

disbelieve. And thus with many the doctrines of the Bible are driven away into forgetfulness, or rejected as without foundation. Even apart from the decisions of a judgment day and the fate of eternity, there are many reasons connected with this life, which would incline a wicked man to deny the faith. Is he the slave of some criminal pleasure? It must be abandoned before he can become a real christian. But how can he repent of that of which he is fond, or relinquish that which forms his favorite enjoyment? It is much easier and more expeditious to doubt or deny the Bible; and this, for a time at least, sets his conscience free. Is he engaged in some dishonest but profitable traffic? This must be abandoned if he become a real christian. What a blessed peradventure were the Bible untrue, and no future reckoning! I might pursue this lucrative, money-making course, although a little crooked, and my gains would continue to augment without any danger of their eating like a canker. I shall at least defer the examination of the question until some future period. But if christianity be true, this conduct will only increase the bitterness of a future repentance; for it commands reparation for fraud, and the restitution of ill-gotten gain. Ah! this is strictness with a vengeance. Why, it leaves no loop-hole for the transgressor! No—none. Then it is easier to deny such a religion than to practise it. Yes; easier for a wicked man—but ah, not so safe! But the danger is future; the pleasure is near; we will therefore embrace the pleasure though forbidden; and, thus the love of iniquity makes many an infidel, and is the universal cause of that neglect and indifference with which true religion is treated in the world.

5. I shall advert only to one other frequent cause of religious indifference, verging to unbelief, and that is, the want of an experimental knowledge of its truths. A general conviction that the Bible is a revelation from God, is not christian faith; yet it forms the whole amount of many a one's christianity. Saving faith implies the affectionate consent of the heart as well as the unhesitating submission of the understanding. And unless these are combined the moral influence of the gospel can never be experienced, nor can it be heartily acknowledged as the power of God and the wisdom of God. If man were purely an intellectual being, he would be made a Christian by the conviction of his understanding. But as he is also a moral being, his will must be subdued, and his affections won to the practical duties which flow from admitted doctrines. This illustrates these two most important truths:—"If any man

will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God;" and again, "he that believeth hath the witness in himself." Live the christian's life, and you will have the evidence within yourself of the heavenly origin of the christian's faith. Meditate upon your present knowledge until it purify your heart and regulate your life. And as your holiness becomes perfected your mind will take a clearer and more comprehensive view of revealed truth; new points radiant with celestial light, will be constantly standing up before the eye; and though in this imperfect state of our existence darkness will continue to rest upon a great part of our mental horizon, you will be assured and grateful that such rays are vouchsafed as may guide you securely to a blessed immortality.

In conclusion, brethren, permit me to urge upon you this consideration that religion is a matter respecting which you cannot safely be either unconcerned or in doubt. If God has spoken to man, the evidence must be complete, and the discoveries momentous; and it must be criminal not to inquire, and dangerous not to be settled. Come then, in the fear of God, in a candid spirit, with the love of goodness, and the Bible will not shrink from your examination. It will manifest the signs of its divinity as clear as external nature does the eternal power and Godhead of its Creator. By the divine blessing it will mould your sentiments and habits and whole character into a conformity with those of the heavenly world towards which it directs your hopes. In every reverent and faithful perusal it will send forth a sanctifying energy into the heart which no merely human production ever exerted; and by casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ, it will demonstrate itself to your own knowledge and experience, the divinely appointed instrument for the moral recovery of this fallen world.