

REFORM NO. 238

A SERMON
DELIVERED ON SABBATH MORNING, FEBRUARY 13, 1859
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AT THE MUSIC HALL, ROYAL SURREY GARDENS

*“Now when all this was finished,
all Israel that were present went out to the cities of Judah, and brake the images in pieces,
and cut down the groves and threw down the high places and the altars out of all Judah and Benjamin,
in Ephraim also and Manasseh, until they had utterly destroyed them all.”
2 Chronicles 31:1*

IT is a pleasant sight to behold the thousands assembled together for the worship of God, but it is lamentable to reflect, how often the reverence which is exhibited in the sanctuary is lost when the threshold is passed. How frequently the most earnest address of the preacher is forgotten, and becomes as “the morning cloud, and as the early dew.” We very often go up to the house of God and imagine that we have done our duty when we have gone through the round of the service, self-satisfied, we return each to man home.

Oh that we would remember that the preaching of the Gospel is but the sowing! afterward the reaping must come. Today we do, as it were, lay the first stone of an edifice, and henceforward that edifice must be built, stone by stone, through your daily practice, until at last the topstone is brought forth with shoutings of joy and gladness.

Well said the Scotch woman, when her husband asked her on her return from the house of God sooner than usual, “Wife, is the sermon all done?” “Nay, Donald,” said she, “it is all *said*, but it is nae begun to be *done*.” There was wisdom in her pithy saying, a wisdom which we too frequently forget. Praying is the end of preaching. Reformation, conversion, regeneration—these are the ends of the ministry, and a holy life should be the result of your devout worship.

We have read in your hearing the story of the great passover, which was held in the days of Hezekiah. One almost envies the men of that time, we might almost wish that we could be carried back some thousands of years, that we might have been there to see the solemn sacrifices, to behold the priests, as with joyous countenances they sang the praises of God, and to have mingled in that countless throng, which stood at one hour to listen to the Levite, at another hour gathered round the priest, again at another season clapped their hands for joy at the sound of the golden trumpets, and then out vied the trumpets by the magnificent sound of their vocal praise.

But beloved, when that scene had vanished, and the multitude had gone to their homes, Hezekiah might have sat down and wept if there had not been a fitting effect from so great a gathering. Isaiah the prophet, I doubt not, was one of the gladdest in all the crowd. Oh, how his noble heart beat for joy, and how eloquent was his seraphic tongue when he preached among the people and cried, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money; come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.”

But sad indeed would his heart have been, notwithstanding all the delightful excitement of the day, if he had not seen some glorious consequences result from the ministrations and from the great gatherings of the people. In our text we are informed that the passover did not end with the seven days twice-told of its extraordinary celebration. The passover, it is true, might end, but not its blessed effects.

Now there are three effects which ought always to follow our solemn assembly upon the Lord’s day, especially when we gather in such a number as the present, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving. We should go home and first *break our false gods*, next, *cut down the very groves in which we have been*

wont to delight, and after that break the altars which though dedicated to the God of Israel, are not according to Scripture, and therefore ought to be broken down, albeit they be even dedicated to the true God.

I. To begin then, the true result of all our gatherings should be, in the first place, to BREAK IN PIECES ALL OUR IMAGES.

“Thou shalt have none other gods before me.” Every place is before God. Everything is before His face and open to Him. Therefore by this command we understand that we are in no way, and in no sense to have another god, but the Lord, our God. What! do you ask, are we a nation of idolaters? Can this text pertain to us? Would not this be a proper rebuke to address the Hindustani, or to speak to the benighted inhabitants of the center of Africa? Might we not exhort them to serve JEHOVAH and to dash the gods of their fathers in pieces? Assuredly we might.

But imagine not that idolatry is confined to nations of a swarthy hue. It is not in Africa alone that false gods are worshipped, idols are worshipped in this land also, and by many of you. Yea, all of us, until renewed by divine grace, worship gods which our own hands have made, and we do not fear, and love, and obey the living God with our entire and exclusive homage. Once however, let grace be received into the heart, let the soul be renewed by the Holy Spirit, once drink in the free life of Jesus, and these false gods must be broken in pieces at once.

The first god who is worshipped among us is one called *self-righteousness*. The Pharisees were the high priests of this god, they burnt incense every morning and every evening before him, but he has ten thousand times ten thousand worshippers still left. Among your respectable classes of society he is the received divinity. If a man be respectable, he thinks it all-sufficient. Among your moralists, this is the great god before which they bow down and worship. Nay, among sinners themselves, men whose character is not moral, there is nevertheless, found an altar to this god within their hearts.

I have known a drunkard self-righteous, for he has declared that he did not swear, and I have known a swearer self-righteous, for he trusted he would be saved because he did not steal. Until we are brought to know our own lost and ruined condition, self-righteousness is the god before which every one of us will prostrate ourselves.

Oh, my dear friends, if we have worshipped God in this house today, let us go home determined to aim a blow, by the help of God, at self-righteousness, let us go home and prostrate ourselves before God, and cry—

“Vile and full of sin I am.”

“Lord, I confess before You that I have no good works in which to trust, no self-righteousness on which I can rely. I cast my boastings away, I come to You as a poor, guilty, helpless sinner, ‘LORD, save, or I perish.’” That is the way to dash down this god. Paul once worshipped this mighty one, and worshipped him so well, that after the “most straitest sect of his religion, he lived a Pharisee.” Never, in his opinion, so good a man as himself. He served this god with all his mind, and soul, and strength.

But once upon a time, as he was going to Damascus to sacrifice to this god with the blood of believers in Christ, the Lord Jesus looked upon him out of heaven and said, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Prostrate fell Saul, and down went his self-righteousness too. Afterwards, you might hear him say, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.” May we all go home thus, and pull down our self-righteousness.

Stop a moment, I am not quite sure that we can do this all at once. *My* self-righteousness I feel in my own heart, as something like those colossal statues of Egypt, and when I try to break it in pieces, I can but disfigure it; I manage to break a chip off here and a chip off there, but still there stands the statue, not in all its former symmetry, but still there.

At any rate, if you and I cannot wholly get rid of our self-righteousness, let us never lay down the axe and the hammer until we have destroyed it. Let us go home today and have another blow at this old foe, let us go home to have another dash at the colossal god, and let us take up the chisel and the

hammer, and once more try to disfigure him. This is the proper result of the ministrations of God's Word, to destroy and cut in pieces, and utterly break down our self-righteousness.

There are other gods still worshipped in this world, to be execrated with unrelenting indignation. There is one which is certain to be broken, so sure as ever a man becomes a Christian, I mean *Bacchus*, that jolly god whom so many adored in days of yore with mad revelry, and who is still worshipped by tens of thousands of Englishmen. Perhaps he is the great god of Britain. I am certain he has many temples, for there is scarcely a corner of any street in which we do not behold his image, or see his votaries pouring out libations before him. He is a god that is worshipped with reeling to and fro, and staggering. Men become drunken in his presence, and so do him homage.

Now, you that are drunkards, if you become Christians, that will turn your cup bottom upwards once and forever. There will be no more inebriety for you now. By the grace of God you will say, "They that be drunken are drunken in the night, but let us who are of the day be sober. I renounce this practice of drunkenness, I can have nothing more to do with it."

Bless God there are many here present who have gone out of this hall to demolish this god. Oh! if it were right to relate the cases that have been told privately to us, we could tell you this very day, not of one, or two, or twenty, but of hundreds, who, as we believe, once made their homes a hell, who treated their wives with brutality and their children with neglect, whose homes were empty, because every article they had was sold for accursed drink. They have heard the Gospel not in word only, but also in power, and now their home is a paradise, their house is made glad with prayer, their children are brought up in the fear of the Lord.

We have seen the wife's tear of gladness when she said, "The Lord be blessed forever, and blessed be the name of the Gospel, for a wretched woman has been made happy, and she who was but a drudge and a slave to one who was like a fiend, has now become the companion of one whom she reckons to be little short of an angel." Ay, may this be the effect with some of *you*, for there are some such here today, I doubt not, who still worship this all-degrading deity, the deity of drunkenness.

Let me tell you of another god, which is to be pulled down as certainly by any man who worships JEHOVAH aright, and that is the god of *lust*, oh! this world is not so good as it seems to be. You scarcely hear the minister in these days talk of whoremongers, adulterers, and such like, but they are not all dead. There are such to be found, such in every congregation I fear. Our streets have not yet become such as Chastity might pace at midnight, nor are the chief places of the earth become clean and purified.

There is much hidden pollution to be dragged forth, and cast into Kishon. Even in high places, sin is tolerated, men are respectable, who have sent their fellow creatures to hell, and are going there themselves, but once let grace come into the heart, and away with these, the most darling lust is given up, and that which was thought to be the greatest pleasure, is now looked upon with abhorrence and detestation.

If you, my hearer, live in lust, and yet do make a profession of religion, away with your profession, for it is an awful lie. Away with that profession, for it is an empty vanity! away with it! It will but add to your destruction, and cannot save you from the dreadful doom of the man that goes on in his iniquity. A happy thing it is for a man when he goes from the house of God, with the resolve that lust shall be abandoned, and every sinful pleasure cast away.

There are too, the gods of *business*, but I must not touch upon them, of course. The minister has nothing to do with business, he is told. Keep your counting-house door bolted always, let not the minister inside. But the minister knows why he is shut out. Is it not because there are secrets of your prison house which you would not have revealed? There are things done which pass for honest among tradesmen, that if put in the balance of the sanctuary are found very wanting. I would that the result of our preaching upon our hearers should be such that their actions should be more upright and their conduct more Christlike in their daily business.

I have heard of a woman who once went to hear a minister, and when he called to see her on the Monday, he asked her what the text was. She replied, "It was a blessed sermon to me, sir, but I forget the

text.” “Well, what was the subject, my good woman?” “Oh! I do not know, I forget now.” “Well,” said he, “it cannot have done you any good, then.” “Yes it did,” said she, “for though I forgot the sermon, I did not forget to burn my bushel when I got home.” The fact was she had a bushel that gave false measure to her customers, and although she forgot what the sermon was about, she did not forget to burn her false measure.

If any of you are in business and have false measures, though you may forget what I say, do not forget to break your yard measure, and to have your weights set right, and to remodel your business, and “to do unto others as ye would they should do unto you.” Break the gods of your business in pieces, if so be you have not followed with your whole heart the statutes of the God of Israel. If you cannot serve God in your daily business, then give such business up, or alter it so that you can.

Say now, who is there among us who has not some image to break? I have thought sometimes that I had broken all mine at one season, for I have had the will to do it, but lo! I have walked through the temple of my heart, and I have seen in some dark corner an idol still standing. Let it be cast down, I have said, and I have used the sledge hammer upon it. But when I thought I had cleared all away, there was still one gigantic figure standing there, for you may be sure that there is one idol of which we can never thoroughly cleanse our hearts though we try and though by God’s strength we give him a blow every day. It is the god of *pride*.

He changes his shape continually, sometimes he calls himself humility, and we begin to bow before him, till we find we are getting proud of our humility. At another time he assumes the fashion of conscientiousness, and we begin to carp at this and cavil at the other, and all the while we are tampering with our own professed sanctity, and are bowing before the shrine of religious pride. We think sometimes we are praising God when we are praising ourselves, and we pray at times that God may prosper us in doing good, and our greatest desire is to be honored, not that His name should be glorified.

This idol must be cast down, but it is of such a form and such a shape, that I suppose it will fare like Dagon. When the ark was brought into the house, it is said Dagon fell upon his face to the ground before the ark of the Lord, and his head and the palms of his hands were cut off, nevertheless the stump of Dagon remained. So will it be with us, I fear, the stump of Dagon will still remain, do what we may.

Then let us each today go home to our closet and begin to open the door of the chambers of our hearts, and walk through them all, and say, “What have I to break, what have I to knock down, what have I to destroy,” and let us be very careful that we do destroy all that we can get near. Oh my hearers! how I wish we were more watchful of the effects produced in ourselves by preaching.

II. Let us now go a step further, and consider what it is to CUT DOWN THE GROVES.

Groves are the places where those images have been set up. There was nothing, mark you, positively sinful in the grove. There could not be anything wrong in a cluster of trees. They were very beautiful—they were the work of God, but they had been used for an idolatrous purpose, and therefore down they must come. Had some of the lax professors of this age been present, they would have said, “Break the god”—that is right enough. Hammer away at him, dash him to pieces, but don’t cut down the trees. You may use them for very proper purposes. Why, you may even go there to pray. There you may sit and refresh yourself, and beneath their grateful shade you may even worship the true God.

“Nay,” say these reformers. “We will cut down the trees and all, because the images have been harbored under their covert.” Now, I am going to lift the axe to clear away some of the trees, where some of you at least have defiled yourselves with the false gods of this world’s idolatry.

The first grove of trees, at which I must strike is the *theater*. I am told by some that in the theater there is much that might do good. There are plays, they inform me, that might be profitably heard and I believe there are. I am told again, that there is something so pleasant, so agreeable, so interesting in them that one might be instructed there, and that especially do the plays of Shakespeare contain such noble sentiments, that a man must feel his soul elevated and his heart expanded while witnessing their performance.

Nevertheless, I will have this grove down, every bit of it. It is all very well for you to eulogize it, I will not argue with you, but false gods have been worshipped in these places, and are being worshipped still, so hew down every tree of them.

Oh! you would have them spared, would you? Why, which tree in the whole grove is undefiled by a harlot? Which theater in the world is not the very den and nest of abominable iniquity, obscenity, and lust? Is it possible for any man to enter and come out of one of them without defilement? If it is possible, I suppose it is only so with men who are so bad that they cannot be made worse than they are, and therefore cannot be defiled.

To the Christian mind, there is something hideous in the whole matter. He may believe that there were times when the theater might have been profitable. He looks back to the days of the Greeks and Romans, and feels that then it might have been the lever of civilization. But since those old times, he finds that the devil has become the god of the theater, and the god that is diligently worshipped there is none other than Beelzebub.

And therefore he says, "No, if I be a Christian, by the grace of God, I will never tread that floor again. Let others go there if they please. If they can find an interest under the shadow of its trees, let them sit there, but I remember, in the days when I went there, I worshipped Bacchus, I worshipped iniquities of every shape. For me to go there would be to put myself into temptation's way. Therefore I will down with the tree, I abhor it, I pass by on the other side, rather than come in contact even with its shadow."

Now, men may make what apologies they please, but the thing is clear to me, that no man can be a true child of God and yet attend those haunts of vice. I care not though I may be thought too severe. We had better use severity than allow souls to perish unwarned, God Himself has annexed to the theater the warning of your own destruction, for staring you in the face, there is a hand with these words written—"To the pit," and true enough, it is the short cut to hell, and to the pit that is bottomless.

But there are other groves that must come down too, there is the *tavern*—like the grove, a very excellent thing in itself, the tavern is needed in some places for the refreshment of travelers, and the inn is a great advantage of civilization, but nevertheless, the Christian man remembers, that in the tavern, false gods are worshipped, he recollects that the company of the taproom is not the fellowship of the saints, nor the general assembly and church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven.

The Christian may have to go into the tavern, his business may sometimes take him there, but he will be like a man going through a shower of rain, he will carry an umbrella while he is going through it, and he will get out of it as soon as he can. So will the Christian do, he will try and guard himself against evil while he is there, but not one moment longer will he stay than imperative necessity demands.

The tavern, I have said, was originally an institute of civilization, and it is at this day a thing that cannot be given up, but notwithstanding this, let no Christian, nor any pretender to Christianity, resort habitually to such places, nor let him sit down with the profane who generally assemble there. I believe there are Christian men who are often tempted into bad company by the benefit clubs and societies which are held in such places, if there are no benefit societies but those which are held in public houses, trust to God, and have nothing to do with societies at all.

But there *are* others, and you are under no necessity whatever, to injure and contaminate your character by connecting yourself with those who meet in such places, and lead you into sin. "Well," says one, "but I can do it and yet I am not hurt." I dare say *you* can, *I* could not. If the coals did not burn me, yet they would blacken me, and therefore, I would have nothing to do with them.

There are some professors however, who are like the old lady's coachman. She advertised for a coachman, and three waited on her. To one she said, "How near could you drive to danger?" "Madam," he replied, "I could drive, I dare say, within six inches, and yet be safe." "Then you will not suit me at all," said she. She asked the next, "How near can *you* drive me to danger?" "I would drive within a hair's breadth." "Then you will not suit me." The third was asked, "How near can *you* drive to danger?"

“Madam,” said he, “that is a thing I never tried, for I always drive as far off from danger as I can.” She said, “Then you will suit me.” That is my advice to every professor of religion.

I must make the very same remark with regard to the pastimes, the puerile pastimes and enjoyments of the rich, and of those who meet for purposes, not for sin, but of what they call *recreation*. Dancing—the ballroom—is there anything sinful there? I say, *No!* no more than there was in the trees that surrounded the image. But nevertheless, I will cut the trees down, because of their association with the images. I must have done with every amusement of such a kind that I could not appear before my God while in the act.

The Christian is to recollect that “in such an hour as he thinks not the Son of man cometh.” Would he like his Master to come and find him in the society of the frivolous, engaged in the dizzy mazes of the dance? I trow not. Perhaps one of the last places he would like to be found in would be there. Dancing! while hell is filling and sinners are perishing!

What! Are Christian men to be the saviors of the world, and yet waste their time so? Are there no poor to be relieved, no sick to be visited? Are there no dens of this great metropolis that need to be pried into by the servants of Christ? Are there no children to be taught, are there no aged men who need leading to Jesus, is there nothing to be done in this great vineyard—this great field of the Lord, so that a Christian could afford to waste his time so? Let the worldling do it if he likes, we have no right to talk to him about it. But amusements that are right for him are not right for us. Let him do as he pleases, but we are the servants of God.

We profess that all we have and all we are is given up to Christ, and can that be consistent with the waste of time that is involved in the frivolous amusements in which so many are content to indulge? I do not condemn the thing itself, any more than I condemn the grove of trees. I condemn it for its associations with many things that are to be avoided by the Christian, jesting, lascivious and foolish talking, and many unholy thoughts, that must necessarily arise. Down with the trees altogether, because *there* have false gods been worshipped.

You are too hard, a great deal, some will reply, well, I dare say I am, but I am not harder than God’s Word. If I am, whatever is not according to God’s Word reject, but you will not find me beginning to temporize just yet, I assure you. While I know a thing to be true, I am not the man to stammer in speaking it. What I would not do myself, I would not have others do who are Christian men, and who are followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I must lift up the axe against another evil—*books*. There are many books that are to be so esteemed by the Christian man, that they must be cut down like the groves of trees, not because they are bad in themselves, mark, but because there false gods are worshiped. Novel reading is the rage of the present day. I go to a railway bookstall, and I cannot see a book that I can read. I get one, and it is all trash. I search to find something that would be really valuable, but I am told, “It would not sell here.” The fact is, nothing will sell but that which is light, and frothy, and frivolous, so every traveler is compelled to consume such food as that, unless he carries something better with him.

Do I therefore say that the Christian man must condemn all reading of fiction and novels? No, I do not, but I do say, that the mass of popular books published under the name of Light Literature, is to be eschewed and cut down, for the simple reason that the moral of it is not that of piety and goodness, the tendency of the reading is not to bring the Christian towards heaven, but rather to retard and impede him in his good course.

I lift up my axe against many a work that I cannot condemn, if I look at it abstractedly in itself, but which must come down, because I recollect how much of my own precious time I wasted in such vapid reading, and how many years in which I might have had fellowship with Christ have been cast away, whilst I have been foolishly indulging a vicious taste for the romantic and the frivolous.

No, there are many things which are not wrong in themselves, but which nevertheless must be given up by the true Christian because they have had, and do have, association with things positively wrong.

Just as these groves must be cut down—not because there can be a sin in trees, but because the trees have been associated with the worship of idols.

You remember John Knox's memorable saying when he turned the Romanists out, he went straight away to pull down their chapels. He gathered the mob together and began to overhaul the whole of their places of worship. Why should John Knox meddle with them? "I'll pull the nests down," said he, "then I shall be sure that the birds will never come back." So I would today. I would not only drive away the birds—the sin, the evil, but I would pull down the nest, so that there will be no temptation to you to come back again to the sin.

"Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will be a Father unto you." Come out from the world, you children of Christ. Have naught to do with their enjoyments, nor with their devices. Follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth. Go not a whoring after these iniquities, but drink you waters out of your own cistern, and be you always ravished with His love who is your Lord, your husband, your hope, your joy, your all.

III. Moreover, they not only broke the images, and cut down the groves, but they **THREW DOWN THE HIGH PLACES AND THE ALTARS OUT OF ALL JUDAH AND BENJAMIN.**

This was perhaps the least necessary work, but it showed the thoroughness of their desire to serve the Lord. These altars were built for the service of the true God, but they were built against His express command. God had said that He would have but one altar, namely, at Jerusalem. These people, to avoid inconvenience and trouble, thought they would build altars wherever they lived, and there celebrate their worship.

I can conceive that they worshipped JEHOVAH with all their hearts, and that He might graciously accept even such worship as that through Christ Jesus, overlooking their ignorance and casting their sin behind His back! But now as their zeal was kindled, their consciences became scrupulous, so they resolved not only to avoid the things that are positively sinful, but they would have nothing to do with anything that is not positively right. So they began to cast down the altars of God because they were not built according to God's law.

This then is a third reformation which ought to result from the ministry, and the assembling of the people together when we have times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. There should be a casting down of everything in connection with the true worship that is not according to the law of God and the Word of God.

As it was with the worship of Israel of old, so it is now with that of the Christian church. The pure becomes alloyed with the base, that which is genuine with that which is spurious, divine revelation with human tradition, and the inspired decrees of heaven with the inventions and devices of the children of men. Some fallacies are perpetuated from generation to generation, until the deep hue of antiquity tinges them over, makes them look venerable and speciously invites a reverence and regard to which they never had any legitimate claim.

We have in this country, seven or eight different forms of the Christian religion. Some of these are at complete variance and contradiction with others. Some indeed, I verily think, are contradictory in themselves. We are all, I do trust, building on a sure foundation for eternity, if we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and abide by the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, notwithstanding our many grievous discrepancies, which must involve error.

Evangelical Christians are to be found in every sect and denomination bearing the name of our one common Lord, yea, there are some who as yet have never taken upon them His name by public profession, who devoutly follow Him in secret.

But mark you this, if the grace of God be once more restored to the church in all its fullness, and the Spirit of God is poured out from on high, in all His sanctifying energy, there will come such a shaking as has never been seen in our days. We want such a one as Martin Luther to rise from his tomb. If Martin Luther were now to visit our so-called reformed churches, he would say with all his holy boldness, "I was not half a reformer when I was alive before, now I will make thorough work of it."

How he would adjure you to cast away your superstitions, to abolish all the rites and forms and ceremonies that are not of divine appointment, and once more in the integrity of simple faith, to worship the Lord God alone, in that way alone, which the Lord God Himself has ordained. Let all these, like those altars of Judaism, be cast down to the ground and utterly put away.

I desire not only to be a Christian, but to be fully a Christian, walking in all the ways of my blessed Master, with a perfect heart, and I desire for all my brethren and sisters in Christ here, not only that they may have grace enough to save their souls, but grace enough to purify them from all the devices of men, from every false doctrine, from every false practice, and every evil thing.

Speak you now of doctrine? Are there not two kinds of doctrines professed among Christians, the one Arminian, and the other Calvinistic? We cannot be both right, it is impossible. The Arminian says, "God loves all men alike." "Not so," says the Calvinist. "He has proved to many of us by His free and distinguishing grace that He has given us more than others, not for the merit of our deservings, but according to the riches of His mercy, and the counsel of His own will."

The Arminian supposes that Christ has bought all men with His blood, and yet that multitudes of these redeemed ones perish. The Calvinist holds, that none can perish for whom Jesus died—that His blood was never shed in vain, and that of all those whom He has redeemed, none shall ever perish. The Arminian teaches that though a man should be regenerated and become a child of God today, he may tomorrow be cast out of the covenant, and be as much a child of the devil as if no spiritual change had been wrought in him. "Not so," says the Calvinist, "Salvation is of God alone, and where once He begins He never leaves off, until He has finished the good work."

How obvious it is that we cannot both be right in matters about which we so widely differ. I exhort you therefore, my brothers and sisters, after you have broken your images and cut down your groves, go a step further, and break down the false altars. I can only say for myself, "If I be wrong, I desire to be set right," and for you I am solemnly concerned, "If you be wrong, may God help you to a right judgment, and bring you to see the truth, embrace it, and earnestly and valiantly maintain it."

I like you to be charitable to others, but do not be too charitable to yourselves. Let others follow out their own conscientious convictions, but do you recollect, it is not your conscience that is to be your guide, but God's Word, and if your conscience is wrong, you are to bring it to God's Word that it may be reproved and "transformed by the renewing of your mind." It is for you to do *what* God tells you, *as* God tells you, *when* God tells you, and *how* God tells you.

Pardon me for a moment, if I should risk the displeasure of some I love by referring to an ordinance of the church about which we are likely to disagree. The sacred rite of baptism is administered in a great number of churches to little infants upon the sponsorship of their guardians or friends, while many of us consider that Holy Scripture teaches that believers only (without respect to their age at all) are the proper subjects of baptism, and that upon a personal profession of their faith in Christ.

I see a man take up an unconscious infant in his arms, and he says he baptizes it. When I turn to my Bible, I can see nothing whatever of this sort there. It is true I find the Lord Jesus saying, "Suffer little children to come unto me," but that affords no precedent for carrying a little child to the minister, who could not come, that was too young to walk, much less to think and understand the meaning of these things.

Yet more, when Jesus said "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven"—they did come to Him, but I do not find that He baptized or sprinkled them at all, He gave them His blessing and they went away. I am sure He did not baptize them, for it is expressly said, "Jesus Christ baptized not, but His disciples." So then, that passage does not favor the Paedo-baptist, it is quite clear.

I am informed however, that the reason why children are baptized is that we are told in the Bible that Abraham's children were circumcised. This puzzles me. I cannot see any likeness at all between the two things. But who were the persons circumcised? They were Israelites. Why were they circumcised? Because they were Israelites.

That is the reason, and I say I would not hesitate to baptize any Christian, though he is a babe in Christ, as soon as he knows the Lord Jesus Christ, were he only eight days old in the faith, if he proves that he is an Israelite in the spirit himself, I will baptize him. I have nothing to do with his father or his mother in religion.

Religion is a personal act all the way through, another man cannot believe for me, cannot repent for me, and another person cannot give for me the answer of a good conscience toward God in baptism and have it done in my name. We must act on our own individual responsibility in religion by the grace of God, or else the thing is virtually not done at all.

Now I believe many godly people do sincerely worship God at this altar of infant baptism, but I am equally clear that it is my duty to do my utmost to break it down, for it is not God's altar, God's altar is believers' baptism. What said Philip to the Eunuch? "If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest." "Lo! here is water," said the Eunuch.

Yes, but that was not all, there must be faith, as well as water, before there could be legitimate baptism, and every baptism that is administered to any man, except he asks it himself on profession of his faith in Christ, is an altar at which I could not worship, for I do not believe it to be the altar of God, but an altar originally built at Rome, the pattern of which has been adopted here to the marring of the union of the church, and to the great injury of souls.

Now, all I ask from those who differ from me in opinion is simply to look at the matter honestly and calmly. If they can find infant baptism in the Bible, then let them practice it and worship there, if they cannot, let them be honest, and come and worship at the altar of Jerusalem, and there alone.

An old woman was once promised a Bible if she could find a text that sanctioned infant baptism. She could only find one, and that was, "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man, for the Lord's sake." The minister gave her the Bible for her ingenuity, admitting that it was an ordinance of man, and no mistake.

I quote this instance of infant baptism, as only one out of many corruptions that have crept into our churches. It is quite clear that all sects cannot be right. They may be right as to the main points essential to salvation, though in their discrepancies with one another they betray errors. I do not want you to believe that I am right, rather turn to Scripture, and see what is right. The day must come when Episcopacy, Independency, Wesleyanism, and every other system, must be read by the Word of God, and every form given up that is not approved before the Most High.

I hope I shall always be able to lift up my voice against that charity growing up in our midst, which is not only a charity towards persons, but a charity towards doctrines. I have fervent charity towards every brother in Christ who differs from me, I love them for Christ's sake, and hold fellowship with him for the truth's sake, but I can have no charity for his errors, nor do I wish him to have any for mine. I tell him straight to their face, "If your sentiments contradict mine, either I am right and you are wrong, or you are right and I am wrong, and it is time we should meet together and search the Word of God, to see what is right."

Talk of your Evangelical Alliances and such like, they will never endure, they may effect many blessed purposes, but they are not the remedy that is wanted for our divisions. What is wanted, is for all of us to come to the model of the Word of God, and when we have come to that, we must come together. Let us all come "to the law and to the testimony." Let the Baptist, let the Independent, let the Churchman, lay aside his old thoughts, his old prejudices, and his old traditions, and let each man search for himself, as in the sight of Almighty God, and some of the altars must go down, for they cannot all be after the divine type, when their dissimilarity is so palpable.

May the Spirit of God be poured out in this land, and there will come a three-fold reformation such as I have described, broken images, groves cut down, and fallen altars scattered to the winds. And yet, my dear hearers, I do not ask you to attend to this last thing first. It is unimportant compared with the first. The images are first to be burned, then sinful customs are to be given up, and after that let the

church be reformed. Each of these in its proper place and due order is important, and all must be attended to.

Yet once more, my hearer, before I send you away let me put one pertinent and pressing question to you. What have you got by all your hearing of God's Word? Some of you have heard sermons beyond count, you can hardly reckon the number of Gospel ministers to whom you have listened. What good have you obtained as the result of them all? Have you been led to repentance? Have you been brought to faith? Are you made "a child of God and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven"? If not, I solemnly remind you that all your church goings and chapel goings are increasing your condemnation. Unless you repent, these privileges shall rise up in judgment against you to condemn you.

Woe unto you, London, woe unto you, for if the words which have been preached in your streets had been proclaimed in Sodom and Gomorrah, they had repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Woe unto you, you sons and daughters of pious parents, children trained in the Sunday school, hearers of God's Word, for "except ye repent, it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you." "I speak as unto wise men, judge ye what I say," and may God guide you aright.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.