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FREDERICK DOUGLASS' PAPER,
ROCHESTER, N. Y.

For Frederick Douglass' Paper.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN A SLAVEHOLDER
AND THE BIBLE.

Slaveholder—I have taken you up, my friend, to find out what you really decide on the subject, so much controverted, and of so much importance to myself. Is there anything you can honestly find fault with in this institution, as exhibited on my plantation, for instance? I take care of my slaves, as they were my own children. I feed and clothe them well; I look after their welfare in every respect, up to the best of my ability; see that their houses are dry, clean and comfortable; I work them less than any of my neighbors, so much so that they threaten to leave me with compliance with existing customs, and even talk of legislative interference; their health is carefully attended to; I hear the gospel every Sabbath, and have meetings among themselves, as often as they please out of working hours. I do not say these things to praise myself, for I know it is my duty to look after their welfare to the utmost of my ability. In short, I seek to carry out towards them, or to all men, the golden rule, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." For you, my friend, have taught me to consider them as such—Now answer my question, put in other words, Do you condemn Slavery absolutely, and without reason?

Bible—Thou shalt not steal."

S—Steal! I abhor the thought! Steal! what do you mean? Ah, I know; you refer to the abolitionist doctrine, that a slaveholder *as such*, is a thief, a man-stealer. But let me tell you, my good friend, that I have nothing to do with the slave-trader. Twenty of my slaves were left me by my father's will. My hand needed more hands, and I paid handsomely (my neighbors said I gave too much for all but one) for the fifteen I have added to them during the last five years. This money is generally considered a fair equivalent for their labor, and what dishonesty is there in such a transaction as this?

Bible—Be not partaker of other men's sins."—1 Tim. v. 22.

S—Why, I thought that belonged to *mine*. I see, however, that it is a principle binding on all Christians. But how does it apply to me, and such as me? You seem to mean me to consider for myself. Ah, you point back to the trade, and say I sanction it, by receiving, as the abolitionists would say, *wicked men*. I confess, that if the trade were as bad as they represented it, the charge would be just. But they are benefited by the exchange of countries. They were, to sum up all their miseries in one, ignorant of the gospel in their own land. Here they hear of the Saviour, and many are saved by faith in Him.

H—As some affirm that we say, Let us do evil, that good may come, whose damnation is just?"—Rom. iii. 8.

S—You mean me to acknowledge that the Jesus principle, "The end sanctifies the means," is false and wicked; and that however much we desire to benefit our fellowmen, we must use holy and righteous means, and those only, to accomplish this object—

I have thought, that, in consideration of the advantages according to the African population, the chief of which I have alluded to, our forefathers were justified in carrying them from their native land with a friendly violence, to benefit them in our own.

E—The weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty, through God, to the pulling down of strong holds." For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against . . . spiritual wickedness (or wicked spirits) in heavenly places."—2 Cor. x. 4. Eph. vi. 10.

S—I admit that violence has, at least, the appearance of coming under "carnal weapons." But is it more than the appearance? For many good men have used, and do use violence.

B—*I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; for he that hateth you, hateth your Father.*—John xiv. 9.

S—I perceive. You remind me that if I am a Christian, I am one in the enjoyment of living fellowship with God. How is it our ministers do not tell us about these things? If a man professes to have experienced religion, and lives a decent life, he passes off for a Christian, like the best. I am sure I felt a great deal when I joined the church eight years back, and I experienced a great change in my feelings. They told me this was religion, and I have never had it questioned to this day. You make me doubt about myself.

B—*He that believeth on the Son, hath life in himself.* "The spirit witnesseth with our spirit, that by no means palliates the iniquity of our wrong doing nor gives us the shadow of a sanction for it.

I—if I say we seek the African's welfare by taking care of him in his imbecile condition, you show me that God requires us to educate him into Christianity; and then, that for ought we can tell, God calls him to some special labor or mission, which requires his liberty as an indispensable condition. Still you must admit that such cases are not the rule, but the exception, and occur, without very rarely.

B—*God hath chosen the foolish things of the world, to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things that are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things, which are not, to bring to nought things that are.*—1 Cor. i. 27, 28.

S—I don't think I ever heard those words before. Yet Mr. Pleasant is a good man, and learned in theology. He came out first in his divinity class. We all think much

for passing so severe a judgment on a large majority of professing Christians—on such men as Washington and Cromwell, to name no more individuals?

B—*I am . . . the truth.* "T_he word is truth."—John xiv. 6. xvii. 17.

S—But these Christians attach a different meaning to the passages in question.—They argue that it is not the action, but the spirit, of resistance, which the Savior forbids; and that the apostle disclaims a carnal handling of the ordinary weapons in use among men.

B—*Why do ye transgress the commandments of God by your tradition? . . . Thus have we made the commandments of God of none effect by your tradition.*"—*In vain do ye worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.*—Matt. xv. 1. Cor.

S—You are severe on the many distinguished and excellent divines who have so numerously upheld the views I mentioned. Is it not presumptuous in me to set my private judgment against the opinion of so many wise men of God?

B—*Though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.*—Gal. i. 8. "I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. . . . If any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, &c., . . . the fire shall try every man's work. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he, himself, shall be saved; yet so by fire."—1 Cor. iii. 15. "Let God be true, but every man is a liar."—Rom. iii. 4. "Who then is Paul or Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed . . . Therefore let no man glory in men."—1 Cor. iii. 5, 21. "Not that we are sufficient to think anything as of ourselves but our sufficiency is of God."—2 Cor. iii. 5.

S—You lead me a great deal further than I meant to go; however, I wish to be thorough in the matter. I should be a trifler if I did not. And I confess I find it very interesting to follow you in this examination of principles, though I have to struggle hard to maintain my own. And I have come to the full determination that none shall be borned to my own, but those that can bear the test of truth. From the string of passages you have poured upon me, I conclude that you would have me place no confidence in any, even the most holy, class of men, as men. What am I to do? Where shall I go for authority on all these "controverted points?"

B—*To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.*—Is. viii. 20.

S—in other words, *you* are the authority.

B—*All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is, profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*—2 Tim. iii. 16, 17.

S—Very good, very good. And they say you explain yourself. I accept your authority, but how interpret passage which may be taken in different senses, if I may not accept any man as my final interpreter of your meaning? How I defend, on my own judgment, if I cannot on that of others?—What guarantees have I of coming to correct conclusions?

B—*Ye have unctio[n] from the Holy One, and ye know all things.*—1 John i. 20. —*The spirit of truth . . . will guide you into all truth.*—John xvi. 13.

S—In other words, *you* are the authority.

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S—You suggest that, if such a contingency should arrive, in the ordinary course of events, I am yet to deal by my poor bosotted or vicious neighbor, as I would in his place, be he deformed by vice, that I confer a real benefit on them by becoming their master, to control and hinder them from rushing into absolute destruction.

B—*As ye would that men would do to you, so to you.*

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S—You mean me to infer that a man must be free, or he cannot follow out the leading of this spirit in *all circumstances*. But surely we must admit the possibility of human relationship, which, tho' binding in its nature, is yet no obstacle to the operations of the spirit of God.

B—*Where the spirit of the Lord is there is liberty.*—2 Cor. iii. 17.

S—If I get your meaning aright, it is that whatever may be a Christian's relative responsibility, his duty to his God is his pre-eminent responsibility, and to this all others must give way. But in order to the carrying out of this direct responsibility to God, no human relationship must or can be supremely binding. This is true as a principle. But we are speaking of the relationship in general. And you will not claim that many, even intelligent christians, are in the habit of exercising this close dependence on God, and consequent independence of man.

B—*Do you mean to say that I am to depend on the spirit of God, to guide me in my judgment, so that I may be preserved from false conclusions? This seems to be the force of your quotations.* If this is so, the difficulty will be to distinguish between His guidance, and the promptings of fanaticism. For Satan can disguise himself as an "angel of light," as you elsewhere warn us.—2 Cor. xi. 14.

B—*If thine shall be full of light.* "If we say we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another." And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son, Jesus Christ.—Math. vi. 22. John i. 6, 7, 8.

S—You have brought me on high and holy ground. How dare I talk of fellowship with the Supreme?

B—*He that hateth the Son, hath life; he that hateth not the Son of God, hath not life.*—1 John v. 12. —*If any man have not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*—Rom. viii. 9. —*He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him.*—John iii. 36.

S—But I am not an unbeliever! I am a member of a church.

B—*He that hath seen me, hath seen the Father.*—John xiv. 9.

S—I perceive. You remind me that if I am a Christian, I am one in the enjoyment of living fellowship with God. How is it our ministers do not tell us about these things? If a man professes to have experienced religion, and lives a decent life, he passes off for a Christian, like the best. I am sure I felt a great deal when I joined the church eight years back, and I experienced a great change in my feelings. They told me this was religion, and I have never had it questioned to this day. You make me doubt about myself.

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of him; he makes very fine sermons. How is it I never have heard these things before?

B—*If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the ditch.*

S—Severe, very severe! Yet it does seem as if I had been blind in many things till now—things Mr. Pleasant ought to have taught us about. My honored friend, I never thought of you as I ought. You have set me thinking to-day as never before. I shall never forget this interview. You have said so much, that I cannot deceive myself any longer as to my being a Christian; for I never had that witness in myself, which you have shown me to be an indispensable mark for the individual of real faith in Christ. I cannot rest till I have examined into my own state; and with your help, and that of the Holy Spirit to whom you direct me, I hope I shall soon know what it is to have a well-grounded hope of salvation through the Savior. But the question of slavery presses, from peculiar circumstances, in a special manner on my mind. I must decide, I hope I shall, as to what my duty is to the slaves.

S—You are severe on the many distinguished and excellent divines who have so numerously upheld the views I mentioned. Is it not presumptuous in me to set my private judgment against the opinion of so many wise men of God?

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B—*As ye would that men would do to you, so to you.*

S—You repeat my words. Will you explain?

B—*As ye would that men should do to you, do you also to them likewise.*—Luke vi. 31.

S—But doubtless Joseph was a good man, and seeking faithfully to serve God and his neighbor;—in short, to carry out the spirit of this precept, (which God taught His people in ancient as well as later days, of course) when he bought the Egyptians for his king with *Genes* xlvi, 16, 26.

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