

# AN UNFINISHED ESSAY TO DOCTOR PRIESTLY ON THE TRINITY

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From Fletcher Box 18

## PREFACE

Doctor Priestly, a gentleman well known by his literary, philosophical, and moral accomplishments, that lately published a large Book, to shew that Christianity, as it is now general professed, is greatly corrupted. And he attempts to prove, that the principal cause of this corruption was the well-meant mistake of those Christians, who first admitted the Son and the Holy Ghost to a participation of the divine honours, which, he thinks, belong to the Father only, because (according to his scheme, the Son is a mere man, and the Holy Ghost is nothing but a divine virtue, or power void of consciousness and understanding. And he boldly calls our worshipping the Son and of the Holy Ghost, the Christian idolatry.

That primitive Christianity that lost its glory, must be granted by all candid enquirers after truth. We may now apply to the Christian Church, what Isaiah said of the Jewish Church, Thy wine is mixt with water, and thy silver is become dross. Nor am I sorry that a man of the Doctor's parts and reputation, hath stepped forth to proclaim this alarming truth: It suits the sleepy world of Christians. Strangers to the life and power of scriptural Christianity, we generally rest supine in a formal and empty profession of the Christian faith: and it is to be hoped, that the blows which the Doctor and his friends, Mr. Lindsey, &c. incessantly strike at the root of our profession, will at last rouse us from our lethargy, and stir up seriously to consider the difference there is between primitive and modern Christianity, that we may return to the pure truth, productive of the ardent love, for which the first Christians were so conspicuous.

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This interesting subject deserves the attention of all those who wish well to the Christian Sion: it had engrossed my thoughts for years before Dr. Priestley's Book was published. I particularly consider'd this subject, when I searched, pray'd over, and compar'd the Scriptures, in order to compose my Essay on Truth, my Essay on Christian Perfection, and my Scripture Scales.

The Reader is here presented with the fruit of these researches, the result of which is: (1) That Dr. Priestley is in the right, when he asserts that Christianity (as it is generally receiv'd among us) is enervated and despoil'd of its primitive glory. (2) That the Dr. hits the mark again, when he says that this corruption affects not barely the remote branches of Christian truth, but some of its capital roots: (3) that nevertheless he is under the greatest mistake, when he asserts, that the principal error of modern Christians, consists in not paying divine honours to the Father alone: and (4) That, on the contrary, the principal mischief is done, by not properly improving the gradual displays which God hath made of himself, first, as creating Father, secondly as redeeming Son, and thirdly, as sanctifying Spirit: In so much that the ladder of the divine dispensation (by which believers rise to the truths, which are to sanctify them wholly) being broken, we cannot but stop short of the prize of our high calling. The Unitarians so crush this precious, this important ladder, that they allow us but the first and lowest step of it; while the generality of those who honour the Son as they honour the Father, preach faith in the Redeemer in so unscriptural a manner, as to make us stop on the second step. In so much that the third step is now commonly set aside; tho' it is that, by which only we can rise again to scriptural Christianity. By this means the perfective dispensation of the Holy Ghost is so lost among Christians, that in the most numerous congregations you will scarce find twenty people who have the first love of the Christian church, and who so keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, as to be all of one heart and of one soul.

The design of this Treatise is to restore the ladder of truth to its scriptural completeness and usefulness, by placing all its different steps in their order, so that the lovers of gospel-truth, who desire to go on from faith to faith, and to ascend all the glorious heights of Christianity, may do it with ease and safety, and with a full persuasion that they are in the same narrow way, by which the primitive Christians, leaving the darkness of Judaism entered into the kingdom of grace, and triumphantly ran to the kingdom of glory.

The method by which this is attempted, is such as, I trust, no Protestant will object to. Avoiding every deep and metaphysical reasoning, I have have only produced Facts and plain Declarations from Scriptures; and by ranging them under proper heads, I have collected their light in a kind of focus, where, by shining together on the Proposition to be establish'd, they make the truth of it (if I am not mistaken) as clear as noon-day.

This Book, consider'd as a Treatise upon the Dispensation of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, contains a full answer to some dangerous Propositions advanced by Dr. Priestly, in his 7th Letter to Dr. Horsely. "There is nothing (says he) in the Doctrine of the Trinity, in itself considered, that can recommend it as a part of a system of religious truth." And again, "There is no fact in nature, nor any purpose in

morals, that required it."

In direct opposition to these two propositions, this Charimeter proves (1) that Christianity considered as a System of religious truth, is entirely founded on the Doctrine of the Trinity: (2) that what distinguishes Christianity from Judaism, is nothing but the manifestation of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, superadded to the manifestation of the Father: And (3) that moral purposes so absolutely require a discovery of the Father's love, of the Son's grace, and of the Spirit's power, that without this experimental acquaintance with the Doctrine of the Trinity, the first love, and, of course, the first works of the primitive Church, can never be produced again.

This Treatise is divided into three Parts. In the first Part the Doctrine of the Dispensations of divine grace is brought out of the dark confusion, into which it began to sink, when the first light of the Church grew dim, and her first love waxed cold.

The second Part contains an answer to the objections of those who think, that every step out of Babel, is a dangerous innovation.

And the Third Part shews the advantages, which will arise to private Christians, and to the Churches of Christ, from restoring the doctrine of the divine dispensations to its scriptural brightness, and importance.

As this Doctrine stands or falls with the Doctrine of the Trinity, before I presented to the Public my Plan of the divine Dispensations, and my little model of the Temple of Truth, considered in its three capital divisions (the Court of the Gentiles, the Holy Place, and the Holy of holies) I thought it proper to clear the ground which I raise this model; and therefore, I made little attempt to remove the Socinian rubbish, by which Dr. Priestly and his seconds, have covered that grounds. This attempt I have call'd A Scriptural Vindication of the Doctrine of the Trinity in a Letters to that Gentleman, and I desire that the Reader would consider those letters, as an introduction to this moral vindication of the same fundamental doctrine.

