









First understand, then judge.  
Bring forth the people blind, although they have eyes;  
And deaf, although they have ears.  
Let them produce their witnesses, that they may be justified;  
Or let them hear their turn, and say, THIS IS TRUE.  
ISAIAH.

Boston 1813

To the Intelligent and the Candid  
Who are  
Willing to Listen to Every Opinion  
That is Supported by Reason;  
And  
Not Averse to Bringing their Own Opinions  
To the Test of Examination;  
THIS BOOK  
Is Respectfully Dedicated  
By  
The Author



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## PREFACE

The celebrated Dr. Price, in his valuable *Observation on the Importance of the American Revolution*, addressed to the people of the United States, observes that, It is a common opinion, that there are some doctrines so sacred, and others of so bad a tendency, that no public discussion of them ought to be allowed. Were this a right opinion, all the persecution that has ever been practised would be justified; for if it is a part of the duty of civil magistrates to prevent the discussion of such doctrines, they must, in doing this, act on their own judgments of the nature and tendency of doctrines; and, consequently, they must have a right to prevent the discussion of all doctrines which they think to be too sacred for discussion, or too dangerous in their tendency; and this right they must exercise in the only way in which civil power is capable of exercising it — 'by inflicting penalties upon all who oppose sacred doctrines, or who maintain pernicious opinions.' In Mahometan, countries, therefore, magistrates would have a right to silence and punish all who oppose the divine mission of Mahomet, a doctrine there reckoned of the most sacred nature. The like is true of the doctrines of transubstantiation, worship of the Virgin Mary, &c. &c., in Popish countries; and of the doctrines of the Trinity, satisfaction, &c., in Protestant countries. All such laws are right, if the opinion I have mentioned is right. But, in reality, civil power has nothing to do in such matters, and civil governors go miserably out of their proper province, whenever they take upon them the care of truth, or the support of any doctrinal points. They are not judges of truth, and if they pretend to decide about it, they will decide wrong. This all the countries under heaven think of the application of civil power to doctrinal points in every country, but their own. It is indeed superstition, idolatry, and nonsense, that civil power at present supports almost every where under the idea of supporting sacred truth, and opposing dangerous error. Would not, therefore, its perfect neutrality be the greatest blessing? Would not the interest of truth gain unspeakably, were all the rulers of states to aim at nothing but keeping the peace; or did they consider themselves bound to take care, not of the future, but

the present, interest of man; not of their souls and of their faith, but of their person and property; not of any ecclesiastical, but secular, matters only?

All the experience of past time proves, that the consequence of allowing civil power to judge of the nature and tendency of doctrines, must be making it a hindrance to the progress of truth, and an enemy to the improvement of the world.

I would extend these observations to all points of faith, however sacred they may: be deemed. Nothing reasonable—can suffer by discussion. All doctrines, really sacred, must be clear, and incapable of being opposed with success.

That immoral tendency of doctrines, which has been urged as a reason against allowing the public discussion of them, may be either avowed and direct? or only a consequence with which they are charged. If it is avowed and direct, such doctrines certainly will not spread; the principles rooted, in human nature will resist them, and the advocates of them will be soon disgraced. If, on the contrary, it is only a consequence with which a doctrine is charged, it should be considered how apt all parties are to charge the doctrines they oppose with bad tendencies. It is well known that Calvinists and Arminians, Trinitarians and Socinians, Fatalists and Free-Willers, are continually exclaiming against one another's opinions, as dangerous and licentious. Even Christianity itself could not, at its first introduction, escape this accusation. The professors of it were considered as atheists, because they opposed pagan idolatry; and their religion was, on this account, reckoned a destructive and pernicious enthusiasm. If, therefore, the rulers of a state are to prohibit the propagation of all doctrines, in which they apprehend immoral tendencies, an opening will be made, as I have before observed, for every species of persecution. There will be no doctrine, however true or important, the avowal of which will not, in, some country or other, be subjected to civil penalties.

These observations bear the stamp of good sense, and their truth has been abundantly confirmed by experience; and it is the peculiar honour of the United States, that in conformity with the principles of these observations, perfect freedom, of opinion and of speech, are here established by law, and are the birthright of every citizen

thereof. Our country\* is the only one which has not been guilty of the folly of establishing the ascendancy of one set of religious opinions, and persecuting or tolerating all others, and which does not permit any man to harass his neighbour, because he thinks differently from himself. In consequence of these excellent institutions, difference of religious sentiment; makes here no breach in private friendship, and works no danger to the public security. This is as it should be; for, in matters of opinion, especially with regard to so important a thing as religion, it is every man's natural right and duty to think for himself, and to judge upon such evidence as he can procure, after he has used his best endeavours to get information. Human decisions are of no weight in this matter, for another man has no more right to. determine what his opinions shall be, than I have to determine what another mans opinions shall be. It is amazing that one man can dare to presume he has such a right over another; and that any man can be so weak and credulous, as to imagine, that another has such right over him.

As it is every man's natural right and duty to think and judge for himself in matters of opinion; so he should be allowed freely to bring forward and defend his opinions, and to endeavour, when he judges proper, to convince others also of their truth.

For unless all men are allowed freely to profess their opinions, the means of information, with respect to opinions, must, in a great measure, be wanting; and just inquiries into their truth be almost impracticable; and, by consequence, our natural right and duty to think and judge for ourselves, must be rendered almost nugatory, or be subverted, for want of materials whereon to employ our minds. A man by himself, without communication with other minds, can make no great progress in knowledge; and besides, an individual is indisposed to use his own strength, when an undisturbed laziness, ignorance, and prejudice give him full satisfaction as to the truth of his opinions. But if there be a free profession, or communication of sentiment, every man will have an opportunity of acquainting himself with all that can be known from others; and many for their own satisfaction will make inquiries, and, in order to ascertain the truth of opinions, will desire to know all that can be said on any question.

If such liberty of professing and teaching be not allowed, error, if authorized, will keep its ground; and truth, if dormant, will never be brought to light; or, if authorized, will be supported on a false and absurd foundation, and such as would equally support error; and, if received on the ground of authority, will not be in the least meritorious to its professors.

Besides, not to encourage capable and honest men to profess and defend their opinions when different from ours, is to distrust the truth of our own opinion, and to fear the light. Such conduct must, in a country of sense and learning, increase the number of unbelievers already so greatly complained of; who, if they see matters of opinion not allowed to be professed, and impartially debated, think, justly perhaps, that they have foul play, and, therefore, reject many things as false and ill grounded, which otherwise they might perhaps receive as truths.

The grand principle of men considered as having relation to the Deity, and under an obligation to be religious, is, that they ought to consult their reason, and seek every where for the best instruction; and of Christians and Protestants the duty, and professed principle is, to consult reason and the Scripture, as the rule of their faith and practice.

But how can these, which are practical principles, be duly put in practice, unless all be at liberty, at all times, and in all points, consider and debate with others, (as well as with themselves,) what reason and Scripture says; and to profess, and act openly, according to what they are convinced they say? How can we become better informed with regard to religion, than by using the best means of information? which consist in consulting reason and scripture, and calling in the aid of others. And of what use is it to consult reason, and Scripture at all, as any means of information., if we are not, upon conviction, to follow their dictates?

No man has any reason to apprehend any ill consequences to truth, (for which alone he ought to have any concern,) from free inquiry and debate.—For truth is not a thing to dread examination, but when fairly proposed to an unbiased understanding, is like light to the eye; it must distinguish itself from error, as light does distinguish does distinguish itself from darkness. For, while free debate is

allowed, truth is in no danger, for it will never want a professor thereof, nor an advocate to offer some plea in its behalf. And it can never be wholly banished, but when human decisions, backed by human power, carry all before them.

We ought to examine foundations of opinions, not only, that we may attain the discovery of truth, but we ought to do so, on this account, because that it is our duty; and the way to recommend ourselves to the favour of God. For opinions, how true soever, when the effect of education or tradition, or interest, or passion, can never recommend a man to God. For those ways have no merit in them, and are the worst a man can possibly take to obtain truth; and therefore, though they may be objects of forgiveness, they can never be of reward from Him.

Having promised these observations in order to persuade, and dispose the reader to be candid, I will now declare the motives, which induced me to submit to the consideration of the intelligent, the contents of this volume. The Author has spared, he thinks, no pains to arrive at certain Truth in matters of religion; the; sense of which is what distinguishes man from the brute. And in this most important subject that can employ the human understanding, he has been particularly desirous to become acquainted with the Grounds, and Doctrines of the Christian Religion; and nothing but the difficulties, which he in this volume lays before the public, staggers his faith in it.

It may perhaps add to the interest the Reader may take in this work to inform him, that the Author was a believer in the religion of the New Testament, after what he conceived to be a sufficient examination of its evidence for a divine origin. He had terminated an examination of the controversy with the Deists to his own satisfaction, i.e. he felt convinced that their objections were not insurmountable, when he turned his attention to the consideration of the ancient, and obscure controversy between the Christians and the Jews. His curiosity was deeply interested to examine a subject in truth so little known, and to ascertain the causes, and the reasons, which had prevented a people more interested in the truth of Christianity than any other from believing it: and he set down to the subject without any suspicion, that the examination would not termi-

nate in convincing him still more in favour of what were then his opinions. After a long, thorough, and startling examination of their Books, together with all the answers to them he could obtain from a Library amply furnished in this respect, he was finally very reluctantly compelled to feel persuaded, by proofs he could neither refute, nor evade, that how easily soever Christians might answer the Deists, so called, the Jews were clearly too hard for them. Because they set the Old and New Testament in opposition, and reduce Christians to this fatal dilemma. — Either the Old Testament contains a Revelation from God; or it does not. If it does, then the New Testament cannot be from God, because it is palpably, and importantly repugnant to the Old Testament in doctrine, and some other things. Now Jews, and Christians, each of them admit the Old Testament as containing a divine Revelation; consequently the Jews cannot, and Christians ought not to receive and allow any thing as a Revelation from God which flatly contradicts a former by them acknowledged Revelation: because it cannot be supposed that God will contradict himself. On the other hand — if the Old Testament be not from God, still the New Testament must go down, because it asserts that the Old Testament is a revelation from God, and builds upon it as a foundation. And if the foundation fails, how can the house, stand? The Author pledges himself to the Reader, to prove, that they establish this dilemma completely. And he cannot help thinking, that there is reason to believe, that if both sides of this strangely neglected controversy had been made public in times past, and become known, that the consequences would have been long ago fatal at least to the New Testament.

The Author has been earnestly dissuaded from making public the contents of this volume on account of apprehended mischievous consequences. He thought, however, that the age of pious frauds ought to be past, and their principle discarded, at least in Protestant countries. Deception and error are always, sooner or later, discovered; and truth in, the long run, both in politics, and religion, will never be ultimately harmful. If what the Book states is true, it ought to be known, if it is erroneous; it can, and will, be refuted.

The Author therefore makes it public, for these reasons, — because he thinks, that the matter contained in the book, is true, and important, — because he wished, and found it necessary to justify him-

self from contemptible misrepresentations uttered behind his back; and to give to those who know him, good and sufficient reasons for past conduct, of which those to whom he is known, cannot be ignorant; and finally, he thought it right, and proper, and humane, to give to the world a work which contained the reasons for the unbelief of the countrymen of Jesus; who for almost eighteen hundred years have been made the unresisting victims of, as the reader will find, groundless misrepresentation, and the most amazing cruelty; because they refused to believe what it was impossible that they should believe, on account of reasons their persecutors did not know, and refused to be informed of.

If the arguments and statements contained in this volume should be found to be correct, he believes that every honest and candid man, after his first surprise that they should not have been made known before, will feel for the victims of a mistake so singular and so ancient as the one which is the subject of the following pages; and will think with the author, that it is time, high time, that the truth should be known, and justice be done to them.\*

There is not in existence a more singular instance of the mischievous mistakes arising from taking things for granted which require proof, than the case before the reader. The world has all along been in total error with regard to the reasons and the motives which have prevented the Hebrew nation from receiving the system of the New Testament. They have been successfully accused of incorrigible blindness and obstinacy; and while volumes upon volumes have been written against them, and the arguments therein contained, supported and enforced by the power of the Inquisition, and the oppressions of all Christendom, these unfortunate people have not been willingly suffered to offer to the world one word in their own defence. They have not been allowed, after hearing with patience both arguments, and railing accusations in abundance, to answer in their turn; but have been compelled, through the fear of confiscation, persecution, and death, to leave misapprehensions unexplained, and misrepresentations unrefuted.

Is it then to be wondered at, that mankind have considered their adversaries as in the right, and that deserted by reason, and even their own Scriptures, they were supported in their opinion only by a

blind and pertinacious obstinacy, more worthy of wonder than curiosity? Alas! the world did not consider, that nothing was more easy than to confute people whose tongues were frozen by the terror of the Inquisition!! But, thanks to the good sense of this enlightened age, those times are past and gone. There is now one happy country where freedom of speech is allowed, where every harmless religious opinion is protected by law, and where every opinion is listened to that is supported by reason. The time, I trust, is now come when the substantial arguments of this oppressed, and, in this respect, certainly calumniated, people, may be produced and their reasons set forth, without the fear of harm, and with, and with the hope of hearing from the intelligent and the candid. They, we believe, will be fully convinced, that their adversaries have for so long a time triumphed over them without measure, only because they have been suffered to do so without contradiction.

The reader is assured, that, notwithstanding the subject, he will find nothing in this volume but what is considered by the author to be fair and liberal argument; and such no honest man ought to decline looking in the face. He has endeavoured to discuss the important subject of the book in the most inoffensive manner; for he has no wish, and claims no right, to wound the feelings of those who differ from him in opinion. There is not, nor ought there to be, a word of reproach in it, against the moral character of Jesus, or the twelve Apostles; and the utmost the author attempts to prove is, that their system was founded, not upon fraud and imposture, but upon a mistake. After the deaths of Christ and his Apostles, it was indeed aided and supported by very bad means; but its first founders, the author believes, were guilty of no other crime than that of being mistaken; a very common one indeed.

He hopes, therefore, that such a discussion as the one now laid before the public, will be fairly met, and fairly answered, if answered at all, and that recourse will not be had to dishonest and ungentlemanly misrepresentations, and calling names, in order to prevent people from examining things they have a right to know, and in order to blind and frighten the public, the jury to which he appeals. It is infallibly true, that the knowledge of truth is, and must be beneficial to mankind; and that, in the long run, it never was, and never can be, harmful. It is equally certain, that God would never

give a Revelation so slightly founded as to be endangered by any sophistry of man. If the Christian system be from God, it will certainly stand, no human power can overthrow it; and, therefore, no sincere Christian who believes the New Testament, ought to be afraid to meet half way the objections of any one who offers them with fairness, and expresses them in decent language; and no sensible Christian ought to shut his ears against his neighbour, who respectfully asks a reason for the faith that is in him.

The author has been told, indeed, that, supposing the Christian system to be unfounded, yet that it is reasonable to believe, that the Supreme Being would view any attempts to disturb it, with displeasure, on account of its moral effects. But is not this something like absurdity? Can God have made it necessary, that morals should be founded on delusion, in order that they might be supported? Can the God of TRUTH be displeased to have men convinced that they have been mistaken, or imposed upon, by Revelations pretended to be from Him, which if in fact not from him, must be the offspring either of error or falsehood? And if the Christian system be, in truth, not from God, can we suppose, that in his eyes its doctrines with regard to Him are atoned for, by a few good moral precepts? Can we suppose, that that Supreme and awful Being can feel Himself honoured, in having his creatures made to believe, that He was once nine months in the womb of a woman; that God, the Great and Holy, went through all the nastiness of infancy; that he lived a mendicant in a corner of the earth, and was finally scourged, and hanged on a gibbet by his own creatures? If these things be, in truth, all mistakes, can we suppose, that God is pleased in having them believed of Him? On the contrary, can they, together with the doctrine of the Trinity, I would respectfully ask, be possibly looked upon by Him (if they are not true), otherwise, than as so many — what I forbear to mention. But this is not all. The reader is requested to consider, that the Christian system is built upon the prostrate necks of the whole Hebrew nation. It is a tree which flourished in a soil watered by their tears; its leaves grew green in an atmosphere filled with their cries and groans; and its roots have been moistened and fattened with their blood. The ruin, reproach, and sufferings of that people, are considered, by its advocates, as the most striking proof of the Divine authority of the New Testament; and for almost eight-

een hundred years the system contained in that book has been the cause of miseries and afflictions to that nation, the most horrible and unparalleled in the history of man.

Now, if that system be indeed Divine, all this may be very well, and as it should be. But if, perchance, it should turn out to be a mistake if it be, in truth, not from God; will not, then, that system be justly chargeable with all those shocking cruelties which, on account of it, have been inflicted on that people?

If that system be verily and indeed founded on a mistake, no language, no indignation, can do justice to its guilt in this respect. All its good moral effects are a mere drop of pure water in that ocean of Jewish and Gentile blood it has caused to be shed by embittering men's minds with groundless prejudices. And if it be not divine; if it be plainly and demonstrably proved to have originated in error; who is the man, that, after considering what has been suggested, will have the heart to come forward, and coolly say, that it is better that a whole nation of men should continue, as heretofore, to be unjustly hated, reproached, cursed, and plundered, and massacred, on account of it, rather than that the received religious system should be demonstrated to be founded on mistake?" No! If it be, in fact, founded on mistake, every man of honour, honesty, and humanity, will say, without hesitation, "Let the delusion (if it is one) be done away, which must be supported at the expense of truth, of justice, and the happiness and respectability of a whole nation, who are men like ourselves, and more unfortunate than any others, in having already suffered but too much affliction and misery on account of it." No! though the moral effects ascribed to this system of religion were as good, as great, and ten times greater than they ever have been, or can be, yet, if it is a delusion, it would be absolutely wicked to support it, since it is erected upon the sufferings, wretchedness, and oppression of a people who compose millions of the great family of mankind.

It is remarkable, that the ablest modern advocates for the truth and divine authority of the gospel, as if they knew of no certain, demonstrative proof which could be adduced in a case of so much importance, seem to content themselves, and expect their readers should be satisfied, with an accumulation of probable arguments in