

Christian Retirement

By [Thomas Reade](#)

1837

ON UNBELIEF

Unbelief is a sin of much greater extent than is generally imagined. Some people confine the sin of unbelief to Jews, Muhammadans, and Pagans; to atheists, deists, and skeptics. They deem it a breach of charity to charge this moral evil upon those who profess to believe the Gospel to be a revelation from God; and who exhibit in their outward character, the amiable virtues of benevolence, kindness, and compassion.

But if we bring what the world denominates faith to the test of Scripture, and try its genuineness by the touchstone of the word of God, we shall soon discover it to be "reprobate silver." This counterfeit coin bears some rude outlines of the King's image; but it is so badly executed, that it may be easily detected by a spiritual discerner.

True faith is lively, operative, and fruitful. True faith works by love, that sacred spring which sets all the wheels of obedience in motion. True faith purifies the heart, by uniting the soul to Jesus, and drawing from him through the Spirit, continual supplies of grace and strength, to mortify sin, and walk in the ways of holy obedience. True faith overcomes the world, by raising the believer above its vanities and follies; by enabling him to renounce its pomps and honors; and to live as a pilgrim and stranger upon earth. True faith realizes the invisible glories of heaven, and thus becomes the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

But how does the world's faith operate? It leads men to the house of God on the Sabbath; and then allows them to attend theaters, and gayeties of every description through the week. It induces them to attend the Lord's table on some great festival of the church, and then lulls their consciences to sleep by the assurance that they have done "some great thing" towards liquidating the contracted debt of daily transgression. It prompts them, it may be, to read their Bibles on the Sabbath, and then to close the sacred volume until the Sabbath returns again.

The faith of the nominally Christian world, bad as it is, is nevertheless valuable to civil society; inasmuch as it restrains men in some degree from the licentious and savage practices of heathen nations, and preserves some portion of external

decency and respect for religion among us. But it has nothing saving in it, because it has no respect to the will and favor of God. This profession of faith is consistent with worldly ambition, pride, lust, avarice, hatred of God, and enmity to the Gospel. These evils abound in the lives of multitudes, with whose praises the world resounds.

Look at the great mass of our population, all of whom profess to be Christians. And what is the character of their life and conduct? Who fill the theaters? who resort to houses of debauchery? who tread the giddy circles of maddening pleasure? who compose the midnight revel, and waste their reason amid the fumes of intoxication? who defraud and circumvent their neighbors? who defile their conversation by obscenity and oaths? who spend their time, when worldly business releases them from labor, in idle indulgences or active wickedness?

The nominal professors of Christianity; men who would be highly offended if you ranked them among the degraded idolaters of the heathen world— men, who pride themselves upon their elevated scale in society, and who glory in the name of Christian. Yet these pretended admirers of Christianity abhor the spirit of the religion which they profess! They scruple not to charge the humble followers of Jesus, who "run not with them to the same excess of riot," with hypocrisy, enthusiasm and fanaticism. They regard them with a sneer of contemptuous scorn; and delight to make them the sportive subject of their bacchanalian carousals. Many of these enemies of the cross of Christ are loaded with the common bounties of an indulgent providence.

"How terrible it will be for you who sprawl on ivory beds surrounded with luxury, eating the meat of tender lambs and choice calves. You sing idle songs to the sound of the harp, and you fancy yourselves to be great musicians, as King David was. You drink wine by the bowlful, and you perfume yourselves with exotic fragrances, caring nothing at all that your nation is going to ruin." The poor of Christ's flock are allowed to perish around them, unheeded and despised!

But oh! what an awful change ensues, when death strikes the fatal blow! Instead of beds of ivory and couches of luxurious ease, they lie down on the lake that burns with fire and brimstone. Instead of bacchanalian songs and the melody of sweet music, they hear and join in the dreadful concert, composed of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth! Instead of the delicious wine poured with profusion into their golden bowls, they crave in vain for a drop of water to cool their flaming tongues.

Instead of continuing their laugh of ridicule at the once despised follower of Jesus, "they, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit, are amazed at the strangeness of his salvation, so far beyond all that they looked for;" and exclaim, "this was he, whom we had once in derision and a proverb of reproach. We fools have accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honor; how is he numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints! Therefore

have we erred from the way of truth, and the light of righteousness has not shined unto us, and the Sun of righteousness rose not upon us. We wearied ourselves in the way of wickedness and destruction; yes, we have gone through desert places where there lay no way, but as for the way of the Lord we have not known it. What has pride profited us? or what good has riches with our bragging brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hastens by." Oh! that men were wise; that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!

Unbelief manifests itself in characters of another class.

Many nominal professors of Christianity are of a sweet, amiable disposition; temperate in their enjoyments, and benevolent to their poor neighbors. They are ready to promote objects of general usefulness, and pride themselves upon their integrity of principle and strict propriety of action,

But how does their faith operate? Does it wean their affections from the world? Does it make Jesus daily more precious to their souls? Does it break them off from all self-righteous dependence? Does it produce real contrition for sin; and continual application to the Fountain opened for sin and for uncleanness?

Alas! they know little, and they feel less, of all this. They had never seen their absolute guilt and wretchedness as the offspring of fallen Adam; and therefore they feel not their need of a crucified Jesus, to save them from the curse and dominion of sin.

They profess indeed to believe in the Gospel; but they come to it as "they who are whole." Their language is that of the young ruler, "What lack I yet?" Hence they deem all experimental religion, all warm affections to the Savior, all renunciation of worldly pleasures which are incompatible with the pure spirit of the gospel, as carrying matters too far; as being righteous over much. They wish to possess both worlds; to taste the joys of earth—and the bliss of heaven. But eternal truth has said, "you cannot serve God and mammon." Such profession of faith must therefore lead to the chambers of death; for "if any man has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his." And Christ has declared of all his true disciples, "you are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."

It is also a melancholy truth, that unbelief is not wholly eradicated from the hearts of believers. If it were, there would have been no need for this caution, "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God." And again: speaking of the Israelites in the wilderness, Paul says, "So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief." And then he adds this solemn warning: "Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it."

Those who are in the habit of observing the secret movement of their own spirit, will soon perceive how this subtle evil lies at the bottom of all their languor in devotion: their inertness of duty; their dulness in spiritual perception, and their declensions from the ways of God. This acquaintance with our own heart will lead us to the continued exercise of watchfulness and prayer, through the gracious influence of the Holy Spirit.

A consciousness of inbred sin will cause us to distrust ourselves, to look continually unto Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. This salutary fear, implanted in the heart through the covenant love of God, alone can keep us from falling. We shall walk over the slippery paths of this sinful world with safety, when we tread with cautious step, "leaning upon our beloved."

This knowledge of our corruption, when taught by the Spirit of truth, in connection with the remedy provided to remove it, even the atoning blood of Jesus, causes the soul who receives it, to sink deep in self-abasement; to rise high in heavenly affections; to renounce the vanities of the world; and to grow in a daily fitness for the inheritance of the saints in light.

How extensive, then, is the evil of unbelief. It blights the whole moral creation of God, producing sterility in every heart unrenewed by sovereign grace; while it sheds its baneful influence even over the trees of righteousness which stand in the garden of the Lord.

Just in proportion as its influence is felt in the people of God, it operates like the chilling blast in the vineyard. The blossom is injured—the fruit is checked—yes, too often withered. To this root of bitterness may be traced all the wickedness of the world; all the evils which have abounded, and do abound in the visible church of Christ; all the declensions and falls which have unhappily stained the lives of many, who, by their deep repentance, have proved themselves to be among the redeemed of the Lord.

"Blessed Savior! you who came down from the throne of glory to die for poor perishing sinners, save me from the deadly sin of unbelief. Oh! give me faith in your precious blood. Enable me to rely upon you with the simplicity of a little child. On you may I repose my soul, for you did bear my sins in your own body on the tree. Lord save me from self-righteousness; from the love of the world from pride of heart; from fleshly indulgence. Keep me near to yourself. Wash me daily in your cleansing blood from every contracted defilement. Clothe me with the robe of righteousness, with the garment of salvation. Cause me to rejoice in you; to live in the light of your countenance; to taste that you are gracious; and to glorify you by a growing conformity to your mind and will."

In the hour of death and danger,
When the angry storms impend;
Woe to you, you wilful stranger

To the great Almighty Friend.

In the days of ease and pleasure,
When your sun unclouded shone,
Every folly was your treasure,
And usurped your heart alone.

Jesus Christ was disregarded,
Love and mercy smiled in vain;
Vengeance threatened—wrath retarded;
Nothing did your lust restrain.

But behold! He now arises,
Clad with frowns and armed with woe,
He your guilty soul surprises;
Where, ah! where will you go?

Earth, with all its gilded treasures,
Cannot yield a moment's ease;
Folly, with her wanton pleasures,
Now has lost her power to please.

Swelling streams of guilt surround you,
Like an overwhelming flood;
Ah! poor sinner, haste and turn you
To a Savior's cleansing blood!

See his agonizing features;
See his pains endured for thee;
See him bleed for rebel creatures,
Groaning on the accursed tree.

Still perhaps he may be gracious;
Still his mercy may forgive;
Like the heaven so vast and spacious,
Is the love which bids you live.

This article is provided as a ministry of [Third Millennium Ministries](#) (Thirdmill).
If you have a question about this article, please [email](#) our *Theological Editor*.

Subscribe to *Biblical Perspectives Magazine*

BPM subscribers receive an email notification each time a new issue is published. Notifications include the title, author, and description of each article in the issue, as well as links directly to the articles. Like BPM itself, *subscriptions are free*. To subscribe to [BPM](#), please select this [link](#).