

A VINDICATION OF MINISTER MR. JOHN GILL, FROM THE CAVILS AND INSULTS OF AN IGNORANT AND IMPERTINENT SCRIBBLER

ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF RABBINICAL LEARNING

BY A LOVER OF HUMANITY AND A FRIEND TO LEARNING

A Pamphlet concerning The Importance of Rabbinical Learning, etc. coming to my hands, the subject invited me to read it; but I soon found, that the performance did not answer to what might be expected, from the title page. I was presently convinced the author of it was a bad man, a man of an ill-natured and dogged disposition, a perfect cynic, that unprovoked could write in such a manner he does. The character of the Reverend Mr. Gill, and his writings, against whom this invective is leveled, are too well known, to suffer any prejudice from the performance of so captious and trifling a writer; the consideration of which, one would have thought might have demanded a greater degree of respect to have been shown him, and have secured him from such ill treatment as this he has met with, And as it may be reasonably thought that Mr. Gill is not at leisure through the important business he has upon his hands, and was he, that it would be below him to take notice of such a worthless Writer; and having some taste for rabbinical learning myself, and some little knowledge of it, and to prevent any ill influence this stupid performance may have upon weak minds, I have undertaken to make some animadversions upon it.

The general view of this author is to bring into contempt the writings of the Jewish rabbins; and in order to this he tells abundance of idle stories, said to be found in them; and suggests that such like are the only things contained in them; and therefore nothing good and profitable can be gathered from them, or be of any service for the illustration of the sacred Scriptures; and all this done in the most indecent and abusive manner; a method which has been formerly used for the same purpose, and a sort of treatment men of the greater characters have met with, who have been conversant with Jewish writings. That great and learned man, Mr. Ainsworth, complains of such usage in an advertisement before his notes upon the Psalms, after he had finished and published his learned annotations upon the five books of Moses. His words are: "Whereas I have alleged many of their, (the Jews') interpretations, especially from the Greek and Chaldee, and Maimonides, the chiefest of esteem among them, I am for this blamed; those writers generally condemned; and to make them the more odious, their heretics, fables and falsehoods are displayed;" to which he gives this short answer, and which is a sufficient one to all this author has written; "to object the Jews heretics, fables, and false expositions of many Scriptures, is no sound reason to condemn the good things that are found in them."

As I read the long bead roll of idle tales and romantic stories, given by this man, as told by the Jewish writers, I ever and anon looked to the bottom of the pages, to observe with what authority all this was supported; but could find no reference to any book or author. Mr. Gill does not use his readers in such a manner; whenever he produces any thing out of the Mishnah or Talmud or any Jewish writer, he directs to the book, treatise, chapter, section and page; and it might have been expected, that one who sets up himself as his antagonist should have been master of their writings, and have been able from his own knowledge to

have avouched and supported the things he delivers; but as I read on and came to the close of this wonderful account, how did I bless myself! What a mixture of the passions, of amazement, Indignation and contempt rose up in my mind? When for the truth of this relation of rabbinical fables, I found myself and other readers referred to Purchas's Pilgrimage; an author, I'll venture to say, who never saw the Talmud in his life, and much less read it; and what he has picked out of others, hath been collected by such, who were in the same predicament with himself, and there very likely too from others of the same class. And thus are these stories commonly handed down from one relator to another, until at length they are confirmed by a variety of authors to be the genuine fables of the Jews. This serves to confirm what Mr. Gill has observed, that "Nothing is more common than to represent the rabbins as a set of romantic and fabulous writers, as foolish, stupid and dotards; and this is plentifully done for the most part by such who have never read them." But to return to my author, my resentment began to cool a little when I considered this man's education, according to the account he himself gives of it, Page 6, by which it appears that the first part of his life was spent in reading the histories of Tom Thumb, Jack the Giant killer, Guy, Earl of Warwick, etc.

He thinks he got through these before he was ten years of age, but he is not sure; perhaps he might be twelve or fourteen before he had finished his studies in this sort of classics, and might be of an age to go out an apprentice; and since this has been his course of life, and he has ever since, as it seems, been in trade and business, and still is; it may be presumed that Mr. Purchas, with a man of so mean an education, and of such low reading, is a very great author, and his Pilgrimage perhaps is the top book this man ever read. It is upon this consideration that I can account for and pass over his putting Gemarum for Gemara, and Pandimonium, instead, I suppose, of Pandoemonion; tho', I confess the word pronounced either way is what I never remember to have met with. Perhaps Pantheon ran in the man's head, a temple in Rome, pagan dedicated to all the gods, which he has christened Pandimonium, a word neither Greek nor Latin, but seems designed to point at a place where all the devils met together. But letting these things pass, be it so, that these are such idle tales and fabulous stories in the Talmud, and other Jewish writings, and that they are to be proved to be in them by sufficient authorities, what is all this to the purpose? What tho' there may be many bad things in them, does it follow therefore that there are no good ones? This is very bad reasoning indeed: This author has the assurance (or, if you will, impudence) to say page 31 that it is hard, if not impossible, to find one good thing in the Talmud, and the rest of the Rabbinical writings. I would ask this man whether he has read the Talmud, and the rest of the Rabbinical writings; he ought to have read them before he had expressed himself with such an air of confidence; tho' it is highly probable he never saw the Talmud in his life, and I am very well assured is not able to read one single line in it; and especially what has all this to do with Mr. Gill's exposition of the New Testament? If this man had done any thing to the purpose, he ought to have shown that what is produced in that work out of Jewish writers is of the same kind with these romantic stories; or that there are no such things to be met with in the Mishnah and Talmud, and other writers, which he cites and refers to; or that what is produced is not to the purpose, and does not serve to illustrate any passage of Scripture; or that there were no such rites and usage among the Jews; or that these are not referred to in any part of the New Testament. Till something of this kind is done, it will be to no purpose to object the bad things said to be in

those writings: for a man to observe the bad things in an author in order to bring into contempt and discredit the good things which are in him, argues a very malevolent disposition; and is acting the part of the ill-natured rhapsodist, who collected together, and published all the bad lines in Homer, and took no notice of his good ones. What tho' there are many things wrong in Josephus, in Philo, in the books of the Maccabees, are the good things in them to be neglected and thrown away? Are not these writers justly in credit and esteem notwithstanding, with all men of learning and sense? What though whole volumes might be filled with the fables and falsehoods of heathen writers, must every thing in them that is useful in history, philosophy, morality, and even for the illustration of the sacred Scriptures, be despised and rejected? This would be a discouragement to, and a check upon every branch of literature; yea, it would carry a very severe reflection upon the inspired writers, particularly the apostle Paul, who in his writings has cited the testimonies of the heathen poets, Aratus, Menander, and Epimenides, [Ac 17:28](#); [1Co 15](#); [Tit 1:12](#). What a foolish and wicked part would such a man act, who, in order to discredit and to expose to ridicule and contempt what is produced by the apostle out of their writers, should collect together all the bad things he could find in them? But I have said enough to show the folly and weakness of our author's conduct and reasoning.

It might have been expected from his title page, that he would have given a direct and distinct answer to Mr. Gill's preface to his exposition; and have attempted to have disproved what he there says concerning the antiquity of the Jewish writings he makes use of in his exposition, but nothing of this kind is done. He allows the Targums to be written long before the Incarnation; he takes no notice of the Mishnah, and owns the Talmud was written at the time Mr. Gill says it was. He cavils at and objects to a passage or two in the said preface; one is, that Judaism, properly so called, was a peculiar religion distinct from Christianity, but not contrary to it; whereas he says that that and Christianity were always the same thing, the very same religion. Mr. Gill, I'll venture to say for him, knows very well, nor does he say any thing to the contrary, that Christianity, as to the essentials of it, or the doctrine of salvation by Christ, has been always the same thing in all ages, from the first revelation of it to Adam; but the form in which it has been exhibited has been different. Under the former dispensation it was held forth in types, figures, sacrifices, and carnal ordinances, which is what Mr. Gill means by Judaism, properly so called; an abrogation of which form was made by Christ, and pure naked Christianity divested of such a form, was propagated in the world by the apostles of Christ, by means of preaching the gospel more clearly, and administering ordinances of Christ's appointing; so that Christianity, as to the outward form, may be distinguished, tho' the essence of it has been always the same.

The other passage objected to is, that a work of Maimonides, called Yad Chazaka, is written in pure Hebrew. This man doubts the truth of it; nay, he says, Maimonides could not write, nor did he understand pure Hebrew; yea, he ventures to say, there is not one single line of pure Hebrew in the whole world but in the Bible. One would think this author is a judge of pure Hebrew, and that he has seen all the Hebrew books that are in the world, and particularly has examined Maimonides thoroughly, as to pronounce all this with such a magisterial air; whereas I dare say he never saw the work of Maimonides, nor is he capable of reading any one Hebrew writer, nor of forming any judgment of the difference

between Bible Hebrew and other. No doubt but there is a difference between them, and the preference must be given to the Bible; nor is there any Hebrew so pure as that; and yet Maimonides, in comparison of others, may be said to write in pure Hebrew, which is most clearly the sense in which Mr. Gill is to be understood; since he adds that he wrote "in a clean, neat, and easy language, clear of that crabbed and rugged style in which the Gemara especially is written."

Nor is he alone in his judgment of this matter, both Jews and Christians agreeing with him: As I said before, I have some little knowledge of rabbinical learning; and tho' I know that the testimony of a Jewish rabbi will be despised by this man, yet, as it proves what I affirm, I'll make mention of one, it may have its weight with others, it is a Jewish chronologer of note, R. Abraham Zacuth who affirms that Maimonides composed his *Yad Chazaka* *d jx çdqh ^wçlb* in the Holy Language exceeding pure; and the same testimony is bore to it by many Christian writers, who have always been thought to be good judges of the Hebrew language. The learned Buxtorf speaking of this performance of Maimonides, says of it, that in it the whole Talmudic work is compendiously handled *lingua eleganti Hebraica and perfacili*, in the Hebrew Language elegant and very easy. And to the same purpose Mr. Ainsworth observes^{1[1]} that "these long volumes (meaning the Talmud) were after abridged by Moses, the son of Maimon (called Maimony and Rambam) who lived 1200 years after our Lord's birth; and he set down in plainer Hebrew, the expositions, canons and traditions, according to which they had interpreted the law of God, given by Moses, and practiced the same."

To which may be added what Wolsius of late has affirmed,^{2[2]} that Maimonides wrote this laborious work, *Lingua Hebraica purissima*, in the most pure Hebrew Language. I don't imagine that these authorities will have any weight with this man, and those that adhere to him; all that I produce them for, is to show that some of the best judges of the Hebrew language have been of the same opinion with Mr. Gill. This author treats with contempt the authorities Mr. Gill has produced in favor of the usefulness of Jewish learning for the illustration of the sacred Scriptures, and suggests that these are brought to impose upon the reader; whereas his manifest view is not, as he intimates, to put any truth to the vote, to be carried by a majority; but to show that he is not alone in his sentiments, and that these are not the sudden and single starts of his own mind and fancy. But one thing must not be passed over, and which lies in a marginal note, page 28 that Wagenseil, one of the authors cited by Mr. Gill, calls the very works our author (Mr. Gill) recommends, the fiery darts of Satan. Wagenseil is indeed one of the authors cited by Mr. Gill in favor of the Talmud, and his expressions are very strong; he says, there is no book in the world that can be of that service for the Illustration of the holy Scriptures as the Talmud. And now can any man in his senses think that Wagenseil could so contradict himself as to call this very book the fiery darts of Satan, as this writer insinuates? No, they are not the Mishnah and Talmud, the books which Mr. Gill recommends, and Wagenseil had such an opinion of, as before observed, that he so calls; but some virulent writings of modern Jews, which he published under the title of the fiery darts of Satan, and has given a very learned confutation of some

^{1[1]} Advertisement.

^{2[2]} Bibliothec. Hebrews Volume 1, p. 840.

of them; in which he was greatly assisted by his knowledge of Jewish writings. This man ought to complain to his learned friend who helped him to this note, for imposing upon him in such a manner.

Two or three passages in Mr. Gill's exposition of the New Testament are nibbled at by this writer. He cavils at his note on [Mt 3:1](#) for making John the first administrator of baptism, which he says is not true. He ought to have told us who was the first administrator of baptism, if John was not; since this is advancing a new notion contrary to the sense of men, of all denominations. For though some have been of opinion, that the baptism of Jewish proselytes was before John's time, and that he took some things in his baptism from thence; yet none that I ever heard of, ventured to assert, that Christian baptism, or baptism as it was administered by him, was ever practiced before him. What he means by mentioning another passage in the note on [Mt 23:15](#) along with this, I cannot discern; unless he would suggest a contradiction to the other, which he should have attempted to have proved. He seems to act very cautiously, being aware that the proof of baptism before the times of John depends upon the authorities of the Jewish rabbins; a set of men he don't like, and to expose whom is the general view of his pamphlet.

He gives us a very uncommon piece of criticism on [Mr 3:19-20](#) and yet suggests that the reading of the text he proposes, is easy and well known, and cannot be denied. The version he recommends is this: And they came into the house, and the multitude comes together again, so that it was impossible for them even to eat bread, and they hearing who were with him, exhlzon krazhsai auton, they went out to restrain it, elezon gar oti exesh, for they said, that it is tumultuous. The author of this criticism, whoever he is, for it seems not to be this man's, he is here out of his depths, ought to have supported the sense he gives of the words krates and exishmi by the use of them either in some other parts of New Testament, or in the Septuagint of the old, or in some good classical writer. The former of these may indeed signify to restrain a person, but then it is by laying hands upon him and holding him by force. Now can it be imagined that the few persons that were along with Christ, who went out of the house, were able to lay hands upon, and restrain by mere force the vain multitudes that were crowding about the house? This has something of the marvelous in it, and favors of a rabbinical fable, this man has an aversion to. And as for the latter word, it is generally used to express admiration and astonishment at any thing said or done, that is wonderful; by which persons have been transported beyond themselves, so as to have scarcely been themselves. See [Mr 3:21; 5:42; 6:51; Lu 2:47; 8:56; 24:22; Ac 2:7; 8:9; 9:21; 10:45; 12:16](#). Hence it is used here and in [2Co 5:13](#) is pronounced by this writer a whimsical one, it should seem, because he interprets the good Samaritan of Jesus Christ; which is a sense interpreters generally give into, and therefore, has nothing strange and peculiar in it. He seems to intimate as if Jacob Behm was the first author of this account of the good Samaritan, and therefore ought to have been referred to in the margin; whereas this sense of the parable obtained among Christian writers, ten or twelve hundred years before Jacob Behm was born. Ambrose^{3[3]} in his comment on this passage has these words: "This is not a common Samaritan, who did not despise him whom the priest and Levite despised-The word Samaritan signifies a keeper, the interpretation agrees with this.

^{3[3]} Comment in Luke c. 7:134.

Who is the keeper, but he of whom it is said, The Lord keeps the little ones? And as there is another Jew in the letter and another in the spirit, so there is another Samaritan openly and another secretly. This Samaritan therefore, the descender, who is he, but He that came down from Heaven, and who went up to Heaven; the Son of Man which is in Heaven?"

The two-pence he makes to be the two testaments, and the host, the ministers of the gospel. Gregory Nazianzen, who lived in the fourth century, as the above writer also did, speaking of Christ, says: he was called a Samaritan, and one that had a devil, plhn swzei, but he saved him that went down from Jerusalem, and fell among thieves; and Origen, long before them both, interpreted the good Samaritan of Christ: he first gives the sense of one of the presbyters in his time or before him, explaining the parable after this manner: "The man, that went down is Adam; Jerusalem paradise; Jericho the world; the thieves' contrary powers; the priest the law; the Levite and the prophets; Samaritan Christum the Samaritan Christ; the wounds' disobedience; the beast and the body of the Lord; the inn and the church, which receives all that are willing to enter; the two-pence and the Father and the Son; the host and the governor of the church, to whom the dispensation of things is committed; the return of the Samaritan and the second coming of the Savior"; to which interpretation Origen himself assented; and who goes on to observe, that the word Samaritan signifies a keeper, and adds, this is he that keepeth Israel, who neither slumbers nor sleeps-to whom the Jews said, thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil; who when he denied that he had a devil, did not deny that he was a Samaritan, for he knew himself to be the keeper. This is that Samaritan whose care and help all that are in stand in need of-this Samaritan carries our sins and grieves for us; he carries the man half dead and brings him into the inn, the church, which receives all, and denies not its help to any; to which Jesus invites all, saying, Come unto me, all ye that labor, etc. Thus far this ancient writer, who lived at the beginning of the third century, and so many years before Jacob Behm was in the world, as before observed; A writer I dare say, Mr. Gill never thought worthy of perusing. This man seems to have a respect for poor Jacob, as he calls him, and every like loves its like; but methinks he does not treat him very civilly, in suggesting that his account of the good Samaritan is a whimsical one. What that is I know not; and therefore must leave him and his Teutonic philosopher as being both much of the time past.

It need not be thought strange that this writer should be so much displeased with Mr. Gill's exposition of the New Testament; seeing he seems to have no great opinion of the New Testament itself. Page 4 he says, "the New Testament is wrote history-wise, without one new institution, precept, or idea, in it." But surely the epistles, which are a considerable part of the New Testament, are not historical, but contain doctrinal and practical things, recommended to the churches, or to particular persons; and the ordinances of baptism, and the Lord's supper, were new Institutions, which are not at all mentioned in the Old Testament, and to be met with nowhere but in the writings of the New Testament; and I am inclined to think that every man of sense will find many new ideas in those sacred books, even every man, excepting such as have no ideas at all of any thing. In Page 13, he thinks it a strange thing that "any should attempt to prove the doctrines of Christianity by the New Testament:" But either the New Testament is of divine inspiration, or it is not; if it is not, it ought indeed to be laid aside; but if it is, it should be used as the rule of our faith and practice; and all the doctrines of Christianity are provable by it. In Page 17 he suggests

that the apostles have made use of improper words, words which are not expressive of the ideas contained in those words which they have translated; which bears hard upon the divine Spirit, by whom they were inspired, as to speak with tongues, so to write in a language, and with words most full, proper, pertinent, and accurate. But an author that can give himself such liberties as these is not worthy of any man's notice and regard.

There are many things in this pamphlet which he either cites, or has borrowed from one Mr. Hutcheson, which I shall not concern myself with; my intention being only to take notice of such things in it as relate to Mr. Gill, and to vindicate him from the cavils of this man; and which I think I have sufficiently done, having omitted no one thing he charges him with, or with which he has abused him. As for Mr. Hutcheson; I read some of his books some years ago, but as they were for the most part unintelligible to me, I chose not to meddle with things that are out of my reach; and it would have been well if the author of this pamphlet, I have taken notice of, had been of the same mind.

It seems this man is by occupation a tailor; I don't despise his trade nor him on account of it; it is a very good trade, very useful, honorable and ancient; but it very merrily falls out, that he concludes his pamphlet with a citation out of an anonymous writer; who, in order to expose the Talmud, and the traditions of the Jews, tells some idle stories, and mentions some of their customs and usage, and ends with this: "A tailor may not on that day (the Sabbath-day) wear a needle sticking on his clothes, lest he should seem to carry a weapon-a flea as he runs along may not be caught, if he stops to bite he may, but he must not be cracked. A louse may suffer death: There are sharp disputes among the doctors on this last question."

And since he is pleased to recommend Mr. Gill to be president of a Jewish council to settle their matters, I would observe to him for his comfort, that their rules only respect the Sabbath-day; and that, even was he a Jew, he might wear his needle, catch fleas, and kill lice on other days: And so I shall leave him master of his shop-board, to do all the execution this way he can with his little weapon; and, would he take my advice, it would be much better for him to prick lice than to print pamphlets.

FINIS.

<http://www.reformedreader.org/rbb/gill/avindicationofjohngill.htm>
