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# **SERMON,**

Against the

**DOCTRINE OF UNIVERSALISM,**

Delivered in the

**New Calvinistic Meeting-House in Dorchester, Mass**

**Wednesday Evening, March 7, 1830.**

**BY LYMAN BEECHER, D. D.**



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## TO THE READER.

It is not pretended that this is any thing more than a fair report of Dr. Beecher's argument. The Editor of the *Trumpet* having been present, and heard the Sermon, has the means of judging as to the correctness of this report. In addition to the copy furnished by the stenographer, we had the use of the notes we ourselves took; and the copy we now publish has been made out from both. The Dr. had only the skeleton of his Sermon written. He spoke in a great measure extemporaneously, frequently making repetitions, which, where the language was precisely the same, we thought it expedient to leave out. The Dr. has we learn preached this Sermon several times. It is one of a course which he preaches against Universalism, and about the publication of which there has been so much said. The weaker among the orthodox have imagined that there was something unanswerable in these discourses, and they have boasted of them with little modesty. Whether the series will ever be published we cannot say; but we are sure of the one before us, and we trust our readers will give it an attentive perusal, in obedience to the injunction in the Dr's text—"Prove all things, hold fast that which is good."

## SERMON.



1 THESS. V. 21.

*“Prove all things; hold fast that which is good.”*

Mankind, he said, had long been endeavoring to produce *unity* of belief. The only effectual method by which to accomplish this was free inquiry. Force was entirely in vain. The evidence of truth is plain; and he who will examine may know the truth and understand it.

He had no objection to free inquiry or honest and free investigation—The truth in every case ought to be made manifest—The only way to ascertain the truth was by faith, prayer and candid inquiry, and we need not seek it from bishops or ministers. His holiness the Pope had no good right to require implicit faith.—“Prove all things.” Truth discards all but that which is right. Each one must judge for himself and not for his neighbor.

Our own country was the first in the world, where each one could think for himself, examine and even preach. All were free and equal, and God grant it always might be so. He had come to

preach to them upon the subject of universal salvation, or in other words, the doctrine of exemption from punishment in a future state. This doctrine was neither taught by nature nor by the bible—some even went so far as to say that all punishment was in time, that the only hell we met with was in this world, and that all the threatenings and promises of the bible appertained to this world, and that those threatenings referred merely to remorse of conscience, loss of health, property &c.

He had not come to declaim against, revile, or denounce those who thought differently from him. While such difference of opinion existed, he rejoiced in that liberty which gave to all the privilege of enjoying their own peculiar belief. He would not lift a finger to take away that liberty, or to prevent the honest exercise of a difference of opinion. Every one had the same right with regard to his fellow mortals, but was accountable to God. Upon this subject we should be careful, and reason calmly.

His opinion might honestly differ from that of his brethren. He came merely to tell them wherein he believed them to be wrong, as a fellow traveller to eternity—To wave his hand when he saw them in danger—To warn them of the poison they were about to swallow—of the fatal precipice over which they were about to step. He came to cry out to them—They must

not be in wavering and doubt concerning who was right and who was wrong, but "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good." There can hardly be a conviction to any individual against his wishes—a necessary qualification is to be willing to know the truth.

No one would be willing to be tried before a prejudiced judge when he wished for a right decision. We then should not try ourselves under the prejudices of our own judgment. Time is short, and the question is, whether there is a hell beyond the grave. There is a hell at all events every one knows, and no one without a knowledge of God shall see heaven, so say the scriptures. Suppose there is no hell, will it injure us as much to believe there is, as it will injure us to believe there is not, if at last there shall prove to be a hell? The deceiver, if there be no hell, could be no worse off in eternity.—And to what will this doctrine lead? Personal holiness, morality and religion will appear of no consequence; and if the Universalist knows that he is safe, and is certain in his belief, then repentance and faith spoken of in the Bible are without avail. But why risk the consequences? Why not pursue the old way, and carry to our Maker a broken heart and a contrite spirit? Otherwise we lean upon a broken reed, which will fail us in extremity.—Why not rely upon that which will be a

prop to us to-day, to-night, to-morrow and forever? Upon that God who alone will save us? His object that evening would be, not to defend the doctrine of endless misery, but to examine the arguments on which the Universalists rely to support that doctrine, and to point out the fallacy of such arguments.

One principal argument of the Universalists, sometimes secretly entertained and sometimes avowed, was this—that man was not a free agent, and could not therefore justly incur endless misery. But is it not probable that God can make a free agent? If so, why has he not? Man is made accountable to the law, and has the consciousness to feel the obligation of it. He possesses feelings such as other animals do not. The scriptures treat him as a free agent. They tell him to “abstain from evil and do good.” The proof of his free agency is the consciousness spoken of. This is a lesson of the heart, and that consciousness is as inherent as that of our existence. It is a practical free agency which a man conceives and acts under, and which is denied by the doctrines of universalism. It is the same feeling as that which relates to the claim of a neighbor against ourselves. We are conscious it ought to be satisfied. When they injure us, we are angry. We not only are conscious they are wrong, but they are conscious of being wrong, and



of course are sensible of guilt. Shall we then say that God is the author of a splendid deception, and that he has founded all our expectations on a lie? Shall we say that we are mere machines! impelled like a foot-ball, and unable to resist the impulse by which we are moved? Why has God done this? Has he not made all things as they seem? He who doubts the doctrine of free agency is beyond the pale of human reason. He who is the inhabitant of a town, nation, or subject to the laws of either, acts as if he was a free agent, and if found guilty of any breach of those laws is punished. So if found guilty of breaking the laws of God, why should he not suffer future punishment?

But the Universalists say that we are free agents in a degree; but not to so great an extent that we deserve eternal punishment for the sins of a short life.—Human frailty is to be taken into consideration as an excuse, and may be regarded in favor of the sinner. We speak of frailty—it is not so. The covetous, the avaricious man excuses himself upon the ground of frailty—we deceive ourselves when we talk in this manner. Sin is not frailty, it is guilt, and must be punished as such.

The second argument of the Universalists to be noticed is this—that punishment must be measured by the duration of sin,

and that eternal punishment for the sins of this short life cannot be just. But is this argument a good one? Is it sustained by the analogy of human law? Imprisonment for life is the punishment for the sin of a few moments in commission; therefore it is not the length of time employed in the commission of the sin that regulates the consequences of the act, even in this world. It is the act itself which constitutes the degree of crime, and not the time employed in committing it. The public good requires the restraining of the prisoner, and not the act causing his restriction. This is the case in crimes of every description, and is so in the divine regulation as to the punishment of sinners.

Again—We are not punished forever for the sins of this short life. This is a mistake. Man is a free agent, and free agency extends through eternity. If there is such a thing as free agency, it may exist beyond the grave. The Universalists admit that sin is punished *here*, if not *hereafter*. The law and the subject of the law must in either case be alike. For if sin exists, it must be punished while it exists; and if it exists forever, the punishment must be endless. The punishment of the eternal state treads upon the heels of eternal transgression.

If the soul should rebel in its future state, it would be punished “where the worm

never dieth and the fire is not quenched"—because sin is its fuel. The doctrine of the Bible is, "If ye do not repent, ye shall all likewise perish." If ye do not repent in this life, ye shall never repent. The Bible says not a word about punishing men forever for the evils of this life. Suppose a being to continue in sin—when he dies, is he fit for heaven? And as he is a free agent, does he not deserve a punishment which never ends?

But it is said that God knows how every one will act, and then why punish them for what he knew they would do? Many people injure their neighbors, and prosper. Now this argument if it proves any thing, proves too much. If it is certain that the wicked are not to be punished because God knew they would sin, why does he punish them here? yet still he does. God punished the old world with a flood—Sodom and Gomorrah with fire.—Still God must have known by his foreknowledge what the people of the old world and of these cities would do—nevertheless the punishment was given. This argument is called one of the most perplexing, and it is certainly one of the most popular. This reasoning you may answer for yourselves. God's knowledge is not a forcible and irresistible cause of the acts of man, if he is a free agent. If he sees and knows, yet man acts freely. God acts not needlessly, wickedly and despot-

ically, perverting free agency; there is no coercion used to annul man's free agency. This thing can be made certain.—For example—this meeting was perfectly known to all who are here, of consequence, God knew it. Whether right or wrong, you have all assembled of your own accord, and you did it of your own free agency, yet God knew it—still you acted as free agents in coming. A person owes you a debt and refuses to pay. God knows it, yet you hand him over to the officer, and to the judge, and he is cast into prison until he pay the uttermost farthing; and so will God deal with mankind, and is not that just?

But it is said, that the Deity is a *good* God, and that he would not create beings for the express purpose of damnation—and for that only. The Universalists are the only people that believe this. They believe in a hell here, and that the wicked are damned while here; then of consequence if God made man for the very end he suffers, it follows they were made on purpose to be damned or punished here. This is the amount of *their* argument, but *we* do not hold to this belief but believe that all are free agents. We believe also in the benevolence of God. We do not believe that the thief and murderer are tempted of God, and therefore throw the sin upon him, but that the agent himself perverts the purposes of the Deity, and

the fault is in the agent and not in the Deity.

It is said again—that it is unreasonable to suppose that God would eternally punish in a future state a finite sin. Is it more unreasonable to suppose this, than that there should be an eternal reward for finite good? The reason of the thing is as correct in the one case as the other—why not so? I leave it to the consideration of common sense. It is also said that all punishment relates to time, because there is no future punishment threatened in the Bible. We reply then that there is none in relation to time—for the same reasoning which will show that there is no future punishment threatened will show that there is no present punishment threatened. He would carry his readers to the Bible, and if there is no future punishment threatened there, then there is no resurrection spoken of—Where the one is alluded to, *there* is the other. The one must be as true as the other, and both are mentioned in innumerable instances. He would challenge any man to dispute this fact. If he could not prove that the sacred writers believed in future punishment, then it could not be proved that the orthodox of the present day believed in that doctrine. It was as clear that the one believed it as the other. The same reasoning which would prove that the authors of the Bible did not hold to future

punishment, would prove that he himself did not hold to it. You could explain away his language as well as theirs. Had he preached as forcible and as clear a sermon on endless punishment as President Edwards did, give him the liberty to explain his language as Universalists explain that of the Bible, and he would prove that he did not hold to endless punishment, but was himself a Universalist.\*

The fact was the Bible did explicitly reveal eternal punishment. This was unquestionable. On the Bible he rested his faith, and the language of it could not consistently be explained away.

The Universalist said that God wills the salvation of all men, and as he is Almighty, it must come to pass. This is a popular argument, but it is not sound, without a qualification. God desires the salvation of all men without distinction. He has provided a remedy for sin. When the means of salvation are rejected, does

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\* The Dr. should have stated, that he was indebted for this suggestion to his brother in the faith, Rev. Mr. Ide of Medway. It occurs in the discourse delivered by that gentleman at the ordination of Rev. Asa Hixon, in Oakham, Mass. The Dr. probably has had an opportunity of looking over Mr. Ide's Sermon, and has availed himself of the thought without giving credit for it. It is wonderful, if the language of the scriptures favors so clearly the doctrine of endless hell torments, that the advocates of that theory can seldom quote a passage in its support without altering it more or less.—ED. TRUMPET.

it follow that therefore man is to be saved? The Bible invites every one to come and do his duty. God wills the salvation of all men now, in this world. Are there no sinners? This question is answered by facts. There *are* sinners—all are not saved. The drunkard is not saved nor the murderer—there is a hell, but it is said that *that* hell is confined to this world. This doctrine will apply as well to heaven as to hell.

Again it is said, God, as the Father of men, would not torment his children forever. This also is a favorite position.—Fathers, however, *do* punish their children, and when they are disobedient, abandon or disinherit them—so it is with God in relation to man. But he is not the Father of man unless man is *filial*—those only who cry “abba father” sincerely, are his children. There is not a text which says that God is the Father of rebels. Nevertheless, he invites them to come to him with parental affection. The scriptures are full of invitations. For instance—“Oh that my people would hearken unto me,” &c. But if they will not come, he says, “I have called and ye refused—I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded, therefore, I will laugh at your calamity, and mock when your fear cometh.”

But the argument drawn from the conduct of an earthly parent is not good.—

Did not God for sin drown a whole world? and would a father drown his own children? Did he not visit Sodom and Gomorrah with fire? Is it safe to reason analogically upon this subject, and to say that God would hang his own son, or child, by causing him to commit the sin of which he is convicted? The mistake in these cases of false reasoning is by arguing from limited premises to general conclusions. It is wholly improper to compare the management of a nation or government, to that of a parent. The dignity of the power against whom the sin is committed, and the safety of the government must be taken into account. The government hangs a man, and is justified in so doing, but this no parent could do. God punishes sinners by drowning, hanging and burning; but this no individual could do. The argument therefore, from the disposition and government of an earthly parent is not good.

It is objected to the doctrine of endless misery, that it leads to priestcraft.

To this it is replied, that civil liberty has always been maintained by those who held to that doctrine. The protestant priesthood at the Reformation held that sentiment, and they broke open the prison doors, and said to the captives of error, be free.

Upon the doctrine of future punishment grew up the reformation, which poured light



upon a dark world of papal superstition. The history by Hume shows that by this belief in future punishment the puritans of New England, over whose honored sepulchres we have wept and trembled, came here and established their civil and religious liberty. It was this belief that caused their departure from the land of their fathers. The influence of this belief marks a different character in the cantons of Switzerland, between the protestant and the catholic, who hopes to escape future punishment by his penance and indulgences. That difference is seen even by the traveller as he passes the line separating the one from the other; and every where in proportion as the belief in future retribution is weakened, crimes multiply in society. To illustrate this he would refer to the papal indulgences, when first sold in Germany and Europe, wherein a traffic was made of the souls of men; on this head he would refer to Tetsel (a writer on this subject in Germany.) The increase of crime was in proportion to the increase of indulgencies, and the hope of escaping future punishment; and the fact was that these indulgencies though paid for, tended to the increase of crime and the destruction of society. But the doctrine of Universal Salvation, released men from all fear of future punishment, and gave the indulgencies to sin without money and without price. Is it not reasona-

ble to suppose that the same causes will produce the same effects? The indulgence offered by the Universalists is more unqualified than that offered by the Papists, and the effect of course, must be still more pernicious to society.

Once more, let us look at Atheism which denies the existence of a God.—How was it in France? In the period of the Revolution they denied the existence of a God—they burnt the Bible by the hands of the common hangman. There was no priestcraft here, for they vomited out their priesthood. There was no fear of future punishment, for they declared death to be an eternal sleep—under such a state of things, in one year, two millions of persons perished by violence—In Paris one quarter of the births were illegitimate. There were thirteen thousand prostitutes, and other crimes prevailed in proportion, as the chronicle of that time will avouch. Lastly, there was one fact he must mention which was not called forth by enmity to Universalists. He did not wish it so regarded. But it was his duty to state it. It is true that there are many Universalists, who are persons in one sense of great moral worth—the doctrines which they profess have not produced these deleterious effects which seemingly they were calculated to create. But is it not true that the character of the individuals may

have been formed by the education which they had previously received, and that this was the Anchor which enabled them to ride out the storm ? It is not because the tendency of a doctrine is good that some who embrace it are good. In general cases to appeal to facts, is invidious; yet still it is a fact that while there are many moral individuals who do not believe in future punishment, nearly all the loose livers of the land are Universalists. When the standard of Universalism is raised in a country village, who are the first to rally round its banner ? Not the staid and sober, but the wicked and depraved. He said this as relating merely to the limits of his own observation. Now if reason tells us that this doctrine of Universalism is true, why do not holy men who love the truth become proselytes and patronize it ? But “ they that do evil and hate the light ” gather round this standard—why are the wicked first found there ? Yet such is the fact, and it cannot be disputed. If there were no other reason for resisting this dangerous doctrine than the last specified, that would be enough. For himself he had no interests except to express his honest belief, and to advise his fellow mortals not to put their souls on so doubtful an issue.—“ Prove all things, hold fast to that which is good,” and may God send his holy spirit down to instruct you in the right way through our only media-

tor and saviour Jesus Christ; and may we constantly live under the solemn apprehension, that "he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved, but he who believeth not shall be damned."

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From the Trumpet and Universalist Magazine.

The following certificate which we have received from Br. Balfour, will corroborate what we have said, in regard to the correctness of the Report of Dr. Beecher's Sermon.

Br. Whittemore,—I have read the Report of Dr. Beecher's Sermon, on your first page, which you had the goodness to send me, when you commenced working your first side. Having heard the Dr. preach that Sermon, I am happy to bear testimony, that the Report is a very fair and full exhibition of the argument of said discourse; and in many cases, his very language is preserved.

WALTER BALFOUR.

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