

F R E E D O M

From CIVIL and ECCLESIASTICAL SLAVERY, the purchase of
CHRIST.

DISCOURSE,

Offered to a numerous Assembly,

On *MARCH* the *FIFTH*, 1774,

At the PRESBYTERIAN MEETING-HOUSE, in NEW-
BURY-PORT.

By Jonathan Parsons, *A. M. & V. D. M.*

NEWBURY-PORT, *New-England* :

Printed by I. THOMAS and H. W. TINGES.

1774.

T O T H E

Hon. JOHN HANCOCK, Esq;

O F

B O S T O N,

The ensuing DISCOURSE is inscribed

By his humble servant,

The AUTHOR.

F R E E D O M
From *C I V I L* and *E C C L E S I A S T I C A L*
S L A V E R Y,
THE PURCHASE OF
C H R I S T.

My benevolent Townsmen and other hearers,

 FROM a sense of my incapacity, and the shortness of the time allowed me to prepare, I repeatedly declined speaking in public, on a day set apart to Commemorate the bloody Massacre, the barbarous butchery at Boston four years ago. And when I looked over the excellent peices that have been printed on that sorrowful occasion, I thought very little new could be offered, and therefore felt the greater inclination to be excused. But the importunity of friends which finally overcame me, I hope will be a sufficient apology, and engage your candour in hearing, while I offer a few things inferred from

G A L A T I A N S, Chap. 5. Ver. 1.

Stand fast therefore in the Liberty wherewith CHRIST hath made you free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

IGNORANCE, pride, covetiousness, or the lust of power, has, in all ages, influenced many men to exert themselves many ways, to fix a yoke of bondage upon the necks of some of their brethren. The Jewish Doctors being ignorant of that freedom which Christ gave his true followers by his obedience and death, used their utmost art to enslave their brethren by the rites and observances of the ceremonial law, and when our Apostle opposed them, no doubt their pride and covetousness wrought fervently, as their gain and sovereignty were in danger of being entirely muzzled. And had they obtained their end in bringing this yoke upon the Gentile converts, yet even then, they would not have been easy, for they were never able to bear it themselves.

BUT there are other ways of enslaving men, besides by burdensome rites: Burdensome taxes laid upon them without their consent, whether in the *State* or in the *Church*, are a sinful yoke of bondage.

AS to the **STATE**; Our patriotic brethren in **Boston**, have justly observed on one of these anniversary occasions, that a noble attachment to a free **CONSTITUTION** raised ancient **ROME** “ from the smallest beginnings “ to that bright summit of happiness and glory to which she arrived; and “ it was the loss of this which plunged her from that summit into the “ black gulph of infamy and slavery.”

AND we shall add, the same spirit of liberty prevailed in Christian **Rome** at the first embracing Christian principles: But they were soon disposed to enslave their brethren respecting matters of religion, as they had done

in the state before they embraced the Christian faith. Their merchandize and hire were soon employed for sweet incense and costly perfumes, to serve the pride and luxury of the great; until at last, haughty Popes and Prelates usurped a tyrannical power over the consciences of men and drew money out of their pockets, for pardons and indulgencies, and for praying them out of purgatory, which was to their destruction and not to their salvation.

It would not have been quite so dark, had the yoke never been put upon the necks of *protestants*; but *persecution* for conscience sake—imprisonment, confiscation of goods, banishment and even death, have often been practised since the reformation, and in protestant nations too. Nor would it be necessary to go out of *England* and *Scotland* for many instances of such flagrant wickedness.—But can we pretend that *New-England* ever attempted to lay a yoke of bondage upon any of its inhabitants, for conscience sake? Here we shall spread a veil over our fore-fathers, and leave their extraordinary conduct with that God who judgeth righteous judgment. We need not go back for proof to make it appear, that men have endeavoured to enslave their brethren in *ecclesiastical* concerns: for all those that *forcibly* take away the money or property from their honest neighbours to support a minister which they cannot in conscience attend, are guilty of spiritual tyranny: They take away their money or lay a tax upon them without their consent, and disenable them to support the worship of God agreeable to the dictates of their own consciences. And if this is not enslaving men in their most important interests, in the name of wonder, what is? Our neighbours* have been convinced of

* New Hampshire.

the injustice of such a practice, and have granted liberty of conscience to all denominations of protestants. Nor do I know of any province in *New-England*, in this enlightened age of liberty, but what has done the same, except *T H I S*, which is foremost in espousing the cause of *civil* liberty.—But violence and spoil are still heard in our dear province. It has relieved *Episcopalians*, *Anabaptists* and *Quakers*, but still keeps the yoke of bondage upon the necks of *Calvinists*.* These, though they are

* By *Calvinists* is meant the whole of those doctrines which are usually called *Calvinistic* as they are contained in the *Westminster*, *New-England* and other protestant confessions of faith, that we are generally acquainted with, or at least might to be, also the government of the church agreeable to the Calvinistic or Presbyterian plan. — Both the doctrines and government referred to, we apprehend are founded on the scriptures ; and, viewing them in this light, we are careful to regard them—not merely as terms of peace, but as terms of stated communion.

For men to say that they cheerfully take the holy scriptures for their rule, is, in our opinion, too uncertain to be received as a test of their orthodoxy in the faith, or their agreement in worship and government ; for as to the faith, it is well known, that avowed *Arians*, *Pelagians*, *Arminians*, *Secinians*, *Antinomians*, &c. &c. will as readily say that they take the holy scriptures for their rule, as the strictest Calvinists : But reason itself teaches, that words and syllables, in our English Bible, do not, but sense and meaning do determine whither, and how far men agree with the word of God. We apprehend it necessary to be known what sense men put upon the scriptures, in the distinguishing doctrines of Christianity, in order to *occasional* communion with them ; and how, or in what sense they understand the scriptures relative to church government, in order to stated communion. We are fully persuaded that it is owing to the random way of settling ministers and churches, together with a vile contempt of creeds and confessions, that has been the guilty cause of the many confusions and distresses in the land. No sort of church government fixed, but all is managed to suit the taste of the party concerned ; and all confessions of faith, by which the sense and meaning

and through the shifting scenes of state affairs, have been as dutiful subjects as ever the House of HANOVER had, must be kept in slavery ; while we as one united body are pleading for liberty.

BLESSED be God the several congregations in this town, have *honoured* themselves and done justice in this affair, by cordially agreeing in one united application to our ASSEMBLY with success, that each religious society in the town, should be obliged to pay ministerial charges “ where they meet for public worship ” and they are exempted from “ paying towards the support of the ministry, and from other incidental charges at any other place than where they attend.” This is truly becoming the sons of liberty, and well worthy the imitation of every town in the province. It is no more than our excellent CHARTER allows us, though, it is pleaded, our laws made for ECCLESIASTICAL affairs abridge us of this liberty.

WERE these equitable principles which have been the price of blood, propagated in *ecclesiastical* as *warmly* as in civil concerns, there would be

of scripture may be known, are set aside.—Hence, all seem to jumble together, and make meer *hodge-podge*. Yet we hope better things of some, though we thus speak ; and as to ourselves, we openly declare we cannot receive doctrines in a sense counter to the standards which we have solemnly subscribed. We apprehend that upon the strictest examination they will stand the test, and as to church government, we think it does not depend upon the capricious humours of men, but is of divine original, both as to the thing itself, and the way of administration. Yet if any are otherwise minded respecting government, we are far from stripping them of the Christian character, provided they firmly adhere to the great doctrines of Christianity, which distinguish that from all other religions in the world.

much more peace and social happiness in our parishes than has generally prevailed among us. But whether this privilege be granted to the church or not, yet I am sure the law of reason and equity will stand up in favour of it.

THOUGH I have observed "with high satisfaction, the zeal and exertions of the Americans in defence of their rights and liberties" of a civil kind, and earnestly wish that HE who holds the universe in his hands, may crown their warmest efforts with everlasting success—Yet I own it looks odd to me, that a PROVINCE which holds on *ecclesiastical* tyranny beyond all her sister colonies should be foremost in her attempts and pleas for *civil* liberty.—Nor can I groundedly hope for the smiles of Heaven upon us, in our utmost efforts, if we endeavour to enslave our Christian brethren in their ecclesiastical concerns; for while we plead for liberty on one hand, and promote slavery on the other, our principles are too contracted and corrupt; and if we regard oppression in our hearts the Lord will not hear us. Christian liberty, both civil and ecclesiastical, is the greatest blessing of the kind, that we can enjoy; and therefore to be deprived of either, is the greatest injury we can suffer; and whoever they be that attempt to hold us in the claws of tyranny, must be heinous offenders in the sight of God. All attempts to justify slavery, are but the feeble endeavours of selfishness to oppose the law of nature and divine revelation, and serve to show us the weakness of the judgment and the wickedness of the human heart.

I wish and earnestly pray that our patriotic House of Representatives may be inspired to exert themselves, in the wisest and most effectual way, to put an end to all civil and ecclesiastical oppression, and to make liberty e-

qual to all men inhabiting the province.—This, this would immortalize their names, and all the sons of liberty would rise up and call them blessed. When that time commences it will be a token for good that justice will run down our streets as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

BUT whether success attends our endeavours or not, it becomes us, as men and christians, to assert our natural and constitutional privileges—never to give them up, but if possible to recover and defend them against all malicious claims of haughty and covetous tools of arbitrary power, they are a legacy left us by Christ, the purchase of his blood. And will any tamely submit to be entangled with the yoke of bondage, now Christ has made us free!

SURELY, *My Friends and Townsmen*, you will be very jealous for the defence for our excellent constitution, and where a breach is made upon it you will earnestly contend for its being healed. Neither the high notions of the British Parliament, nor the groundless prejudices in this Province, should intimidate your minds. Where is the brave spirits of our Fore-fathers that ventured life and all that was dear to them, rather, than give up their privileges to the pleasure of *Sir Edmund Androse* and his creatures! Sure, in this enlightned age of liberty, you will not readily yeild to slavery. Now natural and constitutional rites are so well understood, and appear so reasonable you cannot desert the cause, nor grow indifferent about it. I perswade myself, that you, in combination with our brethren, will be more successful than our mother country has some times been, in preserving that reverance and authority which is due to christian liberty.

I pity rather than hate the British parliament, in their tyrannic men-

timents respecting the Colonies. We chuse to be as one body—like *Jerusalem*, as a City COMPACT together. We desire to live in connection with Great-Britain, in a sweet harmony, and are grieved to see the dispoitism that is breaking us asunder. I pity the place-men and pensioners in this Province, who are striving by public measures among ourselves, and private letters to men abroad, to keep up and increate the alienation between us and our mother country. I wish the bleeding wounds may be thoroughly healed, and the true interests of Church and State may govern all denominations in their future contests, and regulate all their claims: They were designed to be mutual benefits; and if they were cordially united in the truth, we might be led forth in the right way of peace, by the hand of *Moses* and *Aaron*. May the virtuous on both sides endeavour, by all probable means, to remove all grounds of complaint, and restore equal liberties—If every one uprightly considered his own happiness as a part of the whole, and inseperable from it, he would feel no disposition to enslave any. All would cheerfully submit to a righteous government in church and state; for they would find all turn to general good, friendship and gratitude would be restored between Great-Britain and her Colonies, love and peace between the various denominations of protestant christians.—Church and state would be mutual helps in this province; and as we are beautiful for situation, we should soon be the joy of the whole land. None would be taxed without his consent, to support a ministry he conscientiously dissented from. The enemies would not roar in parishes, nor break down the carved work with axes and hammers; the same public spirit would reign in all orders and conditions of men, which reigned in Christ Jesus.—If a spirit of Christian benevolence was properly cultivated in all the different classes, *the law* would not bind any one to pay their money to support a

worship which they esteemed corrupt, but where they could with peace and comfort set down with their brethren; and this would not lessen the extent of good order and pleasure nor shorten their duration.

BUT when shall this happy *era* commence! Not in the STATE, as long as fleets and armies are palmed upon us, to threaten destruction in a time of peace—Not as long as the parliament of Great-Britain strive to tax us without our consent.

THE shocking effects of these violent measures we have already felt by the ever memorable tragical scene at *Boston* four years ago! We mourn with our brethren, that the sons of violence and blood were ever suffered to parade the streets of our Metropolis! We feel for them, who saw their streets stained with INNOCENT BLOOD, by worse than butchering Soldiers! Should the Lord arraign the blood-thirsty crew as he did *Cain*, they might add rebellion to their other sin, as he did: But if they should hear GOD say, “What have you done! The voice of your brethren’s blood crieth unto me from the ground;” they would be ready to cry, “Our punishment is greater than we can bear:” They would feel themselves cut off from the church, and forbid to bring any more vain oblations, unpardoned guilt would fill their souls with continual terror. May the awful catastrophe of that evening be ever deeply engraven upon our hearts as it is this day!

I READILY own that I feel upon my mind a great aversion to all enslaving measures, and a strong desire for public liberty. I wish to see all those fetters which parliaments have endeavoured to fix upon us, done away. When will the time come, that fleets and armies shall be rec-

and better employed than to threaten us with bondage and death ! I could also wish for the peace and happiness of the church ; and therefore, that all denominations of protestants might be at liberty to seek their edification in those worshipping assemblies with which they agree in sentiment, and be discharged from ministerial taxes to any but where they attend, as it is in this town, through the benevolent application of its inhabitants. We see many sad consequences of violence in the church ; we have tried force long enough to convince us that we have no reason to be proud of the experiment. Methinks a *collector* has as much reason to tremble at the face of an honest man when he demands his money or property in such a case, as a thief would have at the sight of a sheriff. What benefit has ever accrued to people by the plunder of honest men, who soberly dissent from their brethren—the consequence of so much injustice has been to excite people to devise several schemes to get rid of their fetters. Besides, it is attended with a general loss of credit and confidence in one another. It requires no great degree of virtue and wisdom in a court to put a stop to such gains of ungodliness.

BUT a spirit of liberty is wanting, even among those that are pleading for liberty, and dread slavery. The Church as well as the State must be founded on principles of justice, benevolence and moderation, or there can be no peace. The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then *peaceable*—but envy and strife arise from beneath.

I PRESUME not to dictate the legislators of the people : But it is our duty as Ministers of Christ, to open the nature of justice and oppression. We have a right to say that what any man can call *his*, must remain his, if he agrees to part with it ; and if it is taken away by *force*,

it is an act of injustice. Justice will regulate the happiness of church and state; but oppression will promote their misery. By what bond society and social happiness will be promoted, I know not, as long as they bite and devour one another.

RIGHTeousNESS and mercy are due to all men, especially to those with whom we are nearly connected. The law of nature and the written law of God, ought to be the great maxims of all civil and ecclesiastical policy. It is truly surprising to observe, how *slowly* the principles of freedom prevail respecting the Church in a land so warmly engaged for liberty in the *State*. It has been the policy of some, who are zealous for liberty, to lay their brethren under the severest restrictions on religious accounts, though doubtless if proper freedom was granted, the whole body would feel the blessings of it; for the most effectual method of receiving good from others is to do good to them. Equal liberties granted to all denominations, would naturally tend to beget affectionate union. The time I am persuaded will come, when the restraints laid upon some christians, and the violence used towards them will cease, and there will be as great freedom in the Church as we plead for in the state. It would be a noble effect of laudable ambition in our whole legislative body, if they should follow their neighbours in this matter, or fix upon some better plan for relief. O that court and country may break through the prejudices and selfishness of the age! O that all may be led into the right path to promote truth and social happiness! The path that would make the province peaceful among themselves, and respectable among others! But force and fraud will never effect this blessing, though love and friendship might. And then we should, with a better grace, plead the merits of our cause, whenever called thereto. ^{grace,} ^{gh} it should

be at the expence of life and treasure—the evidence in our favour would shine the brighter in the view of all wise and good men. It would be a good means to convince them that we are contending for our rights and liberties, with a benevolent and christian spirit—by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, through the manifestation of the truth ; and that we dread the defence of liberty by external force—that nothing but meer necessity shall draw us into it.

BUT if these and other equitable measures will not prevail over those that would enslave us, Christian benevolence will inspire us to secure our rights, and repair our injuries at the point of the sword ; for if one man may defend himself and his rights against an assailant, much more may a whole country defend themselves when their rights are invaded, because the concern is greater. In such case, the spirit of Christian benevolence would animate us to fill our streets with blood, rather than suffer others to rob us of our rights. I readily grant that arms are a sad remedy, and the more undesirable where there has subsisted useful connections : But if old friends are disposed to be terrible, if they endeavour to enslave, and bring mischief and misery upon their brethren, this is a false notion of glory, and condemned by true religion. Then it becomes us to take up arms and use them in the nature of a remedy. Such corrosives are painful, but the causes which make them necessary are more dangerous. When nothing else will serve to preserve or restore our liberties, it becomes a duty to make use of arms—We desire liberty with peace, and would gladly live as friends, but if the blessing of liberty cannot be had ^{with} peace, it is lawful and right to enter into a contrary state. If former friends ^{are} now resolved to entangle us with a yoke of bondage, God

forbid that we should suffer them to cut off our limbs and mangle our whole body to gratify their injurious demands. Such terms of peace are no better than what *Nabab* the *Ammonite* proposed to the men of *Jabesh Gilead*, that they would let him thrust out their right eyes, and bring reproach upon all Israel, leaving them one eye to serve him in some mean and servile drudgery. If it should be so that our natural and constitutional liberties cannot be recovered and maintained without repelling force by force; who could hesitate for a moment, about the propriety of taking up arms ! If our brethren will not be easy unless we suffer them to thrust out our right eyes, and enslave our families, it is a very loud call from God, to defend ourselves from their encroachments : And if we go forth in the name and strength of Christ, he will be our sun to guide and animate us, and our shield to defend and give us salvation.

It is matter of deep lamentation that any of the ministry at home, or any pensioners and their tools in the British colonies should distress a free people with any outward inconveniences from a sinful, imperious spirit directly opposite to the genius of the gospel : It is a great pity that those who are so nearly connected in interest, and a long combination productive of their common good and happiness should be broken asunder by unprincipled tyrants and traitors,—traitors to their King and to his loyal subjects ! They deeply offend him who has purchased all our privileges, and who will severely judge and condemn all tyrannizing over a free people. They cannot be justly offended though in this open and undisguised way, I affirm they are acting over the old trade of persecution, rather than we should be free, and the methods of distress are calculated to prevent the

nation and colonies from being a flourishing people, so long as the old connection lasts. The same plan if it should prevail, will issue in most fatal consequences. It has laid waste many flourishing countries, and multitudes, for liberties sake, have been killed all the day long ; the blood of martyrs have run like rivers down the streets of famous cities ; it has put others to cruel mockings, bonds, imprisonments and banishments. Yea it was the same principle that crucified the Lord of life and glory, And as these have been the shocking consequences of such principles prevailing in the church or state, the like may be acted over again, if the principles are not seasonably suppressed.

BUT should we suffer ever so many temporal inconveniences for it, yet, as Christians, we may not give up those rights and privileges that Christ has purchased for and bestowed upon us ; for giving them up, would not only reflect great dishonour upon Christ, but would be inconsistent with the peace and welfare of the people, and therefore be quite intolerable. We hope that HE by whom Kings reign, and Princes decree justice, will inspire our DREAD SOVEREIGN with those feelings of pity, humanity and goodness, which were very conspicuous in his ROYAL GRAND-FATHER ; and dispose him to put a speedy and final end to all those measures of despotism, invented and propagated by a corrupt ministry.

GOD grant, that we may so conduct in our ecclesiastical concerns, as that all denominations of protestants may enjoy equal privileges. I am warranted to tell you, that it has been the opinion of good judges of our charter, that no denomination of protestants can be a legal establish-

ment in the province, so as to interfere with the freedom of another denomination : That if, by *Parish lines*, any of our laws bind men to pay toward the support of a ministry from which they soberly dissent, such laws will be judged a breach of charter, if the matter be properly represented home. I humbly apprehend that, in such a day of jealousy as this is, all of us are called to consider whether there has not been a breach upon our Charter rights in this matter, for if the affair should be complained of, our own arbitrariness may soon bring us into slavery.

MAY that God, who loves righteousness, and hates violence and oppression, dispose all orders of men among us, both in church and state, to put away the evil of our doings, seek judgment, relieve the oppressed ! If mutual benevolence and righteousness should reign among ourselves, we may hope to enjoy the Blessing of liberty : but if we refuse and rebel, we may justly fear being devoured by the sword of those that are watching to enslave us.

F I N I S.