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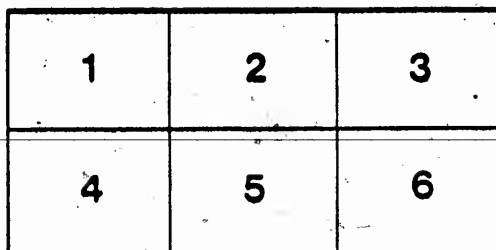
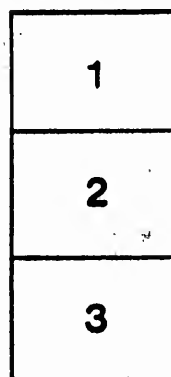
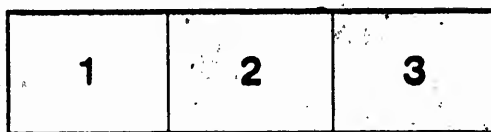
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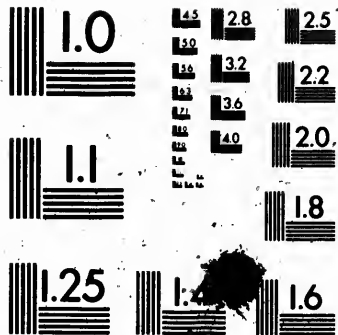
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THE
TRUE RULE
OF
CHRISTIAN CONDUCT.

A SERMON
PREACHED AT THE OPENING OF THE SYNOD

OF THE
FREE CHURCH OF NOVA-SCOTIA,

AT NEW GLASGOW, JUNE 26TH, 1850.

BY

THE REV. ANDREW KING, M. A.

PROFESSOR OF THEOLOGY, HALIFAX.

HALIFAX, NOVA-SCOTIA,
PUBLISHED BY A. & W. MACKINLAY.
1851.

TO
THE MINISTERS AND ELDERS
OF THE
FREE SYNOD OF NOVA-SCOTIA,
THE FOLLOWING SERMON,
PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST,
IS MOST RESPECTFULLY
DEDICATED.

THE TRUE RULE OF CHRISTIAN CONDUCT.

A SERMON.

PHILIPPIANS iii. 15, 16.—“*Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.*”

MY REVEREND FATHERS AND BRETHREN are aware that there is some diversity of reading in the 16th verse. The common text (πλην εις 'ο αφθασαμεν, τω αυτω στοιχειν κανονι το' αυτο' φρονειν) is correctly translated as we have just read. Two Manuscripts, two ancient versions, with some of the Latin fathers, omitting all that follows the word *στοιχειν* seem to have read only *πλην εις 'ο αφθασαμεν τω αυτω στοιχειν*. “Nevertheless, whereto we have attained, let us walk by the same,” or, “let us walk together.” Four other Manuscripts omit simply the word *κανονι*. “rule,” while some others, transposing the words, give the clause in the following order, “Let us mind the same thing, let us walk by the same rule.” On the ground of these diversities, some critics have rejected all these words as being spurious; and Griesbach, in particular, has thrown them out of his text. This, however, seems to be altogether unwarranted, as there is a most decided preponderance of authority from manuscripts, versions, and the writings of the Fathers, for the retention of the words which he thus rejects. But while we make this remark in reference to the integrity of the text, it does not appear that the principle involved in the exhortation of the apostle is altered by the rejection of the words; although the idea is amplified in the common reading.

In the earlier part of this chapter, the apostle warns the Philippians to be on their guard against the propagation of error, and particularly against Judaizing teachers. He refers to the distinctions of which, as a Jew, he might have boasted, if he could attach importance to such things; but he shews the light in which he was brought to regard them, when his mind had been opened to a reception of the truth as it is in Jesus.—How much soever he might have been inclined to rest upon them formerly, as what would secure to him the favour of God, and a title to the

Kingdom of heaven, he now saw that dependence upon them, like leaning upon a broken reed, would only prove injurious, and what things, therefore, were formerly reckoned gain to him, he now counted loss for Christ. "Yea, doubtless," he says, "and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." His desire was to be found in him, not having his own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. Much as he had already suffered in the service and for the sake of his Master, evidently as divine grace had been working in him and by him, he did not rest satisfied in the attainments which he had made, he did not feel himself to be at liberty to stop short in his career. On the contrary, knowing that he had not yet attained, that he was not yet perfect, that neither his work nor his character was yet brought to full maturity, he forgot the things that were behind, he reached forth unto those things that were before, and pressed toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. In the words of our text, to which we have now more particularly to direct our attention, he exhorts the Philippians to a similar course, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

As the apostle had just declared that he did not look upon himself as being perfect, it is evident that when, in the text, he says "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded?" he uses the word "perfect" in a qualified and relative sense. The word which is thus translated properly signifies one who has reached the end: it denotes that to the perfection and proper state of which nothing is wanting. It is also employed, however, with different shades of meaning, to denote an adult, as compared with an infant or a youth;—to denote one *advanced* in his acquaintance with any art or science,—to denote one *advanced* in moral and religious attainments—and, without reference to the progress actually made, it is employed to denote one who aims at perfection; the perfect man, in this sense, being one, not who has already attained perfection, but who keeps it habitually in view, and who steadily advances towards it. The apostle, then, knew that he had not yet attained the object upon which his heart was set—that he was far from that perfection at which he aimed: but still, as one whose heart had been brought by divine teaching to understand the exhortation of his blessed Lord, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," he pressed on towards the mark; and he calls upon those who

had entered upon the same course, who were engaged in the same pursuit, to justify their character by acting upon the same principle.

This exhortation of the apostle embraces, we conceive, the following particulars: 1st. There are great differences in degree of christian knowledge and attainment in the case of those who, as the true followers of Christ, may be styled "perfect." 2nd. Although the Christian life may consist with very low degrees of attainment, it is nevertheless progressive; and the Christian must press on towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. 3rd. Divine revelation is the source of that light which dispels error, and guides the feet in the way of peace. 4th. It is a special duty incumbent upon those who have been thus enlightened to walk in this light, to walk by the same rule, to mind the same thing.

Let us consider these particulars in their order, and may the Spirit of all grace take of the things that are Christ's and show them unto us.

1st. There are great differences in degree of Christian knowledge and attainment in the case of those who, as the true followers of Christ, may be styled "perfect." This diversity, indeed, is brought out in the entire history of the Church, whether we look to it in its collective capacity or in its individual members. It is the same body corporate that is presented to our contemplation when we look to the Church in its infancy, in the earliest ages of the world; when we mark it in its progress to maturity, in the days of Isaiah; or when we consider it in the advanced stage to which it is brought in these New-Testament times. But while in that faith in the exercise of which Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than his brother Cain, and as to which he is still set forth as a pattern to us, we have the acting of the same spiritual life which animates the whole family of the Redeemed; the light which had as yet beamed upon his mind, respecting the seed of the woman that was to bruise the head of the serpent, was but dim and shadowy when compared with that which was communicated when the evangelical prophet was commissioned to announce, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed;" and still more so when compared with the light of the New-Testament, in which Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among us, and in which we are informed that he hath by one offering perfected for ever them that are sanctified. The least informed of those who were brought to a spiritual apprehension of the mysteries of redemption as announced even to our first parents, were of the household of faith: while the most advanced of those who were kept under the yoke of a system which presented only

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"the shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things," have been far surpassed by the subjects of a later dispensation, into whose hearts God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, hath shined, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ. When we look back indeed from the noon-day light of the gospel dispensation, we may be at a loss to understand how the church in the early ages of the world could have been savingly enlightened through intimations in which we, it is true, may see an important spiritual meaning, favoured as we are with the light which the New-Testament writings throw upon them; but which, without such light, we might be apt to think would be altogether unintelligible. In these intimations, however, we see the dawn of that clearer light,—we have the principles of that more fully announced gospel in which we now rejoice. It was saving truth which was communicated to our fallen parents while they were yet in Eden. The light was gradually increased in subsequent ages; and the church, more fully instructed, came, as it advanced, to entertain more enlarged and better defined conceptions of the glory of God, as a just God and yet a Saviour. The Old Testament prophets were far from understanding the full import of their own words, while they predicted the Messiah, whether in his sufferings or in his glory. The apostle Peter says (1 Peter i. 10, 11). "Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently; who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." In like manner, with respect to the calling of the gentiles, the apostle Paul, writing to the Ephesians (chap. iii. 4—6.) says, "Whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit; that the gentiles should be fellow heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel." So, in the first chapter to the Colossians, at the 26th verse, he speaks of "the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of the mystery among the gentiles; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." These statements clearly indicate a difference in the amount of privilege enjoyed at different times by the church, in the degree of light with which she has been favoured, and, consequently, in the degree of attainment which she could make in the full improvement of her privileges.

What is thus evident when we consider the church as a body, is no

less evident when we look to the individuals of whom it is composed. The work of enlightening and sanctifying the soul is not completed the instant that any one turns "from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God." However fully the gospel may have been set before him, his apprehensions of it at first may be very indistinct. It is the light of divine truth which has beamed upon his soul, he himself is now rendered "light in the Lord;" but he has many lessons still to learn. In the work of regeneration he has been renewed, indeed, in the whole man after the image of God, but the features of that image are but imperfectly developed; and he has still to grow both in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The apostle John accordingly speaks, in reference to spiritual attainment, of "little children," of "young men," and of "fathers;" the language employed expressing very clearly the idea, that while those who constitute these different classes are, all of them, God's people, the young men are not so matured as the fathers, and the little children are still less advanced than the young men. The same individual may, in the progress of time, be presented to us in these successive stages; and the church, whether we look to the progress of natural life or to the developement of that which is spiritual, in its numerous members and their diversified circumstances, presents to us a body composed at once of little children, of young men, and of fathers, differing much in the progress which they have made, but all partakers of divine grace, and dear to him who carries the lambs in his bosom, and who also says, Isaiah, xlvi. 4, "even to your old age I am he; and even to hoar hairs will I carry you."

2nd. While the Christian life may consist with very low degrees of attainment, it is nevertheless progressive; and the Christian must press on toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God which is in Christ Jesus. The apostle does not write here as one who held that, the christianity of these Philippians being admitted, their diversity of views, their prejudices, their errors, were of no consequence. On the contrary, he anticipates the time when they would come to a fuller acknowledgment of the truth, and when even those things on which they differed would be revealed to them. "If in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

And here it may be necessary to observe that, although we have hitherto confined our remarks to the greater or less amount of knowledge and of positive Christian attainment which some may possess as compared with others, all of whom are really the followers of Christ, the diversity of which the apostle speaks does not result so much from simple ignorance, in the case of those who are "otherwise minded," as from the

rejecting of the truth, the holding of some views which are opposed to it. He himself had announced the truth, he had illustrated the spirit of those who are influenced by it; yet still he speaks of those who were "otherwise minded." In the case of the angels themselves, we may recognize different stages of advancement; although all of them are, and ever have been, the devoted servants of God. Being mere creatures, they are not possessed of omniscience. In this respect, they may adopt the language of Bildad the Shuhite, (Job viii. 9.) and say, "We are but of yesterday, and know nothing." The scriptures accordingly speak of their progress in knowledge. The unfoldings of the mysteries of redemption, they tell us, are things which the angels desire to look into.— Nay, they tell us, still further, that those unfoldings, amongst other ends, are specially designed for their instruction. The apostle Paul says, (Eph. iii. 8–11, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: *to the intent that now, unto the principalities, and powers in heavenly places, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" But although these angels are not omniscient, their views as far as they go are correct. They hold no error. The holding of error implies an obliquity of vision, and a disordered state of mind from which they are free. Oneness of mind does not necessarily imply the same extent of view, or the same clearness of perception; but it certainly implies the absence of contradiction. Error is the very principle of division, for it is a contradiction of the truth.— Still farther, it is essentially sinful, for it is a contradiction of Him who is light, and in whom is no darkness at all. Even in heaven, there must be different degrees of attainment, for God alone is omniscient and absolutely perfect; yet there, notwithstanding diversity of degree, there is oneness of mind, there is no contradiction, there is no error; the inhabitants there in God's light see light. The statement of the apostle, therefore, when he says "if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you," is, not that all ignorance shall be removed, for omniscience is exclusively the perfection of God, nor is it, that they shall be all brought to the same level, for they may be still found differing, as "*one star differeth from another star in glory;*" but it is, that their mistakes shall be corrected, and that error, that truly dividing principle, shall be removed.

This declaration implies, on the part of the apostle, a feeling with re-

gard to God's people whom he sees to be in error, and of whom he here speaks as being otherwise minded, that stands out in distinct contrast to that which is implied in the expression "let us agree to differ." That phrase, when employed with regard to religious truth, means that, while professing to hold certain principles as upon the authority of God's word, word, we are perfectly willing that others should not only remain ignorant of them, but should even reject them, and cling to the opposing error. Nor is that all. Right religious principles are the appropriate source from which right moral conduct is to proceed; as is implied in the prayer of our Saviour, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." On the other hand, where erroneous principles are adopted, corresponding evil fruits will be produced in the life. In these circumstances therefore, to "agree to differ," implies our willingness or consent that the parties with whom we thus agree should remain ignorant of, and even opposed to, that truth which God has revealed for the very end "that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works,"—that they should remain under the power of those prejudices and errors which, to all the extent to which they operate, obstruct advancement in those ways in which it is found that "the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." This is an agreement into which no man has a right to enter.—It is true, where means, and even the most appropriate means, may be employed to disabuse the mind of a brother of the errors by which it is enthralled, he may continue wedded to those errors still. But with whatever tenacity error may be clung to, we are not to give it the sanction which is implied in agreeing that any one should hold by it. If we would exonerate our own conscience, we must act upon the charge, Levit. xix. 17., "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him." And although duty does not call upon us, in every case, to engage in a direct discussion of the controverted topics, and still less to prosecute such discussion, when entered upon, till the brother is convinced of his error and brought to embrace the truth; yet it does require that we be careful to make our light shine before men; and, particularly, that we so act as that even where we decline controversy—where it may seem most advisable to let opposers alone—we nevertheless give them no warrant to suppose that it is with our approval that they abide in their errors.

It does not alter the case to tell us, that these men who are otherwise minded may be as conscientious as we in the views which they hold, and that each has a right to the exercise of his own judgment. The remarks which we are now making do not at all interfere with the right of

individual judgment. Every man is bound, for the regulation of his own conduct, and under his solemn responsibility to God, to "try the spirits." But the right of individual judgment is very different from a right, in the exercise of it, to reject any part of that counsel which God has been pleased to reveal. No man has, or can have, a right to reject the truth and to cling to error. In the exercise of what is not only his right, but his duty, to judge and to prove all things, he may come to a wrong conclusion; and instead of holding fast that which is good, he may believe a lie. In this, however, he sins. For his sin in thus rejecting the truth and believing a lie, he is responsible to God; and there are many cases in which, if he carry out his belief into practice, he may be made to feel that he is under a responsibility also to man. He may be quite conscientious in the views which he holds, just as Saul of Tarsus was, when he thought that he *ought* to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth: but even conscience is an unsafe guide *if it is not enlightened*. Notwithstanding the strength of our conviction that we are right, when we believe a lie, the error which we hold is an error still; and the very strength of our conviction that it is a truth, will only render it all the more influential in urging us on in a course that is wrong. The apostle understood this well; and while he raises no question about the conscientiousness of those who were otherwise minded, on the contrary, admitting their sincerity, and speaking to them as brethren, so far from agreeing that they should continue to differ, as if that were a matter of no consequence, he tells them that he anticipates the time when their views would be changed. He cannot agree to it that their heavenward course should be always impeded by that error which at present so far enthrals their mind—that they should always be strangers to the sanctifying and comforting influences of that truth to which they are now opposed; and his affection for them as brethren, leads him to rejoice in the thought that even this would yet be revealed to them.

3rd. Divine revelation is the source of that light which dispels error, and guides the feet in the way of peace. This is true with respect to an external revelation. It is the testimony of the Lord that is sure, making wise the simple; and he who would truly cleanse his way must take heed thereto according to God's word. The words of our text, however, do not seem to refer so much to the necessity of an external revelation, that the truth which makes wise unto salvation may be presented to the mind, as to the necessity of the teaching of the Holy Spirit, that the truth thus revealed may be received into the heart. In so far as mere objective exhibition of the truth is concerned, that had been already enjoyed in the experience of those of whom the apostle here speaks. He

had made known to them the truth, in the inspired communications with which they had been already favoured; but with respect to some parts of that revelation they were still "otherwise minded." It is in reference to instruction already addressed to them that he says, "Let us therefore, as many as be perfect be thus minded"; while he adds, "and if in any thing ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you."

Even where men enjoy the advantage of an external revelation, there is need still further of inward divine teaching; for "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him; neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." It is not when the gospel is merely preached, but when, in connexion with the preaching of the gospel, the Lord, as in the case of Lydia, opens the heart, that the entrance of the word gives light and liberty to the soul. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." Rom. viii. 7.—It is opposed to the holy, humbling truths of God's word; and even where renewing grace has been experienced, and a progress has been made in sanctification, there are still found opposing principles within.—Pride, prejudice, carnal affection in its various operations, may still obstruct the progress of the work where it has been begun: but the gospel had come to these Philippians, as it had come to the Thessalonians, "not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance"; and the apostle was confident of this very thing, that he which had begun a good work in them, would perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

4th. It is a special duty incumbent upon those who have been thus enlightened to walk in this light—to walk by the same rule, to mind the same thing. The language of the apostle here does not only imply that we are not to part with truth already received—that we are to guard against declension or backsliding, but expressly enjoins the holding fast, and for the present regulation of our conduct, that which we have received. These attainments are so many talents, which must not be at any time hid in a napkin. Having received the love of the truth that we may be saved, we must walk in the light of that truth, we must make our light so shine before men, that others seeing our good works, may glorify our Father who is in heaven.

The due consideration of this will enable us to understand whose attainments it is of which the apostle speaks, when he says, "whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing." There are many who seem to conceive that the apostle here re-

fers to what may be admitted to be the attainments of those who differ from us—that the truths which we hold in common do constitute that whereto we have attained; and that in other matters we must just “agree to differ.” However numerous, and however weighty may be the names which may be arrayed in support of such a view, with all deference to these names, we have no hesitation in saying that it has no support from the words of the apostle, it is inconsistent with the object of his argument, it is contradictory to some of the plainest statements of God’s word, it is quite absurd in itself. A sentiment such as is thus ascribed to the apostle might have been very distinctly expressed had he, addressing those that differed, said, “nevertheless whereto *you* have already attained”; or if, addressing those who agreed with himself, and pointing out the way in which they should act with those that differed, he had said, “nevertheless whereto *they* have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.” But while this is something very different from what he has actually said, it would be making the attainments of those who were less advanced a standard for their maturer brethren; a thing utterly inconsistent with what he had just proposed to them as the principle upon which he himself was acting; “Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” The sentiment which is thus attributed to the apostle is contradictory also to the charges “Buy the truth, and sell it not”; “Hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown”: and with the words of our Saviour “Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set upon an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.” Still further, this sentiment involves in it an absolute absurdity. Not only are official teachers to feed with knowledge and understanding those whom they are called to instruct, but even private christians have a duty laid upon them to edify one another; but how is this edification to be promoted, if they are to know nothing whether of christian doctrine or of christian duty—if they are to exhibit nothing of christian grace, beyond the standard of those less advanced brethren with whom they may have opportunities of intercourse? No one ever imagined that a teacher would be less fitted for his work by bringing to it an amount of attainment beyond what his pupils had yet reached. It is true, in bringing out his information, he must have a regard to their progress, and some he may have to feed with milk, while others may be nourished with strong meat: but adapting the

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.

various degrees of attainment among its members; and, in reference to the truths which the apostle propounded, there might be numbers who on different points were "otherwise minded"; but he did not on that account shun to declare unto them "all the counsel of God." And so with regard to these Philippians. Whether the matters on which they differed respected the ceremonial law, as some think; or certain things concerning justification, which they did not yet doctrinally apprehend, as others suppose: the apostle did not, in deference to the opposing views of those whom he regarded as brethren, allow the controverted truth to be set aside. He neither confined it to his own breast, nor satisfied himself with maintaining it only in the presence of those who already concurred with him in holding it. On the contrary, he maintained its claims, he held it still up to view, and looked forward to the time when these opposing brethren also would bow to its authority—when God would reveal even this unto them.

But, leaving an interpretation of this portion of our text on which we have dwelt at such length, merely because the names by which it is supported have given it considerable currency, we have to remind you that the Scriptures leave us at no loss to understand what the apostle refers to, when he speaks of a rule or canon according to which we should walk, and with respect to which we should be of one mind. As "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works;" so its claim to be recognised as a rule or canon, according to which we are to walk, does not depend upon its truths, or any portion of its truths, being received as such, and held in common by any number of men however great; but upon the authority of him who has given the revelation. Men may be slow in recognising its authority; and, even where that may be generally admitted, they may still be slow in apprehending its meaning; but every portion of its truth nevertheless lays an obligation on the conscience of him to whom it is addressed. "The authority of the Holy Scriptures, for which it ought to be believed and obeyed, dependeth not upon the testimony of any man or church, but wholly upon God (who is truth itself), the author thereof; and therefore, it is to be received, because it is the Word of God."* This revelation of God's will, and the illustration of its principles in the person and character of the Lord Jesus Christ, the apostle habitually kept before his own mind as his standard. It is as thus pressing on toward the mark that he says, (1 Cor. xi. 1.) "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

*Westminster Confession of Faith, Chapter i. Section 4.

It is with respect to this that he thanks God in behalf of the Christians at Rome (Romans vi. 17.), that they had obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which had been delivered them; and it is with respect to the same revelation that he says to Timothy (2 Tim. i. 13.), "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love, which is in Christ Jesus." This revelation, recorded in the Scriptures, comes to us, in its various portions, with the weight of divine authority; and both demands and deserves the most cordial acceptance. Its proper object is to enlighten the understanding, to affect the heart, to regulate the conduct. Some parts of it may be more readily apprehended than others. Amongst those who may profit by its discoveries, some may be found more advanced than others. To each individual, however, to whom it comes, it comes with an authority that is supreme. The voice, whether recognised or not, is the voice of God; and, in connexion with the privilege of hearing it, there is the duty to obey, and a heavy responsibility in the neglect of it. This is true even with respect to the objective exhibition of the Word, but when, in addition to this, there is that entrance of the Word which gives light and liberty within, the obligations are proportionally increased; and as each new step in the progress is attained, the duty lies upon every individual who is thus favoured, to all the extent to which he has been enabled to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, keeping his pattern steadily before him, to walk by that very rule, to mind that very thing. This is the standard or rule of which the apostle speaks in our text; and such is the conduct in reference to that standard which he inculcates. His exhortation is, "as far as we severally have hitherto reached in knowledge, grace, or holiness, let us keep close to one and the same rule, and practise according to it, as it is plainly revealed in the sacred canon, which, among other things assures us that in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which works by love, or a new creature; and let us be unanimous in our adherence to this rule."^{*}

The true rule of Christian duty therefore, which the apostle here proposes, is, not what in point of fact even the followers of Christ unanimously hold, but what they are bound in duty thus to hold. It is to be learned, not by inquiring how much truth is held by them in common, but by listening to the whole Word of God. He is the most close adherent to this rule, not who tries to act in such a way as that he shall exhibit least of distinctive principle, but who carries out most fully the instructions of God's Word, and who is most closely assimilated to the glo-

* Guyse's Paraphrase.

rious character which that Word sets before us as our pattern. This close adherence may bring out very distinctly the differences betwixt him and many who, though brethren, are "otherwise minded." He must not shrink; however, from the consequences. If separation from those whom, on other grounds, he esteems and loves, should be the result, he separates from them that he may be nearer to Christ. It is in this adherence to Christ's rule that he acquits himself faithfully in the discharge of his own duty, and is in the right way to make progress in the Christian life; for "then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord." It is in this adherence that he acts most wisely and kindly even towards those from whom for a time he may be separated. In the various attainments of the Christian a banner has been given him that it may be displayed because of the truth, and it is the stedfast upholding of this banner that, through divine grace, he may know the blessedness connected with letting his light so shine before men, that they may see his good works and glorify his Father which is in heaven. "Whereto, therefore, we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

In the improvement of this subject let us learn, in the first place, the spirit in which we ought to act towards our Christian brethren from whom we differ in matters of religion. Amid all the diversities which mark the followers of Christ here, let us not forget that these diversities distinguish those who, nevertheless, are brethren. Let us gladly recognise the family likeness, let us do honour to the grace of God which may be working in them and by them, and, where we may have occasion to observe defects or to condemn errors in the views which they entertain, let us with affectionate interest anticipate the time when even this shall be revealed to them. If we are now better informed, are we not nevertheless just emerging from our ignorance? or rather, are we not, with all the information which we think we have obtained, just coming to understand how little we know? We too have many lessons yet to learn; and though our minds may now be delivered from errors which once possessed them, and which others still cherish, there are farther deliverances of this kind which we need. We have often already been indebted to the forbearance of our more advanced brethren, and we must be yet more indebted to their indulgence. Let us carry the remembrance of this into our intercourse with those who may need the exercise of similar kindness from us. While we pray that the Holy Spirit may subdue the pride, may remove the prejudices, may enlighten the darkness of our own minds, let us remember the brethren whose errors we profess to lament; and let us plead that he would carry on his own

good work in them also, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

In the second place, let us see the imperative obligation under which we lie to hold by attainments already made, and in the stedfast contemplation of the standard set before us in God's Word, to walk by that same rule, to mind that same thing. While, on the one hand, we are not to allow the diversities which may separate brethren to prevent us from acknowledging and acting upon the relationship which exists notwithstanding; so, on the other hand, we are not to allow our regard for them, even viewed as God's people, to outweigh our regard for the authority of God himself. We are not to look, for instance, upon any portion of divine truth as less entitled to be authoritative with us because some whom we regard as brethren make light of it, may even deny and oppose it. What we have here to consider is, not the question which is often very idly proposed, Is the belief of this or the other truth which God may have been pleased to reveal essential to salvation? but, Is its cordial reception, is the submission of my mind to its authority, is the regulating of my conduct by its light, is this essential to the due discharge of my duty to Him from whom the revelation has come? This is not judging a brother; but it is endeavouring to judge myself, that I may not be judged. If I have been favoured with clearer and fuller discoveries of the truth than he has yet attained, it is not by acting merely upon the dimmer light of his mind that I can acquit myself of my responsibility to God. *Whereto we have attained*, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. This is our duty individually: and it becomes all of us most solemnly to consider what practical use we are making of the light with which we have been favoured. Are we careful, in our individual walk and conversation, "to let our light so shine before men, that they may see our good works, and glorify our Father which is in heaven"?—To whom much has been given, of them shall the more be required.

Fathers and Brethren, what we have been considering is the duty not only of individuals but also of the Church. As the pillar and the ground of the truth, it is bound to hold up the truth in all the extent to which it has been revealed—to declare all the counsel of God, and to regulate its own actings according to the light which it is thus bound to diffuse. In the struggle in which the parent church was lately engaged the question was often proposed, "May not the gospel be savingly preached although the matters in controversy are waived?" The evils of separating from brethren were much dwelt upon; and the injury especially which the cause of religion would sustain from a division was set forth

in a variety of lights. Many predictions, too, were uttered as to the condition in which they would find themselves who would carry out their declaration, that, rather than compromise the principles of the Bible, they would forego all the temporal advantages which were connected with the position that they then occupied. Happily, not only for their own peace of mind, but for the interests of religion, none of these things moved them. They were determined, through grace, to obey God rather than man, and to leave results with Him whose authority bound their conscience. In carrying out this determination, it is true, they had trials to encounter, the full extent of which the world does not yet know; but what has been the result? Confessedly the most influential religious body in Scotland, the Free Church is honoured to dispense to a numerous population there the ordinances of Christ's house administered in their purity. She has been the means of awakening the attention of men to principles a regard to which is essential to the right constitution of society, as well as to the scriptural administration of gospel ordinances. In France, in Switzerland, in Prussia, movements are now in progress, of deepest interest to the advancement of Christ's kingdom, which have been originated or accelerated through the light which she has been enabled to display. From all parts of the world applications have been addressed to her for aid; and, notwithstanding the scantiness of her means and the difficulties with which she herself has to contend, she has not been inattentive to such applications. These provinces of British North America have partaken largely of her liberality.— Different parts on the continent of Europe, the West India Islands, the wide spread plains of India, and the rising settlements of Australia, have been helped by her in various degrees. God has blessed her people with largeness of heart; and they find that there is that scattereth, and yet increaseth. With the light which events have thrown upon principles, can any friend of true religion, look upon these things and yet lament that the ministers and people of the Free Church adhered to truth, though at the expense of separating from brethren?

We have cast in our lot with that church, and are bound to maintain the same standard. That standard contains principles which many here, whom we regard as brethren, deny and oppose. It is not, however, the measure of *their* light, which must regulate *our* conduct. Where to we have attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Events too are showing the importance of the things in which we differ. Look, for instance, at what in Britain is now the great question of the day—the education of the people. The dangers to which they are exposed from overwhelming masses of a population whose education

has been neglected, are forcing unwilling statesmen to acknowledge that they have a duty to discharge with respect to this—that society cannot be kept together without religion—that they must concern themselves with the education of those whom they are called to rule, and that that education must be based upon the Bible. Look also to the Sabbath.—How little could it have been anticipated, a short time ago, that statesmen would, so soon, have made the concessions in its favour which have lately been obtained! We do not say that human legislation can make a people pious, or that acts of parliament can secure the spiritual observance of the Sabbath; but we do say, and it is our duty as a Church to tell the civil magistrate, whether he will hear, or whether he will forbear, that there is a legitimate exercise of his power which may remove obstructions to the due observance of the Sabbath, which may facilitate the means of attending on divine ordinances, and extend the blessings of a religious education; and that it is his duty to exercise his power for these ends; while still we look to divine grace—but grace to be expected in attendance on divine ordinances—to enlighten the mind, to sanctify the heart, and to form a people to orderly habits in what concerns their civil relations, as having been taught supremely to honour him by whom kings reign and princes decree justice. Whereto, therefore, we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

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