

It is necessary here to advert to the constitution of the Presbyterian Church in which you expect to become public instructors. It is characterized by its attachment to a particular system of religious principles. These, as in the school of Christ, its ministers teach, and its members learn to believe; and to these, satisfactory proofs of attachment are required from all who are admitted into the ministerial office. I would, therefore, advise you to make them the subject of rigorous investigation. In the course of your attendance here, it will be my duty to explain and enforce them by all the arguments which I am able to produce. I believe them to be principles which no accurate discussion is able to injure; and, as intelligent beings to whom knowledge is valuable, as men needing the improvement of religious instruction, as persons expecting to become public teachers, I invite you to investigate their nature and ascertain their truth. Allow neither the authority of the church nor my opinion to influence your judgment. In all your inquiries, let truth rest upon its own basis. Admit general principles; not because they have men for their supporters, but God for their author.

Considering religious truth, then, as the object of your pursuit, let me remind you that there is only one source from which a Christian teacher should derive his principles. Whatever is true and profitable must be learned from those instructions which the author of our faith has imparted to his church. By the law and by the testimony every religious opinion ought to be tried. Of the extent and value of the light of nature a great deal has been said; but it has been said by persons, who, enjoying the benefits of a Christian education, have referred to reason what they had learnt from scripture. Without derogating from those powers of intelligence which man possess, or from that religious knowledge which reason may acquire; it may be observed, that the very existence of a revelation from God, indicates the imperfection of human capacity for acquiring, by any other means, a correct knowledge of his will. Of all those, accordingly, whose sole guide has been the light of nature, the uniform experience has proved its insufficiency. Professing themselves to be wise they have become fools; and, by their belief and practice, have dishonoured the glory of the God of heaven. To the sure word of revelation, therefore you must apply for religious instruction. Having once satisfied yourselves that the scriptures are the words of inspiration, neither the opinion of men nor what you conceive to be the light of nature, ought to shake your belief of the doctrines which they contain.