

When circumstances arise which destroy community of feeling what is to be done? Common sense replies,—let the members withdraw. Is there any scriptural doctrine or precept to the contrary? If there is, that decides the question. I know of none. The connection cannot continue. In fact it is virtually terminated. There must be withdrawal or exclusion.

In one respect, the effect is the same,—the termination of the relation, but that is *all* that the sentence of exclusion *professes* to do; and it has the appearance of trifling for the Church to say, “we withdraw fellowship,” when the member can reply:—“There is no fellowship to withdraw from, seeing that I withdrew my fellowship from you some months ago, as I wrote to inform you.” It may be said that exclusion is a punishment. Strictly speaking this is a mistake. An Independent Church has no power to punish. It can neither fine, imprison, whip, or apply the thumb-screw. All that it can do is to separate an offending member from its communion, and this seems to imply that the member is in voluntary connection. As regards members who have withdrawn for adequate causes it carries no moral weight; and if they are in circumstances to be unaffected by it otherwise, it is *brutum fulmen*, and is treated with indifference or contempt. There may be circumstances in which it may affect an innocent man injuriously, and then it is unjust; and it is unjust and uncharitable, though in a less degree, in all cases where the members have withdrawn, and the sentence is not required for the purpose of separation, but is passed from a desire to degrade or annoy.

The entry into a Baptist Church is an act of conscience and will; so should be the remaining in it; and it is most repulsive to me to regard it as a prison in which members must be retained against their will;—retained practically they cannot be, but retained nominally, and for the sole purpose of insult and degradation.

When a member withdraws from change of religious opinions, as in Mr. Payzant's case, the act of exclusion is a glaring inconsistency with Baptist principles and practice. Who maintain more strictly than Baptists the freedom of conscience? and shall they hold Episcopalians, Wesleyans, Presbyterians to be free to leave their communion to join that of the Baptists, and preclude a Baptist from exercising like liberty should his conscience prompt him to change his views?

So as regards a wife who believes her husband to have been the victim of a cruel prosecution by the Church, and has withdrawn from a communion abhorrent to her best and holiest feelings, as is the case with Mrs. Pryor.

So as respecting members who saw their late pastor pursued with unchristian temper and implacable malice by the Church, and the law of truth trampled under foot in their attempts to justify their conduct; and in consequence broke off from their connection, as is the case with myself and others.

In any of these cases shall the power to withdraw be denied, when