

1. To the member received, The nature of the injury inflicted may vary greatly, according to the disposition or temperament of the individual. When to one of a proud spirit, who is naturally unwilling to confess a mistake, even in unimportant matters, the unpleasant truth is brought home, that without religion he professed religion, that without repentance he declared himself penitent, he will be strongly tempted to bury the discovery as a secret in his own breast, not to be disclosed, perhaps, even to his nearest friends. Then, for the sake of appearances, the form of religion must be maintained, but, alas, the power and pleasure are wanting. There is plenty of religious duty and drudgery, but no holy delight, no joy in the Lord. He is regarded as a christian, and spoken to as such. He listens and replies as though he were, or believed himself to be a child of God. This religious deception settles down to a habit of life, and the pride of heart which made it necessary, strengthens by exercise, and may give a kind of support to the sinking spirits, even on the verge of the grave.

2. Again, let us suppose an unconverted person of a very different stamp, to become a member of a christian church. The world is full of individuals who have but little power of independent thought. To think is not their avocation, to reflect not their habit. They are the actors on life's stage, they do what others propose, they execute what others design. Their nature is in everything to put their entire trust in their leaders, popularly called "pinning one's faith to another's sleeve." Such an one asks admission to a christian church. His christian experience, so called, is related, is satisfactory and he is received. Now, is there not great danger that persons of this class may sometimes, perhaps, unconsciously take the action of the church in their reception, as confirmatory evidence of their conversion. Perhaps with great hesitation and doubt they presented themselves, but the church without further enquiry received them. It is very natural for people to feel complacent, to be entirely satisfied with themselves, if only they can get the approbation of others. The conclusion is easily reached. The church has heard my relation, it appears fully satisfied, why should I entertain doubts or seek for more, when those better able to judge of these matters, believe me to be worthy of membership? and thus they settle down upon mere membership, resting upon the empty, and to them profitless, formalities of church ordinances. No warnings to sinners terrify them, no gospel invitations are heeded, because they have come, by degrees, to believe themselves secure. They do not examine their own hearts according to the word of God. They cannot detect the very great contrast between their state and that of one who is living by faith on the Son of God—they are simply deluded, by the fact that they are church members, into the groundless belief that they are on the way to heaven. They may plead, "we have eaten and drunk in thy presence," and the reply may be, "I know you not, who ye are; depart from me all ye workers of iniquity."

Again, there are the shrewd, common-sense practical men of the world, who, upon the whole, love honor and honesty, and detest sham and mere pretence in everything. Suppose one of this class has been induced, in early life, or under some special excitement in later years, without conversion, to become a member of a christian church. In the course of time he becomes convinced that he has not in his heart what the book and the preacher describe as genuine religion—that he has really professed what he never experienced. He begins to enquire whether his case is peculiar, or whether many others may not be in the same condition.