

instruction to the capacity and progress of those who need to be instructed, is something essentially different from meeting with them simply on the ground of truth held in common, and "agreeing to differ" on every thing else.

They who themselves maintain, and who ascribe to the apostle, the sentiment which we are now controverting, seem to think that the interests of the truth have been sufficiently provided for, when, in connexion with this rule of acting on truths held in common, each is to hold his distinctive principles upon this understood "agreement to differ." But upon this we observe, in the first place, that the distinctive truths which are thus held, are, by such agreement, rendered unavailing to the very parties who need to be instructed. We must either confine them to our own breasts, or announce and maintain them only in the presence of those by whom they are already believed. In the second place, this is an agreement, as was formerly observed, into which no man has a right to enter. The truth of God is addressed to us with the authority of Him who is, and who alone is, Lord of the conscience; and no man has a right either to bind himself down, or to agree that another shall bind himself down, in adherence to principles which are inconsistent with the revealed truths of God's word. God hath left the conscience "free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in anything contrary to his Word, or beside it, in matters of faith and worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience."\* In the exercise of their own judgment, men may thus act, whether we agree to it or not; and there are times when it may not be expedient to dwell on the points of difference—there are cases in which our duty may be just to leave the individuals to the errors which they have chosen for themselves. This was the course pursued by the apostle Paul with the opposing Jews at Corinth, when "he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles." Acts xviii. 6. It was on the same principle that he acted with a similar class of persons at Rome, Acts. xxviii. 25-28. But this, you will observe, is the very opposite of "agreeing to differ"; for while the apostle now leaves them alone, it is in such circumstances as to shew that it is not with his consent that they cling to their errors, and reject the truth which he had addressed to them. So also in the case of others who present a more favourable appearance, and who, as the true followers of Christ, might, according to the language of our text, be styled "perfect." In the church of Ephesus there must, of course, have been

\* Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter xx. Section 2.