Lord to death! Stand at the foot of the cross and see His murdered, mangled body, bleeding with its five great wounds and you will say, “What have I to do any more with idols? The vinegar and gall, the bloody sweat, and death pangs have divorced my soul from all its ancient loves and wedded my heart forever to the Well-Beloved, even the King of kings. What have I to do any more with idols?” Nothing separates a man from sin like a sense of the love and the sufferings of Jesus. Redeeming grace and dying love—these ring the death-knells of our lusts and idols—

*“Soon as faith the Lord can see,
Bleeding on a cross for me,
Quick my idols all depart,
Jesus gets and fills my heart.”*

Now, you may recollect again that we must have no more to do with idols, for the same sins which put our Lord to death will put us to death if they can. O child of God, you never sin without injuring yourself. The smallest sin that ever creeps into your heart is a robber seeking to kill and to destroy. You never profited by sin and never can. No, it is poison, deadly poison to your spirit. Do not, therefore, tolerate it for an instant. What have you to do with it? You know it is to be evil, only evil, and that continually. You know that it injures your faith, destroys your enjoyment, withers up your peace, weakens you in prayer, prevents your example being beneficial to others—and for all these reasons what have you to do any more with idols?

Moreover, what have you to do any more with idols, now that you are a child of God—now that you are an heir of heaven? A poor boy sits down and plays with bits of mud in the street and makes dirt pies with his little friends. One day there comes up a king’s messenger who has discovered that this is a lost child from the palace, and the child is taken home and washed, and clothed in royal apparel, and is told that he is a prince and that he is heir to a kingdom. Will he go back and play with the dirty boys in the street again and be a gutter-child, a street wanderer? No, not he! He will be trained to something nobler and more befitting his position. And though you and I once loved the sin that others love and found amusement where others find it, we have now by faith received power to become the sons of God. We are heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. What have we to do any more with idols? What manner of people ought we to be whom the Lord has adopted into the royal family of heaven?

Within a few months some of us will be in heaven—perhaps within a few weeks. What have we to do with idols? Even while we are here, the Lord has raised us up together and made us sit together in the heavenlies in Christ. What have we to do any more with idols? This day are we accepted in the Beloved, the elect of God, justified by faith, with our names written on the palms of Jesus’ hands. What have we

to do any more with idols? Truly the question answers itself. We have nothing to do with them except to loathe them and whenever they are set up in our hearts, even for a moment, we are to break them down by the power of the Eternal Spirit.

Now beloved, if God has worked a great work in you and changed your hearts so that the idols you once worshipped you now detest, I would ask you to keep away from the idols all you can. If you have nothing to do with them, do not go into the places where they are held in honor. “What have I to do any more with idols?” If I knew that a street was infected with small-pox, I should not go out of my way to ride down it. I had rather go round about to avoid the plague. Let it be so with your once darling sin. Get as far away from it as you can, even as you would keep clear of a leper. You have nothing more to do with idols, therefore do not enter their temples or make a league with their worshippers. It is an old Rabbinical tradition with regard to the Nazarites that as they were not to drink wine so they were bidden not eat the grape, nor go through a vineyard. The old proverb was, “O Nazarite, go about, go about, but go not through a vineyard lest you be tempted to eat of the grape and afterwards to drink of the juice thereof.” There is a great spiritual and moral lesson here for us. Keep as far away from sin as ever you can. If you have learned to say, “What have I to do any more with idols?” avoid the very appearance of evil and all those communications which corrupt good manners. The ale house, the dancing saloon, and the theater are not for you. I loathe to hear Christian people say, “What do you think of this-and-that foolish amusement? Do you think I might go as far as that?” Well, my dear friend, if you enjoy anything that has any filth in it, I question whether you know anything about the love of God at all. You remember Rowland Hill’s observation to the person who said he liked to go the theater. The person said, “Well, you know, Mr. Hill, I am a member of the church, but I do not go often. I only go once or twice a year, just for a treat.” “Ah,” said Mr. Hill, “you are a great deal worse than I thought you were. Suppose it were reported commonly that Mr. Hill fed on carrion and was very fond of eating rotten meat. And suppose somebody came to me and said, ‘I hear, Mr. Hill, that you are very fond of eating carrion.’ ‘Oh, no,’ I say, ‘Not at all. I do not regularly feed on it. I only eat a dish of it once or twice a year for a treat!’ Then everybody would say, ‘You are fonder of it than we thought. For if poor creatures have to eat it every day because they cannot get anything better, their taste is not so corrupt as yours who turn away from wholesome food and find rottenness to be a dainty dish.’” If you can find your pleasure and delight where sin of the worst kind is always very near at hand, where religion would be out of place and where Christ, your Master would not be expected to come, you have not learned to say with Ephraim, “What have I to do any more with idols?” Run away from anything which has the least taint of sin and may God help you to do so even to the end. Is this in order that you may be saved? God forbid! I am only speaking to you who are saved already. If you are not saved, the first thing is to have a renewed heart by faith in Jesus Christ, and after that we lay no bondage on you and exact no tax from you by way of duty—but it will be your joy, your delight, your privilege—to keep near to your Master and to say, “What have I to do any more with idols?” God bless you for Christ’s sake. Amen.

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