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The Scripture Doctrine of Future Punishment.

Georgetown, Va., Green, English & Co., [1797].

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THE
SCRIPTURAL DOCTRINE

OF

FUTURE PUNISHMENT VINDICATED,

IN A

DISCOURSE

FROM THESE WORDS,

“ *And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into Life eternal.*”
Math. XXV, & 46th.

TO WHICH

ARE PREFIXED SOME PREFATORY STRICTURES ON
THE LATELY AVOWED RELIGIOUS PRINCIPLES OF
JOSEPH PRIESTLEY, L. L. D. F. R. S. &c. &c.
PARTICULARLY

IN A DISCOURSE DELIVERED BY HIM IN THE CHURCH
OF THE UNIVERSALIENS, IN PHILADELPHIA, AND
PUBLISHED IN 1796.—ENTITLED “UNITARIANISM
EXPLAINED AND DEFENDED” &c. &c.

BY SAMUEL KNOX, M. A. MINISTER OF THE GOS-
PEL, AT BLADENSBURGH, MARYLAND.

“ *But there were false prophets also among the peo-
ple, even as there shall be false teachers among you,
who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even
denying the Lord that bought them.*”

II Ep. of Peter Chap. II v. 1.

GEORGE-TOWN:

PRINTED BY GREEN, ENGLISH, & Co.

[1797]

Prefatory Strictures &c.

THE publication of the Discourse, to which these Strictures are prefixed, on the subject of future punishment, has been chiefly owing to a Discourse of Doctor Priestley's, which was lately handed me by a friend, under the title of "Unitarianism explained and defended," and delivered in the Church of the Universalists at Philadelphia, some time in 1796.

The religious sentiments of Doctor Priestley, especially on the subject of Unitarianism, have been for several years known to many both of the learned and unlearned part of the Christian world. That the Doctor, then, should be so solicitous about explaining his religious opinions to the people of the United States, lest they should be misinterpreted, I must confess appears to me rather an ingenious manner of disseminating them, than that any just

ground of fear exists for such misinterpretation.

At least, I think, it argues a greater presumption of the ignorance, in this respect, of sincere enquirers, in these States, into the present state of Christianity, than the truth will warrant.

When the long received Doctrines of the Gospel, agreeable to the principles of the most reformed churches, are attacked by men of Doctor Priestley's talents and eminence in the learned world, they have a very superior advantage in the promulgation, and also in the establishment of their peculiar opinions.

In the polemical contest such men engage with the most conspicuous advantage; while their antagonists are necessitated to wield their unequal weapons in the humble vale of obscurity, with scarcely a hope of ever reaching either the notice of their opponent; or those who should be most interested in the issue of the controversy.

Indeed such is the advantage, in this respect, which men possess, who have attained the summit, either of philosophical or political fame, that, I think, nothing short of absolute certainty; or divine inspiration should influence them to take the advantage or opportunity which such a situation must afford, for attempting to subvert almost, generally received doctrines—doctrines, too, which have had the happiest effects in the religious reformation and instruction of the most virtuous, as well as the most enlightened part of the Christian World.

Doctor Priestley has indeed, attempted to apologise for the republication of his religious sentiments in this country, by informing us, that he has had better opportunities of information on theological subjects than we have had. If the Doctor had so expressed himself concerning literary or philosophical subjects, few might be disposed to refuse due credit either to the truth; or the modesty of the apology. But, surely if the records of divine revelation be the true, and the only true standard or test of religious truth, we have all that is possibly attainable for our information on those subjects, that are most controverted, as well as he..

We may not, indeed, have had an opportunity of consulting all the various versions of the Scriptures to be met with in some of the public Libraries in Europe, in the original languages; or such a variety of voluminous interpretations or commentaries, ancient and modern, on each particular text. We have, however, all that is necessary. We have the most authentic originals; And also the most approved translations from those originals, and if in that state the scriptures be not calculated for our religious instruction in truth and righteousness, then are they not that transcript of the divine Will, the only end and design of which could be, the reformation of those to whom God was pleased to communicate them. Indeed if any Doctor can persuade us that we have not the opportunity or the means of religious knowledge,

while at the same time we hold in our hands the records of divine truth, then may our religion be whatever such a Rabbi pleases to make it. He has only to point out the way which his superior opportunities have discovered, and it is embraced with all the implicit faith and obedience claimed by the Mitred Pontiff; or the Mahometan Mufti.

Were it true that Doctor Priestley or any other philosopher, could investigate the truth of any religious doctrine as they would a chemical experiment in a laboratory, some claim might, then, be laid to superior attention and regard. But the success of many of their experiments in enquiring into the occult qualities of material objects; into some of the mysterious operations of nature, might teach philosophers a little modesty in their reasonings on, and researches after, the knowledge of Him, who is the great incomprehensible first cause of all things.

It would appear, however; that whether some of those gentlemen, apply their enquiries either to the natural or spiritual world.—Both must be equally subject to the comprehension of their learned researches. So successful have their investigations been, when directed to the world of nature, that God and Religion, even the most sublime truths he has revealed, must, also with equal obviousness be brought within the capacity of their rational powers. To speak to such gentlemen of a religious mystery is to offer an insult to their superior

understandings. With all due deference, however, to their philosophical, unitarian understandings, they may allow us to observe that, Paul hesitated not to declare that, "Great is the mystery of Godliness, God manifested in the flesh."

According to Doctor Priestley's principles, however, there was no mystery in the case. And this, I suppose, is one of those corruptions, for which, as it accords not with Unitarianism, the Doctor would have even Paul stand corrected.

I presume not, by these few strictures; or by the discourse to which they are prefatory, to enter the polemical lists with such a champion as Doctor Priestley. But I may be allowed to say that men as respectable for theological learning and abilities; and also in zeal in searching after religious knowledge as the Doctor, have advocated those doctrines, which he hath presumed to despise, and rank in absurdity with transubstantiation.

The labours of those men are still in our possession, and may render any farther vindication, especially from a very inferior pen, superfluous, neither does it yet appear to any but Unitarians, that the Doctor with all his learned researches into the earliest opinions of the Christian world, hath introduced any new light on those points, so as to invalidate either their arguments; or that scriptural authority on which they are founded.

The doctrines of the Trinity and atonement,

no man of an enlightened mind ought even to name with that of transubstantiation. The former are in no respect derogatory to the glory and honour of the Divine Being, so being they are not represented in a false point of view. But the latter being not only superior; but contrary, to reason, and also in the highest degree, degrading to the dignity of the Supreme Being, is not only an insult to that dignity; but also to every external sense and intellectual idea in the human constitution.

It is certainly unworthy of the candour of Doctor Priestley, considered either as a divine or a philosopher, to say “there is the same foundation in the scriptures for the Doctrine of Transubstantiation, as for that of the Trinity.” It is true, Christ hath said that “His flesh is *meat*, indeed, and his blood *drink* indeed”—and that this is expressed also in the same figurative stile by some of his Apostles. But it is also declared by Christ that “He was a *Door*; that he was a *Vine*, and his Disciples the *Bran-ches*—that he was a *Shepherd* and they his *Sheep*, his little *Flock*.” Now who is it that may not see that these, as well as, what he says of his *broken body* and *shed blood*, are all equally figurative expressions? Whereas with regard to his being the Son of God—the second person of the divine essence, and entitled to the same homage with God, there is no figure, all is plain argument; simple declaration—expressed, too, in opposition to those, who like Doctor Priestley, thought him only man; while they said

that he made himself equal with God.

Besides, the words on which the absurdity of transubstantiation is founded, occur only in one instance; or on one occasion. But were it not inconsistent with the studied brevity of these strictures, I could fill pages with scripture passages apparently divested of all figure, and introduced on many various occasions in support of the doctrines, which Christians have denominated; the Trinity; and atonement for sin by the Death of Christ.

Absurd, however, and inconsistent as the Doctor would represent a belief in those doctrines to be; yet in his preface to that discourse to which I have alluded, he hesitates not to say that, those who believe in them, absurd as they are; and those who do not are, notwithstanding, agreed in all that is "*really fundamental.*" in Religion! And yet the Doctor, afterwards, in his Discourse says, that, "It is time to cry aloud and spare not" in opposition to such absurd doctrines. Now if such doctrines be not, *really fundamental,*" why the good Doctor be so zealous to "cry aloud and spare not?"

But, if to "cry aloud and spare not," be the Doctor's way of recommending peace and union among all the different denominations of Christians, in these states, seeing we disagree not in what is "*really fundamental,*" I hope his abilities are adequate to the vindication of such expressions from any appearance of absurdity or inconsistency.

But the Doctor must surely allow us the same right to be zealous in our religious faith, as he would be in his. In the exercise of this right, then, might not we, in our turn “Cry aloud and spare not,” that, any man, without other means of divine knowledge; any evidence of supernatural powers; or even superior authority to what we possess, should attempt to discredit the generally received doctrines which Christians in these states, think they have, at least, as good authority for, as he has for the contrary—that he should represent us as idolaters with whom he and his Unitarian friends could not, in conscience associate in the solemn services of devotion.

Before, Doctor Priestley, especially considered as a stranger, in whom modesty either in religious or political opinions, is no unbecoming quality, ventured so far in arraigning our religious faith, like *Paul*, at Athens, to whom he compares himself, and, consequently, us to the idolatrous Athenians, he ought to have given some divine demonstration as *Paul* hath done, that he is not mistaken; but that he has been commissioned from heaven to deliver us from idolatry and superstition. While we want, however, this foundation of confidence in his opinions, the Doctor may indeed “Cry aloud and spare not” against us for our unbelief; but surely cannot think it inconsistent that we reply in the same tone.

His account of Unitarian charity would also require a little vindication. He says that, all

denominations of Christians may consistently join in their worship; but that it is impossible that Unitarians can associate in worship with them, without a consciousness of idolatry.

Now, what other principle of charity than this could we expect from a Jew, Mahometan; or an Infidel! Would not all of these, also, say that, we might join in their worship; but that without idolatry, they could not in ours? This remark on Unitarian charity might appear superfluous; or perhaps, invidious, only that the Doctor has been so earnest in inculcating that distinguished virtue to others; and that, too, when, as he says, "We agree in all that is really fundamental."

But what appears still somewhat more irreconcilable to this last charitable-like declaration of the Doctor is, that he says the most important doctrines of our religious faith, "*are vile excrescences,*" which must be cut off, if we would save the tree." This done, he further observes that, "the evidences of revealed religion will challenge the closest investigation." This assertion of the Doctor's, I confess, I do not fully understand. It is, surely, no argument against the authenticity of revealed religion—that men sometimes interpret it erroneously. Now, even supposing that with regard to all those doctrines, to which he alludes, we are in an error, surely the Doctor does not mean to say that it lessens the authority of revealed religion. I humbly apprehend its divine testimony remains equally unshaken either

