

Converts, and Their Confession of Faith

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon emphasizes that true conversion is marked by a personal, Spirit-led confession of faith that cannot be borrowed or assumed from others.

Scripture: Isaiah 44:5, Acts 2:38, John 3:3, Matthew 7:13-14, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 8:5

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Personal Faith"

Description

In this powerful sermon, C.H. Spurgeon calls believers to a deeply personal and Spirit-empowered confession of faith. He stresses the necessity of the Holy Spirit's work in genuine conversion and warns against superficial or crowd-driven professions of faith. Spurgeon encourages Christians to stand boldly for Christ, even if they must do so alone, emphasizing that true religion is an individual matter between the soul and God.

Transcript

"One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." Isaiah 44:5.

THIS is to take place after the Lord has poured out His Spirit upon His people, and upon their offspring. The mainspring of everything good and gracious is the Holy Spirit. Where He comes, everything prospers. But when He has gone, nothing but failure and disaster will come. I believe that at this present moment God's people ought to cry to Him day and night that there may be a fresh baptism into the Holy Spirit. There are many things that are desirable for the Church of Christ, but one thing is absolutely necessary, and this is the one thing—the power of the Holy Spirit in the midst of His people. You know the very simple imagery which sets forth this blessing. If you go down to some of our Thames bridges, you will find the barges stuck fast in the mud and you cannot stir them. It would be a very difficult thing to provide machinery with which to move them—all the king's horses and all the king's men could not do it! But wait till the tide comes in! Now every black, heavy old barge "walks the waters like a thing of life!" Everything that can float is movable as soon as the silver flood has returned. So, many of our churches lie in the mud. Everything seems motionless, pow-erless—but when the Spirit of God comes in like a flood, all is altered! Therefore, let us pray—

"Come, Holy Spirit, come."

I know that, in one sense, He is always with us, but I am sure that, in another sense, He is not. He is abiding in this dispensation, but He is not with this Church or with that—and all the churches have need to cry, "Come, heavenly flood! Come with Your mighty force and lift us all out of our spiritual death!"

When the Spirit of God comes, converts come, too. If they do not come by the Spirit of God, they are not worth having. I have heard, and sorrowfully heard, of many instances where revivalists have added to churches by the score and by the hundreds, but after a couple of years none of the professed converts have been left. If men are brought to say, "I am the Lord's," merely as the result of excitement, they will generally be saying what is not true. And though they may think it true, yet time, which tries all things, will prove their profession to have been untrue. We must have the Spirit of God with us for real spiritual work and if we have Him not, the most powerful revivalist will be only as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal!

We must have the Spirit of God with us. If we have His Presence, even the ordinary minister's preaching will suffice for great blessing to the hearers. But without that Spirit, the ordinary preaching will become more dull and flat and lifeless than ever—and there will be no increase in the Church, and no earnestness among those already in it. I beseech you, therefore, pray day and night for the Spirit of God! We want to have sound doctrine, we want to have great diligence and zeal, we want to have superior holiness—I will not go on with the catalog of what we want—but let us have the Holy Spirit and we shall have all these! This will bring back to the Church and to the individual Believer all that is necessary for spiritual health and strength.

Now, supposing that we have had our prayers answered and that the Spirit of God has been poured out like floods upon the dry ground, then see what is to happen—converts will come forward to confess their faith! So the text evidently tells us.

I. Concerning the converts we so much desire to see and the confession which the Spirit of God will lead them to make, let me begin by saying that THIS CONFESSION OF FAITH IS PERSONAL—"One shall say, I am the Lord's; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord." You see, it is not a joint confession, but an individual one. It is "one," and, "another," and, "another."

Notice, first, that all confession of Christ must be personal—anything else is unreal and worthless. All religion that is true is personal—it has to do with the man's own heart. He is moved to it by his own conscience. His faith must be his own faith. His repentance must be repentance of his own sin. His coming to Christ must be his own coming to Christ. Nobody can perform your religion for you—it is not possible that anything like sponsorship should be admitted into real, vital godliness! Here is a man who professes that he promised that you should renounce all the pomps and vanities of this present wicked world. Who dares promise such a thing as that? If I were to promise for an unborn child that it would have red hair and a Roman nose, I would be quite as reasonable as if I promised that any child should become a child of

God!

I cannot do it, it is not in my power, nor within the power of any man! In every act of religion you, yourself, must be concerned—the godliest mother can pray for you, but you will not be saved unless you pray for yourself! The most believing father may use his faith on your behalf, but you will not be saved unless you, yourself, believe! It is useless for one man to think that he can either believe or repent for another. You are born, one by one—you will die one by one! You will have to stand at the Judgment Seat of Christ in your own proper personality! You must, each one, humble yourselves before God, confess your sin and

personally look to Him who was lifted up upon the Cross for our redemption—and personally yield yourselves up to God. Baptism of which you have no personal knowledge, in which you have no conscious part, is the mockery and mimicry of Baptism—but it is not Scriptural Baptism—and any profession of faith in which you have no conscious part, yourself, is the mimicry of a confession, but it is not a Scriptural confession!

"One shall say, I am the Lord's," but he would not speak for another! That other "shall call himself by the name of Jacob." And the two, together, cannot speak for number three, for he shall come forward and "subscribe with his hand unto the Lord." My dear Friends, I do charge you, understand that "you must be born again." You must yield your hearts to Jesus! And this must be a matter of personal concern with you. National religion and family religion may be well if rightly understood, but nothing less than personal religion will bring anyone into the Kingdom of Heaven!

This, then, is required of us by the Lord, that our religion should be personal. The Gospel comes to us with its urgent call, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." To each convinced sinner who asks, "What must I do to be saved?" the Gospel says, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." It invites you, my Friend, as much as if there were not another person in the world! And the Word of God, if it comes with power to your soul, will come as distinctly to you as if you were the only person in the whole universe! It must be so—nothing but distinct personality will do in religion—and especially in the confession that we make of our being the Lord's people.

This personal confession, dear Friends, needs to be carefully attended to when there are many coming forward. I always dread lest any of you should come into the Church in a crowd. I have often known persons brought into this Tabernacle by the crowd. They somehow mingled with the stream and they did not and they could not move out of it—they were caught up off their feet and carried in here! And, sometimes, there are seasons with Churches when individuals seem to be carried into a confession of faith because it is the fashion to do so—others are doing it, so they do the same! I pray you to be very careful about this matter! If your father, your mother, your brothers, or your sisters make a profession of religion, that is no reason why you should do so unless you can truthfully do it! If you have not repented of sin, do not say that you have done so! If you have not believed in Jesus, do not say that you have! Do not think of coming forward merely because your friends are joining the Church. Act for yourselves!

One of the lessons I have constantly to teach you is that you are individually responsible to God and that it is absolutely necessary for you to exercise your own personal judgment about matters of faith and practice. There may be some who say, "Do what your priest tells you," but we have no priests, because we want all of you to be priests! You are to be a nation of priests. If you are God's people, you are to act before God for yourselves under the teaching of His Spirit given to you individually—and we beseech you to do this. Do not let custom, either good or bad, sway you, but as we charge you not to run with a multitude to do evil, so we exhort you not to run with the multitude professedly doing good when you are not doing it and when your practice does not go with your profession! In all times of revival, it is very necessary that this Truth of God should be taught.

But, next, this individual confession of your faith in Christ is incumbent upon you especially when there are few coming forward. I could say to myself, "If there is nobody in this village confessing Christ, then it is all the more urgent upon me that I should confess Him. If in the Church few have come to tell the pastor that they have found Christ by his means, if I have found the Savior, I will certainly go! I will let him see that he

has not quite labored in vain. I will go for his sake. If there are few added to the Church, then I will go that the Church may not be discouraged in its Christian efforts." Oh, I like to have around me those who feel, "It is no consideration with me whether there are many or few! I have to act as before God on my own account. If there are few who do right, that is all the more reason why I should do it." One said to me, the other day, "My daughters go to such a place of worship because it is fashionable and," he added, "that seems to me a curious reason, for I go to another place because it is not fashionable."

I think that it is a grand thing to learn to be in the right with two or three. Some people say, "Why, you are in such a small minority!" Yes, yes, but as a general rule, minorities are right. Up till now, the majority has never been on the side of Christ, the majority has never been for God, the majority has never been with the Truth of God! Oh, dear young fellows, I cannot bear that you should always be trying to jump the way the cat goes! Go the right way—never mind about the cats! Do not be saying, "I must do what the other fellows do," but be bold and do exactly what the others do not do when you believe that is the right thing to do. What? Is heroism altogether gone? Will Christianity breed no more martyrs? I trust in God that it is not so, but that when there are few confessing Christ, and faith in Him, some of you men and women will feel, "I shall take up my cross and follow Christ and do it the more decidedly, and the more openly, and the more quickly because there are so few doing it."

If we do not mind what we are doing, we may go to Hell for the sake of company! But I would rather go to Heaven, alone, than go with all the multitude down the road to Hell. Still are our Savior's words true, "Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way which leads unto life, and few there are that find it." Oh, that you may resolve that the way shall not be too narrow and the gate shall not be too strait for you and that, by God's Grace, you will find it, and love it none the less, but all the more because the multitude prefer the broader road!

II. Secondly, THIS CONFESSION IS VARIED.

First, one person speaks out for himself—"One shall say, I am the Lord's." That is a fine speech! Truthfully made, it is like a clean cut piece of marble! "I am the Lord's." If you, from your very soul, can say this in any company and not be ashamed to say it before men, angels, or devils, God has taught you a noble piece of eloquence! "I am the Lord's." There is a great fullness about these words, as I will try to show you, directly, but there are some Christians who have made this distinct avowal and they stand to it. Perhaps they have not joined a Church yet—they should do so, but they have done well to say, "I am the Lord's." Paul said of the Macedonian Christians, "This they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord and unto us by the will of God." You have no right to belong to a Church till first you belong to the Lord—so that you can truly say, "I am the Lord's." But it is most blessed when a man or a woman feels this, and says this, and keeps to it till death—"I am the Lord's." This is a noble avowal. I pray God that you may be enabled, now, to make it for the first time if you have never made it before.

The next person mentioned in our text confessed his faith in a different way, for he called himself by the name of Jacob. That is to say, he took up his position with the people of God under their lowliest title. "There," he said, "I am prepared to suffer affliction with the people of God, to be reproached when they are reproached, to be shunned when they are shunned, to be ridiculed when they are ridiculed. I belong to Jacob! He is an extraordinary person, cut off from the rest of the world to be the Lord's and I go with him." It is a grand thing when, first of all, a man knows he is the Lord's, but in some persons, this confession takes more prominently the shape of feeling that they will be with the people of God, that they are willing to take up their cross and go with God's people wherever they go. Their resolution is something like that

brave declaration of Ruth to Naomi, "Where you go, I will go; and where you lodge, I will lodge: your people shall be my people and your God my God."

I remember speaking with a Christian woman who lay dying. She was under some form of doubt at the time, but she said, "I feel sure that the Lord will never send me among the ungodly, for my tastes and habits do not lie that way. I have always been happiest among the people of God and, surely, the Lord will let me be gathered to my own company." And so He will. There is a story told—I believe a true one—of a poor woman who had long been a Believer, but, partly through aberration of mind, I think, she grew so despondent that nobody could cheer her. Before she died, she came out into bright light, but for a long time she was under a cloud and her belief was that she would be sent to Hell. She feared such a doom above all things, but she prayed this very singular prayer, that, although she must suffer for her sins, she might have a place by herself where she might not hear the blasphemies of the wicked against God. She seemed as if she was not afraid of any form of suffering, but she said that she could not bear to hear God's name blasphemed! Dear Soul, there was no fear about her safety, was there? Where there is that holy dread of sin, that hatred of evil, that real love to God, there is no fear whatever of what will become of such people!

Now, there are some who, at first, are afraid that they do not belong to the Lord, but they say that they will belong to His people. They wish, somehow or other, to get in among them and especially when they see them despised. Then they come forward and stand up for them, and say, "On me, also, let the reproach fall, for I, also, am one of them." This is a grand spirit. I commend it heartily!

But here is a third person who makes his confession in a still different way—"Another shall subscribe with his hand unto the Lord, and surname himself by the name of Israel." I do not know this person. Sometimes I think that he is a friend of mine who is afraid to speak, but who likes to write. "I could not," says one, "speak my confession of faith, but I could joyfully sit down and write it." Yes, you are timid, trembling and slow of speech. Do not condemn yourself for that. I have heard of one who came before the Church and could not speak a word—and when the pastor asked her some questions and almost put the answers into her mouth, she could say nothing. So he was obliged to say, "My dear Sister, the Church cannot judge at all as to your faith, for you say nothing." And then she broke the silence by exclaiming, "I cannot speak for Christ, but I could die for Him." "Oh!" said the minister, "that is the best confession of all!" There are some of that sort who would not be able to speak in public, being so timid and retiring, but they subscribe with their hand unto the Lord.

Still, I am not sure that this is the person mentioned in the text. I seem to fancy that it is a stronger body, a man who is not content with saying it, but who writes it down in black and white—"I am the Lord's." That which is written remains, so he puts it down. I have known such people to write out and sign a declaration that they belong to Christ. If they add any promises to that declaration, I am afraid that they will bring themselves into bondage. But if this is all, that they distinctly declare that the transaction is done, and that they belong to God, I think that it is a very admirable way of confessing faith in Him. Possibly, I may be addressing some young people who have done this. Let them be thankful that they have been enabled to make such a declaration of their faith and let them stand to it and abide by it all their days!

But you will notice, also, that this person who thus subscribed, or wrote with his hand, unto the Lord, also went the whole way towards God and His people at their best, for it is added that he surnamed himself by the name of Israel. Let me put this matter very plainly to you. I believe that there are some who give themselves up to the Church of God in a very complete and unreserved manner, resolving that all the

privileges they can enjoy they will have, all the holiness they can ever attain to they will gain, and all the consecration that lies within the region of possibility they will strive after and secure. They surname themselves by the name of Israel—they not only join God's people at their worst, but they mean to join them at their best. Not only do they take the name of Jacob, but the name of Israel, also!

There are certain persons who have joined this Church—I shall not indicate them, but you must know who they are—they are those who, when they joined the Church, joined it with all their heart and threw their whole soul into it. They give their time, their substance, themselves, to the cause of God for the Glory of Christ. On the other hand, there are some who join the Church and we have the distinguished privilege of having their names in our books, but that is all, for they do nothing for Christ. They are a worry to us rather than a help. They are the very first persons to find fault if they do not derive benefit. But as for the Church's service, they cannot answer to their names when the roll is read, for they are not here—they are busy in the world and their whole strength is there—they do not surname themselves by the name of Israel!

Happy is the Church when the Lord sends into her midst men and women who are so completely the Lord's that they give themselves up heart and soul to His service. Years ago, when farming used to pay, I have known farmers have a farm which they worked, themselves, and then they had another at a distance which they called their off-hand farm, out of which they did not get very much. So I believe that there are some people whose religion is a sort of off-hand farm—they do not get much out of it, nor do much with it—but their worldly business is their home farm which they work with all their might. The other matter is of secondary importance to them. Such people are not likely to be very happy in the Lord, themselves, and they are not likely to be made useful to others.

I think that I have thus shown you that there are varied ways of making this confession of faith. With some, it is a distinct avowal of their union with the Lord, Himself. With others it is mainly a sense of their union with the Church. With others it is a blending of the two and a carrying of both to a high degree of perfection. God give us many converts of this last sort!

III. I was going to finish with this observation, that THESE CONFESSIONS OF FAITH ARE ALL GRACIOUS,

but I can only deal with one, for our time has gone—"I am the Lord's."

I wish that I could convey to others the feelings which I have had in thinking over these words. They had been with me many days before I ventured to think of preaching from them—"I am the Lord's." You know the order in which they come elsewhere. "My Beloved is mine, and I am His." "I am His," follows, "my Beloved is mine." You must have Christ before you say that you belong to Christ. Beloved, have you taken hold on Christ? Have you appropriated Him? Is He your all, your everything? Is it so? Well then, you should go on to say, "I am the Lord's."

This declaration, "I am the Lord's," is a very practical confession, for, if I am the Lord's, then I must not give myself up to be the slave of another. I must not serve the world, the flesh, or the devil, for, "I am the Lord's." If the Lord has bought me, if the Lord has chosen me, if the Lord has called me, if the Lord has taken me to be His peculiar portion, I must be reserved for Him and not given to another. This ought to be a check to me in my whole daily life, if I am tempted to do this or that which is wrong.

It will be also a high incentive to duty to say truly, "I am the Lord's." I must live for Him; I cannot merely talk about being His, I must prove it to be so in private by my walking with Him and in public by my walking like

He. If I am the Lord's, I must lay myself out to extend His Kingdom and win the souls of others to His sway. I must be zealous for my Lord—it must not be one step today and another tomorrow, for "I am the Lord's." I must not be idling and trifling, for "I am the Lord's." If this Truth shall come with power to your hearts, it will tend to make earnest workers of you, such servants as need not be ashamed even in the day of their Lord's appearing.

But while it has a practical bearing, this confession has a sweet comforting aspect—"I am the Lord's." The devil desires to have me, but, "I am the Lord's," so he cannot have me. Sin would have me, but, "I am the Lord's," and He has forgiven me and delivered me from the guilt of sin. I might fall a thousand times a day, but, "I am the Lord's." I might fall foully but not finally, for, "I am the Lord's"—and being the Lord's, He holds me in His hands and none shall pluck me from His gracious grasp!

"I am the Lord's." This is my hope of safety and of perfection. If I am the Lord's, then He has begun a good work in me and He will not leave off till He has performed all that He purposed concerning me! He will have respect to the work of His hands. I have heard that when Gustave Dore left Paris, before the siege, he hid one of his most beautiful pictures under a heap of stones in a cellar. Only he knew where it was and, when the siege was over, Dore hastened to the place, for he had a respect to the work of his hands, and though his picture lay hidden there, you may be sure that he soon disinterred it and completed it. And, sometimes, the Lord's people seem to get down under the stones in the cellar, but He will find them. If you are the Lord's, He will not leave you to perish! He will go on with His work and finish the task He has commenced till you shall reflect His wisdom and display His power!

"I am the Lord's." Why, I think I will turn this confession into a hymn! I will not rhyme it, but let it stand as it is, "I am the Lord's." Sing it in your souls! Let the joy bells of your heart ring it out, "I am the Lord's. I shall die in the Lord, I shall rise again at the sounding of the archangel's trumpet, I shall see my Lord's face in Glory, I shall be forever with Him, for I am the Lord's." If you come to the Communion Table with this sweet reflection in your hearts, and then go from the table with this Truth of God worked out practically in your lives, it shall be well with you!

My dear Hearers, I wish you could all say, "I am the Lord's." I would to God you would all put your trust in Christ and take Him to be yours. When you have done that, then do not hesitate to come and confess Him before men! God help you to do, for our Lord Jesus Christ's sake! Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: ISAIAH44.

In this chapter God encourages His Church by a promise of the visitation of His Spirit. Oh, that it may be fulfilled to us, also!

Verses 1-3. Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen: thus says the LORD that made you, and formed you from the womb, which will help you; Fear not, O Jacob, My servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen. For I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon your seed, and My blessing upon your offspring: That is exactly what we need! Oh, that God would thus revive His Church! A little while ago you saw the earth become dry and brown and bare—the very pastures were chapped and parched and opened their mouths to cry for rain. What could we have done if the clouds had still withheld their nourishment? But at last, down came the refreshing showers and all the face of nature was revived! What we have had upon our fields, we need upon our Churches! Nothing will do for our souls but a visitation of the Spirit. Let us pray for it. Come, Holy Spirit, heavenly Rain, pour out Your life-giving treasures upon thirsty souls even as the floods have been

poured out upon the dry ground! Here is a Divine promise, let us plead it—"I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour My Spirit upon your seed and My blessing upon your offspring."

4. And they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses. You must often have noticed how you can trace the course of a brook by the willow trees that grow upon its banks. When you cannot see the brook from a distance, you can see the willows. So, wherever the Spirit of God comes, young people are converted—we see our children growing up in God's fear—and we know that this is the result of the Spirit's working.

5, 6. One shall say, I am the LORD'S; and another shall call himself by the name of Jacob; and another shall subscribe with his hand unto the LORD, and surname himself by the name of Israel. Thus says the LORD, the King of Israel, and His redeemer, the LORD of hosts; I am the First, and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God. This is spoken in the Lord's usual majestic style—does it not remind you of the words of our Lord Jesus as recorded in the Book of the Revelation? "I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, says the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty." How can He be less than Divine who rightly adopts the same style which Jehovah uses in the Prophets—"I am the First, and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God"?

7. And who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for Me, since I appointed the ancient people? And the things that are coming, and shall come, let them show unto them. The great God challenges all pretended gods to compete with Him and to show that they have ever prophesied or foretold the future! One of the greatest proofs of the Inspiration of Scripture and that our God is the only living and true God, is that the prophecies up to now have been literally fulfilled. Go to Bashan, or to Edom, or to Sidon, or to Egypt—and wherever you go, you will see that whatever the Lord said concerning the ancient nations and peoples and cities has been carried out to the very letter!

8. Fear you not, neither be afraid: have not I told you from that time, and have declared it? You are even My witnesses. Is there a God beside Me? Yes, there is no God, I know not any. "There is no God" in the world but Jehovah, the one living and true God whom we adore! Now follows that very wonderful passage descriptive of the making of idols, which we have often read. If there are any of you who worship crosses, crucifixes, or any other visible objects, please remember that God's command is spoken as much to you as to any other idolaters! We may not worship anything that can be seen or handled, for this is the Law laid down by God Himself—"You shall not make unto you any engraved image, or any likeness of anything that is in Heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: you shall not bow down yourself to them, nor serve them." Here, then, is God's description of idol gods.

9. They that make an engraved image are all of them, vanity. They must be very empty-headed and foolish people, or they would not worship a thing which they have engraved with their own hands.

9. And their delectable things shall not profit; and they are their own witnesses; they see not, nor know; that they may be ashamed. Idolaters are just as wooden and doltish as their idols, or else they would know better than to worship them.

10-12. Who has formed a god, or molten engraved image that is profitable for nothing? Behold, all his fellows shall be ashamed: and the workmen, they are of men: let them all be gathered together, let them stand up; yet they shall fear, and they shall be ashamed together. The smith with the tongs both works in the coals, and fashions it with hammers, and works it with the strength of his arms: yes, he is hungry, and

his strength fails: he drinks no water, and is faint. Here is a god-maker with his tongs, and his coals, and his hammers—yet this god-maker gets hungry and faint! Here comes another—

13. The carpenter stretches out his rule; he marks it out with a line; he fits it with planes, and he marks it out with the compass, and makes it after the figure of a man, according to the beauty of a man; that it may remain in the house. Fancy a god-maker with his rule and his line, his planes and his compasses! What fine irony there is here

14. He hews him down cedars, and takes the cypress and the oak, which he strengthens for himself among the trees of the forest; he plants an ash, and the rain does nourish it. The forest is growing stuff to make gods with out of ash, and oak, and cedar, and cypress!

15. Then shall it be for a man to burn: for he will take thereof, and warm himself. He cuts up part of the tree for fuel, and warms himself with it!

15-17. Yes, he kindles it, and bakes bread; yes, he makes a god, and worships it; he makes it an engraved image, and falls down thereto. He burns part thereof in the fire; with part thereof he eats flesh; he roasts roast, and is satisfied: yes, he warms himself, and says, Aha, I am warm, I have seen the fire: and the residue thereof he makes a god, even his engraved image: he falls down unto it, and worships it, and prays unto it, and says, Deliver me; for you are my god. And have not we seen hundreds of persons adoring a doll, or a little picture said to be a likeness of the virgin, or something of that kind? Ah, me, that even under the garb of Christianity the lowest kind of idolatry should still be common among our fellow men! God grant that none of us may ever fall into this deadly evil!

18-20. They have not known nor understood: for He has shut their eyes, that they cannot see; and their hearts, that they cannot understand. And none considers in his heart, neither is there knowledge nor understanding to say, I have burned part of it in the fire; yes, also I have baked bread upon the coals thereof; I have roasted flesh, and eaten it: and shall I make the residue thereof an abomination? Shall I fall down to the stock of a tree? He feeds on ashes. As madmen will sometimes devour ashes, so surely men who worship things that they have made or bought must be mad—"He feeds on ashes."

20. A deceived heart has turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand? If you shall worship the crucifix, or anything else that is visible, you are dishonoring yourself and you are breaking the Law of God! Remember that, "God is a Spirit and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." He will have no similitude. This He abhors with His whole heart and will hold no one guiltless who worships an idol of any kind! Even though the man has reverentially and sincerely bowed before it, he is transgressing against God! These are the false gods—now we shall read of the one true God

21. Remember these, O Jacob and Israel; for you are My servant: I have formed you. "You have not formed Me, as these idolaters make their gods, but I have formed you."

21. You are My servant: O Israel, you shall not be forgotten of Me. God does not forget His people. If you are trusting in Him, you may forget Him through your infirmity, but because of His infinite love, He will never forget you.

22. I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, your transgressions, and, as a cloud, your sins: return unto Me; for I have redeemed you. First He pardoned their sins and then He bade them return to Him. What a wonder

of mercy this is—Free Grace removing sin and then the sweet constraints of gratitude drawing the forgiven sinner near his God!

23. Sing, O you heavens, for the LORD has done it: shout, you lower parts of the earth: break forth into singing, you mountains, O forest, and every tree therein: for the LORD has redeemed Jacob, and glorified Himself in Israel. Pardoned sin is enough to make even the rocks sing! Mountains, trees, forests and even the lower parts of the earth are made to echo with song when sin is blotted out!

24. Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, and He that formed you from the womb, I am the LORD that makes all things; that stretches forth the heavens alone; that spreads abroad the earth by Myself. God does everything by His own unaided strength. With whom took He counsel when He formed the universe? Who instructed the Ever-Blessed when He made the heavens and the earth! He did it all by His own wisdom and power.

25. That frustrates the tokens of the liars, and makes diviners mad: that turns wise men backward, and makes their knowledge foolish. This is what He does to those who boast and think that they know better than He does. But simple hearts that will believe His Word shall know His will and shall grow wise unto salvation.

26-28. That confirms the word of His servant, and performs the counsel of His messengers; that says to Jerusalem, You shall be inhabited; and to the cities of Judah, You shall be built, and I will raise up the decayed places thereof: that says to the deep, Be dry, and I will dry up your rivers: that says of Cyrus, he is My shepherd, and shall perform all My pleasure: even saying to Jerusalem, You shall be built; and to the temple, your foundation shall be laid. This Book of the Prophet Isaiah was written long before the days of Cyrus, yet he is here mentioned by name, and the prophecy of what he would do is here given! We know how completely this prophecy was fulfilled and the Lord who uttered it, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, is our God forever and ever! He shall be our Guide even unto death, blessed be His holy name! Amen.

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