

**A DISCUSSION OF THE CONJOINT QUESTION:
IS THE DOCTRINE OF ENDLESS PUNISHMENT
FOR ANY PART OR PORTION OF THE
HUMAN FAMILY TAUGHT IN THE SCRIPTURES;
OR, ITS THE DOCTRINE OF THE FINAL HOLINESS
AND HAPPINESS OF ALL MANKIND!**

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A Discussion of the Conjoint Question: Is the Doctrine of Endless Punishment for Any Part or Portion of the Human Family Taught in the Scriptures; Or, Its the Doctrine of the Final Holiness and Happiness of All Mankind! by Freeman Yates & Eben Francis

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FREEMAN YATES & EBEN FRANCIS

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OR, IS THE DOCTRINE OF THE FINAL HOLINESS AND
HAPPINESS OF ALL MANKIND?

BETWEEN

FREEMAN YATES,

PASTOR OF THE METHODIST CHURCH, SOUTH-BERWICK, ME.

AND

EBEN FRANCIS,

PASTOR OF THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, DOVER, N. H.

CONSISTING OF

EIGHT DISCOURSES,

DELIVERED IN DOVER, N. H.

IN THE MONTHS OF MARCH AND APRIL, 1843.

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TO THE READER.

The following discourses were prepared in haste, amid the multiplicity of our other duties.

As the congregation, which was present on the last evening of the discussion, so unanimously requested their publication, we cheerfully accede thereto.

This, we believe, will be sufficient apology for our present appearance before the public.

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DISCUSSION,

PART I. No. I.

IN THE UNIVERSALIST CHURCH, WEDNESDAY EVENING, MARCH 15, 1843

BY F. YATES.

QUESTION: Is the doctrine of endless punishment for any part or portion of the human family taught in the Scriptures; or, is the doctrine of the final holiness and happiness of all mankind?

QUESTIONS of more importance than these were never presented to the mind of man. Our race, of whatever clime, has ever looked towards the future with deep interest, and most men, whether sage or savage, have looked forward with expectations of future existence.

The Bible comes to us from the hand of the Father of the Universe, dispelling the doubts, and confirming the faith of those who receive it, by pointing them to a state of being beyond the confines of the present world. To this holy Book we must turn, not only to learn the *fact* of our future existence, but also the *character* of that existence. The great body of those who regard the Bible as a revelation from God have believed that it teaches that man is a moral agent, governed by a moral law, the proper penalty of which is *endless punishment*. But some few, in these latter days, have risen up, and called in question the doctrine of endless punishment. They tell us that the world has been deceived altogether in reference to this subject. The Bible does not teach — what the most pious and

learned men of all ages of the Christian Church have believed — that “a part or portion of the human family” will be endlessly miserable, but directly the contrary, that “all mankind will be finally holy and happy.” If this be the truth it is important that it should be known; if biblical students for 1800 years have failed to discover this doctrine, which, it is contended, was the doctrine taught by Christ and his apostles, — if this discovery was reserved for the wisdom of the present age, we may bless ourselves that we live in such auspicious times, that the lines have fallen to us in such pleasant places; for the discovery of truth should always be a matter of thanksgiving. But before we congratulate ourselves too highly, let us pause a few moments and examine the claims of such new teachers to our confidence in their doctrine. We are commanded in scripture to “try the spirits, and see if they be of God,” for we are told that “false teachers shall arise.” If any man bring to us any other gospel than that preached by Christ and his apostles, we are bound to reject it. Let us examine, therefore, and see what was taught by him who “spoke as never man spake,” and those who were instructed at his feet. Was there any such thing known in the time of Christ and his apostles as the doctrine of endless punishment? and what was the conduct of these teachers in reference to this subject? Were they found opposing it, or did they take such a course as would lead the believers in endless punishment to conclude that this was their doctrine also? These inquiries I shall endeavour to answer on this occasion.

I. *Was the doctrine of endless punishment believed by both Jews and Gentiles in the days of Christ and his apostles?* In answer to this question it is sufficient to say, that Universalists themselves admit that the doctrine of endless punishment was extensively believed by Jews and Gentiles at the time of Christ’s ministry. The following are some of their testimonies on this point. “The Pharisees it is well known believed in the endless punishment of human souls.” *Lectures by W. M. Fernald, p. 79.* “It is generally admitted that the Jews, in our Savior’s day, maintained the Pagan notion of immortal happiness for the righteous, and undying pain for the sinner.” *Letter in the*

Trumpet Feb. 3, 1838. "That the Pharisees believed in a punishment after death we do not deny." *Whittemore's Notes on the Parables*, p. 62. "Jews and heathen believed in endless punishment. *Balfour's Essays*, p. 326.

We might enlarge these quotations from Universalist authors, to show that the doctrine was generally received by both Jews and Gentiles. The following is given to show how extensively it prevailed among them at the time our Savior, the great teacher of truth and righteousness, was in their midst publishing his own gospel. Mr. Balfour, in his *inquiry*, p. 260, where he attempts to show that the Jews obtained their notions of endless punishment from the heathen, says — "The introduction of this and other heathen opinions among the Jews was gradual, but in the days of our Lord, had become general, with perhaps the exception of the sect of the Sadducees." This sect composed but a small part of the Jewish nation. Having established this point by the testimony of Universalists, we will inquire,

II. *Was Christ or his apostles, who lived and preached in the midst of believers in endless punishment, ever known to oppose this doctrine: or, were they ever opposed by others for believing and preaching the contrary doctrine?*

The doctrine of endless punishment is either true or false. If it is false, it is the invention of wicked men got up for unhallowed purposes. It was designed by its originators to frighten the superstitious into obedience by exciting their fears, and threatening them with endless torments if they should dare to go contrary to their wishes. We are told by the opposers of this doctrine that it originated among the heathen, and the Jews received it from them; and that in the time of our Lord and his apostles it had become general. This doctrine is regarded also by its opposers as the most destructive error that ever prevailed among men; nay, worse than all others put together. We will hear how Universalists of the present day speak in reference to this doctrine. What heart-rending feelings they must have on account of this "dreadful error." In the so called Gospel Banner of Feb. 20, 1841, the editor, speaking of the doctrine in question, says — "We believe it to be the greatest error of our times, — one fraught with the worst results to so-

ciety." The Lord save us from an error that reflects so ingloriously upon the ever adorable perfections of Almighty God, our heavenly Father. We would not see his character traduced and slandered by such a reflection upon his nature and proceedings. Neither would we see our fellow men oppressed and made wretched by such a faith." "We believe its influence is decidedly bad — injurious to good morals, and destructive to human happiness. Put all the errors of the world into one, and this would not equal in magnitude the one to which we refer. Is it any longer a wonder in your mind, reader, that we, as Universalists, should employ so much of our time in preaching and writing against this grand error. Nay, we must do it." Mr. Whittemore, in his *Modern History of Universalism*, says, "It is an error pregnant with evil consequences above every other." Again, *Guide*, p. 245 — "When we see the deep misery and heartfelt anguish which a sincere belief in the doctrine occasions, the heart bleeds for the unhappy sufferer."*

These extracts are in perfect keeping with Universalist presses and pulpits everywhere. On the supposition that Christ and his apostles had as much feeling for human woe as Universalists of the present time, and were as capable of judging of the effects of this doctrine which prevailed to such an alarming extent in their day, what would be expected of them? of him especially, whose heart was made of tenderness, and who needed not that any should teach him? Would it not be expected of Christ, who manifested such disinterested benevolence for the children of men, and whose great object was to secure human happiness, that he would have opposed such an error as this in a manner which would have set the matter at rest with his followers at least? But did he, or his apostles ever come in collision with either Jew or Gentile on this subject? Where is it recorded? Four of his disciples, who were his constant followers, have given all of his history that infinite wisdom saw fit for the benefit of future generations, but they have not mentioned a single instance of the kind. He was often found exposing other errors, trifling indeed when compared

*These extracts are taken from an Essay written by Rev. N. D. George, of the Maine (Methodist) Conference, to which Essay I am indebted for some of the thoughts contained in this discourse.

with the one of which we speak, if it be an error, but no where do we read of his coming in contact with any one on this point; or warning his disciples against it, though he often warned them against other errors of the day. The Pharisees frequently met him with various objections, but we never read of their opposing him for believing and preaching that all men would be saved.

We have a brief history of the acts of the apostles, giving frequent accounts of disputations with both Jews and Gentiles, who were believers in endless misery, but no account of opposition on either hand in respect to this doctrine. We have twenty-two Epistles, written by the apostles and addressed to believers in endless punishment, and while they name and expose numerous errors the correctness of this doctrine is never called in question.

“Is it not strange, passing strange, that the greatest teacher the world ever saw, or ever will see, whose heart was made of tenderness, should dwell in the midst of a people believing in an error which outweighs all others put together, and never once raised a warning voice against it, nor showed them its man-degrading, God-dishonoring character? His apostles too, who received their theology from his own blessed lips, labored and reared Churches in the midst of believers in the hated doctrine, yet nowhere in their history do we learn that they raised a single note of alarm against it.”

In view of the fact that the doctrine of endless punishment so extensively prevailed in the days of Christ and his apostles, would not their *silence* on this subject be enough to show that they held the same doctrine, and therefore, that it is the doctrine of the Bible? But,

III. *I come now to a third inquiry. — Did Christ and his Apostles use such language in their discourses and writings as was used by believers in endless punishment in reference to this subject?*

It will not be necessary for me to show that Christ or his apostles ever entered into any labored defence of the doctrine of endless punishment to prove that it was their doctrine. As this doctrine was almost universally believed, it was not necessa-