

We can have no hesitation, it is conceived, to answer this question in the negative. And we do so in the first place, for this reason, that public worship is enjoined by the Almighty, so that the individual in deserting it, is condemning the authority of the very Being whom he pretends to honour with his devotions in private.

Secondly, there are blessings which we all enjoy as a community or a social body, for which, common sense tells us, we ought to express our gratitude to God in public. This is but doing what we usually approve of in matters of far less importance.

Thirdly, if it would be one of the greatest hardships which could be inflicted upon a people, to be deprived altogether of the opportunity of publicly acknowledging God, as we have shewn it would be, then is it the duty of every man to encourage by his presence in the house of prayer his friends, his acquaintances, his dependants, his neighbors, to come to it along with him.

Can any one assert, then, that a person may despise all these considerations, and yet his religious state continue to flourish? Can any one lay claim to the possession of true piety, and yet habitually violate the most express injunctions of God?—to gratitude, and yet refuse, in a public manner, to thank God for public blessings?—to regard for the well-being of his fellow men, and yet be utterly careless about the effect of his example upon the minds and conduct of those around him?

But we have to expose a still greater delusion. Is it generally, nay, is it ever the case that they who forsake the assembling of themselves together are distinguished for growth in the knowledge and graces of the gospel? While we are in the House of God, are they who have voluntarily remained behind us, employing their minds and hearts in the way that Christianity directs her disciples to do on the first day of the week? Do you suppose that these lovers of retirement and solitude, on seeing you leave your dwellings at the hour of prayer, actually set about the duties in private in which they know you are about to engage in public? It would indeed be delightful to have evidence that this is the case—but we have no such evidence. We have the clearest evidence to the contrary? Who is it, again, that we find most indifferent to the various duties which belong to man as an individual and as a member of society? Who is it upon whose fidelity you feel yourselves most disposed to rely as a servant, as a friend, as a master? Surely not upon the man who sets at nought the solemn invitations to assemble in the house of God, and to

offer to God the sincere tribute of his love and obedience. We request you to recollect whether you know many who, habitually forsaking the assembly of Christ's disciples, have conducted themselves in any of the relations of life, in a manner worthy of being held up as examples to others. No, my brethren, there is such a connection between all our obligations, that the man who is careless of God, will ever be found inattentive to the duties claimed from him by his fellow creatures.

True there are numbers that make it their practice regularly to enter the house of prayer, who belie their professions by the sinful course of their lives. This, with regret, we are obliged to confess. Among the professed disciples of Jesus, the eye of Him who is the object of our worship, will not fail to detect some whose hearts are not right, and who bring discredit upon that holy name by which they are called. But let us remember, it is not the services of religion that have formed the temper or that influence the conduct of such men. Though they may sit here, and to all outward appearance, join in the solemn acts of this worshipping assembly, yet they have neither part nor lot with the people of God. Though before God, God is not in all their thoughts. The incense they offer Him is unhallowed; the sacrifices they present upon His altar are maimed and polluted, and are therefore an abomination in the sight of God. They only who worship in spirit and in truth; they only who wash their hands in innocency and then encompass God's holy altar; they only who are actuated with the love of supreme excellence, and are desirous, above all things, to attain to to a nearer and nearer resemblance to it, are, in the sight of the Most High, accounted His servants. All others, let their external demeanour be what it may, and let the world praise it as it may, are mere pretenders, and consequently their conduct is no more a reproach to the public institutions of religion than it is capable of deceiving the great Being whose eye is in every place beholding the evil and the good.

But while there are always Judases to be found in the company of the sincere friends of Jesus, yet it is impossible to believe that Jesus has any friends among those who neglect His divine institutions. The veriest hypocrite who makes his assembling with the faithful a cloak for his vices, would have been, in all probability, a worse man than he is, had he deserted the house of prayer. Here his hypocrisy may occasionally meet with a check; here he may learn that all his art is only, at best, to entrap himself; while he imagines that heaven winks at his duplicity, it