

WHAT CONSTITUTES RELIGIOUS DEFECTION?

There may be no open departure from the ranks. Unlike the familiar illustration in which the politician actually leaves his party, the Christian may be there in presence, while his spirit is not engaged in the work of the Master. Spiritual defection includes a weakening in the grasp with which eternal realities are held. A man may gradually relax his hold, until he cannot tell whether he has a real grip of them or not. It is true, he may delude himself by the sound of certain words he utters in public or in private; but how much of his religious phraseology is "words, words, and nothing more." If once in a while, he were to ask, what do I mean by all this, there would be some hope of him. But alas! how many of our people are steadily yielding to the world in the various forms in which it presents itself to their desires! One is drawn away by pleasures such as no child of God ought to need, &c., dancing, or gambling, or is found in the company of sinners in the bar room, or at the horse race. Another is carried away by that which in its just measure is laudable and right, but which pursued to excess "drowns men in destruction and perdition." (1 Tim. vi. 9.) He may by simply over-attention to business, "choke the seed of the kingdom, so that it becomes unfruitful."

A man may cease to exist as a church member while he is an upright, industrious merchant, farmer, mechanic, or professional man. His name may remain on the roll of membership through the rest of his life, and he be in the condition of the people at Sardis: "Thou hast a name that thou livest and art dead!" (Rev. iii. 1.) This is spiritual defection, defection from the life and power of the gospel, while yet the individual may retain his place in the church.

But a clearer line of division is drawn when from any cause members forsake their brethren. Denominational defection, when one who has been brought up a Baptist, or has professed to put on Christ among us, is not so much to be deplored. When Baptists go over to other bodies, holding more lax discipline, or none at all, it is a high testimony to the purity of our principles. Our churches will always, we trust, be too hot to hold those who openly serve the Devil. Besides, it is no loss to have the unspiritual go where they belong. Judas Maccabæus, on the eve of one of his battles, sifted his army of its timid members, and with reduced bands completely routed the foe. Our tears need not be shed over these, but should be reserved for that increasing company in the borders of all our churches, who, by their follies, their perversities, or their sins, have placed themselves *nowhere*. It is a common story to any of us who have an extended experience, that charges of transgression are brought against a brother or a sister, then the following investigation, then the feelings of pride and resentment aroused, then the cavilling and quibbling of the accused party and his friends; and finally the withdrawal of fellowship. There are, no doubt, occasionally injudicious action and offensive words on the part of the church. Human