

# Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit

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THE GREAT CHANGE

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A Sermon

DELIVERED BY

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*“Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have heard him, and observed him: I am like a green fir tree. From me is thy fruit found” — Hosea 14:8.*

**THIS** passage is in very vivid contrast to what Ephraim had previously said, as it is recorded in the early part of Hosea's prophecy. If you turn to the second chapter, and the fifth verse, you will find this same Ephraim saying, “I will go after my lovers, that give me my bread and my water, my wool and my flax, mine oil and my drink.” These lovers were the idol gods, and Ephraim was determined to go after them, for she ascribed to them her various comforts, her bread and her water, her wool and her flax, her oil and her drink. So desperately set was this Ephraim upon going after her idols that God had much ado to drag her away from them, for that second chapter continues, “Therefore, behold, I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. And she shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; and she shall seek them, but shall not find them.” So, you see, this people had been desperately set upon following after idols; yet, before the prophecy is ended, we find this same Ephraim saying,

“What have I to do any more with idols?” What a change the grace of God works in the heart! It reverses the action of the entire machinery of our being. It puts, “No,” for “Yes,” and “Yes,” for “No.” It is a radical change; that which we hated, we come to love; and that which we loved, we come to hate. Whereas we said, concerning this and that, “I will,” and “I shall,” the grace of God makes us change our note and we say, “I will not; by God's grace, I will not act as I said I would, for what have I to do any more with idols?”

At the beginning of this discourse, I would like to put to each one whom I am addressing this question, “Have you, my friend, ever experienced this great and total change?” Remember, if you have not, it is imperatively necessary that you should if you desire to be numbered amongst the Lord's people. “Ye must be born again,” and this being born again is not the evolving of some good thing out of you that is already there hidden away, but the putting into you of something which is not there. It is the quickening of you from your death in sin. It is a change in you as great as was wrought upon the person of our Lord Jesus when, after lying in the grave dead, he was brought to life. Nothing short of this new birth, this resurrection, this thorough, total, radical change will make you meet to enter heaven. You have no right to expect that you will ever stand within yon gates of pearl unless you have been created anew in Christ Jesus. He that sitteth on the throne saith, “Behold, I make all things new;” and he must make you new, or else, into the new kingdom where there is a new heaven and a new earth, you can never come; nay, you cannot even see that kingdom, for our Lord's words are as true today as when he said to Nicodemus, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Let that searching thought remain with you, and try yourselves by it.

But now I shall take you at once to the words of the text, that we may think of the change which was wrought upon Israel, or Ephraim. We will consider, first, *the character of this change*: “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?” Then, secondly, let us note *the cause of this change*; and, thirdly, *the effect of this change*.

## I. First, then, we are to consider **THE CHARACTER OF THIS CHANGE.**

Ephraim had been besotted with her idolatry. The Israelites were never contented with idols of one sort; they went to Moab, to Egypt, to

Philistia, to Assyria, to the Hittites, and to any other ites, to borrow idols. They introduced fresh idols from distant countries, they were never satisfied with the number of their images; yet now, when God has effectually wrought upon their hearts, they say, one voice speaking for all, “What have I to do any more with idols?”

Notice, that *this change was a very hearty and spontaneous one.* Ephraim did not say, “I should like to worship idols, yet I dare not.” She did not say, “I should like to set up graven images, but I must not.” On the contrary, she herself said, “What have I to do any more with idols?” I wish that some people whom I might mention understood what conversion means. They say to us, “So you do not attend the theatre; what a denial it must be to you!” It is nothing of the kind, for we never have a wish or a desire to go there. What have we, the twice-born, to do with these vain things of the world? “Oh, but the drunkard’s cup—it must be a very great piece of self-denial to you to abjure it!” On the contrary, it is loathsome to us; we have come to feel as if the most nauseous medicine that could be mixed would be sweeter to us than that cup. What have we to do any more with idols?

So, each thing that is evil becomes to the real convert a disgusting and distasteful thing. He does not say, “Oh, how I should like it! How I long for it! What a hungering I have after it!” If he detects in himself the least hankering after evil of any kind, he cries out, “O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” But as far as the work of God’s Spirit has been wrought upon him, he has a thorough hearty severance and divorce from those things which he once loved, and he has as great a horror of them as once he had a desire for them. Now he sings: —

*“ Let worldly minds the world pursue,  
It has no charms for me;  
Once I admired its trifles too,  
But grace has set me free.*

*Its pleasures now no longer please,  
No more content afford;  
Far from my heart be joys like these,  
Now I have seen the Lord*

*As by the light of opening day  
The stars are all concealed;  
So earthly pleasures fade away,  
When Jesus is revealed ”*

I say again, the change is a very spontaneous and hearty one. Ephraim shall herself freely say, “What have I to do any more with idols? I have done with those things, and I am glad to have done with them. Oh, that I had done with them once for all!” I asked a convert, this last week, perhaps to a dozen I have put the same question, “My dear brother, are you perfect?” “No, sir,” each one has said, “I am not.” Then when I have enquired, “Would you not like to be perfect?” the answer in every case has been, “Yes, indeed I would; it would be heaven on earth if I could but be perfectly holy. Oh, that I were clean rid of sin!” So we sing, with Cowper :—

*“ The dearest idol I have known,  
Whate’er that idol be,  
Help me to tear it from thy throne,  
And worship only thee.”*

Let the idols go; smash them all up, break them in pieces like potters’ vessels. If there be a lust, if there be a passion, if there be a joy, if there be a desire, that is not according to the mind of God, away with it. We cannot endure the evil thing, and want to get rid of it. Ephraim shall say, and shall say it cheerfully, spontaneously, heartily, “What have I to do any more with idols?”

Observe also, that *this change is the work of God’s effectual grace*. Notice the wording of the text: “Ephraim *shall* say.” It is God who says, “Ephraim *shall* say.” Perhaps you ask me, “Did you not say that Ephraim said this voluntarily, spontaneously, with all her heart, and of her own free will?” Yes, that is so; but the Holy Spirit, without violating the freedom of man’s will, is the Master of that will. There used to be great wars and fightings among Christian people about free will and free grace; and when I read the reports of those controversies, I am struck with the great amount of truth that was spoken on both sides. When I hear a man stoutly affirm that, if there be any good thing, it is all of the grace of God, I know that it is so; but when another declares that man is a free agent, and that, if he acts virtuously at all, his free will must consent to it, and that this condition is essential to the very making

of virtue, is not that also true? Certainly it is, and why should we not believe both? Ephraim cheerfully says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" and yet, at the back of that, is the great mysterious energy and work of the Holy Ghost bringing to pass the eternal purpose and decree of God, so that they are fulfilled. For God to work his will with mere materialism, with dead blocks of wood or stone, with rivers or with tempests, is but ordinary omnipotence; but for God to leave men absolutely free and responsible agents, and never to interfere with the freedom of their agency, and yet for him to accomplish his eternal purposes concerning them to every jot and tittle, this is, if I may so say, omnipotent omnipotence, this is almighty power carried to a climax. It is just so with the grace of God; we spontaneously quit our sin, but it is because almighty grace is working within us to will and to do of God's own good pleasure. "Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?" because God in his effectual grace has weaned her from her idols.

Notice next, dear friends, that *this change is always a very personal one*. Ephraim says, "What have *I* to do any more with idols?" She does not say, "What have the nations to do with idols?" That would be a wise question; but, as a rule, national or general religion does not amount to much; we say, with Mr. Bunyan, "Those are generals, man, come to particulars." Believe all truth with the general company of those who hold it; but mind that you come to particulars, and say, "What have *I* to do any more with idols?" Do not ask, "What has my mother to do with idols? What has my brother to do with idols? What has my neighbour to do with idols?" but, "What have *I* to do with idols?" If all other men go into sin, I must not. I ask each believing one to whom I am speaking to feel, "God has done so much for me that I must turn away from sin. To me, wilful wickedness would be a horrible thing. I must quit all iniquity. Whatever all the rest of the world may do, I must not go with the multitude to do evil; I must loathe it and leave it. 'As for me, and my house, we will serve the Lord.' 'Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?' " Abhor selfishness and egotism; but, at the same time, be very personal and individual about your own religion. You were born alone, and you will die alone, and you have need to be born again individually and personally; and it must come to a personal transaction between yourself and God, so that you can for yourself say, as we did in our singing:—

***" 'Tis done! the great transaction's done;***

*I am my Lord's, and he is mine:  
He drew me, and I followed on,  
Charmed to confess the voice divine.*

*High heaven that heard the solemn vow,  
That vow renewed shall daily hear;  
Till in life's latest hour I bow,  
And bless in death a bond so dear. ”*

“What have I to do any more with idols?” The change here implied must be spontaneous and hearty; it must be the result of divine grace; and it must be personal.

And then, dear friends, it must also be *a truly repentant change*: “What have I to do any *more* with idols?” There is in that question a confession that the speaker has had to do with idols already. Let the time past suffice us to have wrought the will of the flesh. Brother, if thou art resolved to serve God, through his grace, yet ere thou beginnest that service, remember how thou hast in the past served the devil. Quit not thy old way without many a tear of regret, and many a blush of deep humiliation, for whatever thou mayest do in the future, thou canst not undo the past. Thy wasted time, thy injured faculties, thy angered God, thy friends about thee influenced for evil by thy example, thou canst not blot out all these; therefore, at least stay thou a while, and shed penitent tears over the graves of thy dead sins, and ask thy God to help thee to feel that thou hast had enough of thy evil ways, and sin, and neglect. Say, “What have I to do any more with idols? I have had far too much to do with them already. O Satan, O self, O world, I have served you all too long; and now, my God, with deep regret for all the past, I turn my face to thee!”

This change must also be, dear friends, *life-long*. Notice two words in our text, “What have I to do *any more* with idols?” Where the grace of God really converts a man, he is not converted merely for the next quarter of a year, with the possibility of falling from grace afterwards. That is a human conversion which can ever come to an end; but if God converts you, you never can be unconverted. As conversion is the work of the Spirit of God, it is clear that it must need the same power to undo it as first did it. He who has made you a Christian will keep you a Christian; and unless a stronger than he shall come in, and undo his work, you shall never go back to your old idols again.

*“ Where God begins his gracious work,  
That work he will complete,  
For round the objects of his love,  
All power and mercy meet.*

*Man may repent him of his work,  
And fail in his intent;  
God is above the power of change,  
He never can repent.*

*Each object of his love is sure  
To reach the heavenly goal:  
For neither sin nor Satan can  
Destroy the blood-washed soul. ”*

Oh, how I love to preach this glorious doctrine of everlasting salvation! The salvation that only carries you a little bit of the way to heaven, I never thought worthy of my acceptance, I would not have it as a gift, and I never thought it worth preaching to you. I remember hearing one of the revival preachers say that there are some who go on the road to heaven, and just take a ticket to the next station; then they get out, and take a new ticket, and rush back to the train; and so they keep on. “But,” said the man, “when I started, I took a ticket all the way through.” That is the way to travel to heaven; when you start, get a ticket all the way through. Listen to these words of Christ: “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father’s hand.” Listen also to these words of our Lord to the woman of Samaria: “Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again: but whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.” O my brothers, God does not play at saving men; first doing the work, and then undoing it. If he saves you, you are saved. “He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved.” There is the gospel which we are sent to preach to you; so that, when once converted, truly converted, you will say, “What have I to do any more with idols?”

Perhaps someone asks, “Ay, but do not some professors go back,

and do you say that, if men, after making a profession of religion, live in sin, they shall be saved?" Certainly we say nothing of the kind; we say, on the contrary, that if truly converted they will not live in sin, but if the work of grace be wrought in them, they will be kept from sin; or if they shall, through sudden temptation, fall, they shall be speedily restored; weeping and sighing, they shall be brought back again to the good way. We never said that men could live in sin, and yet go to heaven. That were damnable talk, not fit for a Christian to utter; but he who is truly saved is saved once for all, and he can say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" Throughout the rest of his life he will have done with them, he will have quitted them. He will burn his boats behind him, never to go back to the country which he has quitted once for all. This is a salvation worth having; wherefore, I pray you, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and be a partaker of it.

Yet once more, notice that *this is a very thorough change*: "What have I to do any more with idols?" O you who have done with idols remember that you have also done with the idol temples, you have done with the false priests, you have done with the so-called "sacred thread" and other idolatrous tokens; you have done with everything appertaining to idolatry! You who once were drunkards have done for ever with the public-house and the drunkard's cup. You who once were lascivious, if the grace of God has changed you, what have you to do with fornication, what have you to do with any kind of uncleanness? You who were aforesaid dishonest, if the grace of God has changed you, what have you to do with the tricks of trade? What have you to do with fraudulent bankruptcies? What have you to do with cheating and lying? Let each true believer cry "What have I to do any more with idols?" Begone, sin and Satan, bag and baggage! What has a man, who is bought with the blood of Christ, to do any more with idols? He quits them once for all, by God's good grace.

I find that the rest of my text would take up far too much time for me to expound it fully, so I shall have to content myself with the second division of the subject.

## II. This was to be, you will remember, **THE CAUSE OF THIS GREAT CHANGE.**

The first cause of this change is *the grace received*. In the previous part of the chapter, we find the Lord saying, "I will heal their

backsliding, I will love them freely: for mine anger is turned away from him.” Then our text naturally follows, “Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols?” We cannot get you to give up sin, however earnestly we may exhort you to forsake it; but if, by God’s grace, you receive Christ as your Saviour, then you will abandon sin as a natural consequence. What is the best way to keep chaff out of a bushel measure? Fill it full of wheat; and when the heart of a man is full of Christ, there will be no room for the world, the flesh, and the devil. These evil things cannot find an entrance where Christ has full possession. When God is as the dew of our soul, and we receive freely of his grace, then we do not need telling, and urging, and driving, but we at once say, “What have I to do any more with idols?”

Another cause of this great change lies in *our perception of the beauties of the Lord*. I do not quite know whether what I am going to say is the exact teaching of the text, but I think it is. It is very difficult, sometimes, in these prophecies to know who is speaking. There are often dialogues, and the dialogues are not always so clearly marked that we can tell who is the speaker. I have always thought, when I have read this chapter, that it was the Lord who said, “I have heard him, and observed him;” but on thinking the passage over very carefully, I am not quite sure that it is so. Let me give you another version, which I met with in two verses by an unknown poet; and then see whether this is not the meaning of the passage:—

*“I have heard him, and observed him,  
Seen his beauty rich and rare,  
Seen his majesty and glory,  
And his grace beyond compare.*

*What have I to do with idols,  
When such visions fill my eye?  
How be occupied with shadows  
When the substance passes by? ”*

Does the text mean, then, ‘I will have nothing more to do with idols, for I have heard my God, and I have observed him; I have heard Christ speak, and I have observed the excellence of his character’ ? This much I know—whether that be the teaching of this passage, or not—nothing weans the heart from idols like a sight of Christ. O you worldly Christians, who are getting to be so fond of this world, I am sure that

you have not seen your Master lately! If you had, the world would sink in your esteem. O you who are beginning to be fond of human wisdom, you cannot have heard him speak of late, or else he would be made of God unto you wisdom, and everything else would be folly! O you who are seeking to live for self and for earthly gain, your heads have not been lately pillowed on the Saviour's bosom, you have not recently looked into those dear eyes which are more radiant than the glories of the morning! You cannot have known the fragrance of those garments which smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, or you would never be enamoured of this poor, foul, unsavoury world. "I have heard him, and observed him: what have I to do any more with idols?" "I have heard him say, 'I have loved thee with an everlasting love.' I have observed him go up to the cross, and lay down his life for me; 'what have I to do any more with idols?' " When thou, as the bride of Christ, lovest thy first Husband as thou shouldst love him, then thy wanderings will be at an end. When all thy heart goes after the Well-beloved, and he enraptures thee with manifestations of his love and of his grace, then wilt thou say, "What have I to do with idols—I so favoured, I so enriched with divine blessings, I who am on the road to heaven, I who am so soon to see the face of him I love—what have I to do with idols?"

That seems to me to be a grand meaning perfectly consistent with earnest Christian experience, so I leave it with you. This great change, then, is wrought in us by the grace of God, and by a sight of the true beauties of our Lord.

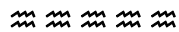
But now, taking the text as it is generally understood, you will get another meaning. One cause for this great change is *the sense of answered prayer*: Ephraim shall say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" And God says of Ephraim, "I have heard him." I recollect, even as a child, God hearing my prayer; I cannot tell you what it was about, it may have been concerning a mere trifle, but to me as a child it was as important as the greatest prayer that Solomon ever offered for himself, and God heard that prayer, and it was thus early established in my mind that the Lord was God. And afterwards, when I came really to know him—for, like the child Samuel, I did not then know the Lord, I only felt after him in prayer—afterwards, when I came to cry to him intelligently, I had this prayer answered, and that petition granted, and many a time since then—I am only speaking what any of you who know the Lord could also say—many a time since then he has answered my requests. I cannot tell you all about this matter; there is many a secret

between me and my dear Lord. This very week, I have had a love-token from him which, if I could tell you about it, would make your eyes wonder and fill with tears. I asked, and I received, as manifestly as if I had spoken to my brother in the flesh, and he had said, "Yes, there, take all you need." Well now, I always find that, in proportion as I am conscious that God is hearing my prayers, my heart says, "What have I to do any more with idols?" If I can have from my God whatever I ask for, why need I cringe and bow my knee to men? If I have but to go to God, and wait upon him, and he will give me the desire of my heart, what have I to do with fretting, and fuming, and being anxious? What have I to do with idols? If there is everything in Christ, and that everything is to be had for the asking, what have I to do with idols? It is wonderful how you are weaned from the dry breasts of the world when you can drink in all that your soul desires from the living God. If God, the Jehovah of hosts, be no more to you than the gods of the heathen, or the gods of the men of the world, why then you *will* have to do with idols; but if your God is the God that heareth prayer, and if you live in his presence, and you speak to him, and he speaks to you, if you keep up perpetual intercourse with him, so that God can say to you, "I have heard him, and observed him," then I am sure that you will also say, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

If I am addressing any poor soul that has been craving mercy from God, one who has been crying for months to God to give him forgiveness through Jesus Christ, why, dear heart, if you will only believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you shall get all that you are asking, you shall receive peace, and pardon, and joy, and rest; and then you will say, "What have I to do any more with idols?"

"Oh!" says one, "my dear sir, I have been trying to overcome sin, and I cannot." I know you cannot; but if you begin by receiving Christ, by praying to God, and getting the answer, then you will be able to say, "What have I to do any more with idols?" You want to wash yourself first, and then to come to the fountain. That will not do; you must come, black as you are, and wash, and be cleansed. You want to get rich spiritually, and then to come to God to enrich you. No; you must come to him poor, come without anything of your own, just as you are, and trust the boundless mercy of God in Christ Jesus, he will give you all you need, and then you will say, "What have I to do any more with idols, for God has heard me, and he doth observe my soul?"

You see, then, some of the ways in which this very great and wonderful change is wrought. I have had to omit many other points on which I meant to speak, but I do pray that this change may be wrought in every one of you. Do not wait to have the change wrought, and then come to God, but come to God for it. If you have a broken heart, come to Christ with it; but if you have not a broken heart, come to Christ to break your heart. If you feel your sin, come to Christ to have it forgiven; but if you do not feel your sin, come to Christ that you may be made to feel it. If there is any good thing in you, thank God for it, and come to him for more; but if there is no good thing whatever in you, come without any good thing, and let Christ begin at the very beginning with you, in all your emptiness, and need, and spiritual beggary and loathsomeness. Come to him just as you are, for he still says, "Him that cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out." May his sweet Spirit graciously attract every one of you till you shall be drawn to him, and so drawn from your idols, and to him shall be glory, for ever and ever! **Amen.**



**The Kings of Earth** : *A hymn by C H Spurgeon based on Psalm 82.*

*The kings of earth are in the hands  
Of God who reigns on high;  
He in their council chamber stands,  
And sees with watchful eye.*

*Though foolish princes tyrants prove,  
and tread the godly down;  
Though earth's foundations all remove;  
He wareth still the crown.*

*They proudly boast a godlike birth,  
In death like men they fall;  
Arise, O God, and judge the earth,  
And rule the nations all.*

*When shall Thy Son, the Prince of Peace  
Descend with glorious power?  
Then only shall oppression cease:  
Oh, haste the welcome hour.*

*Tune: 'St Anne.'*