

# THE WORKS OF JOHN WITHERSPOON

## VOLUME I

An Essay on Justification,  
a Practical Treatise on Regeneration,  
and Sermons I–XVI

John Witherspoon

*Annotated Edition*



*Ligature*

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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE

John Witherspoon (1723–1794) was a Presbyterian minister, educator, signer of the Declaration of Independence, and president of the College of New Jersey. His preaching, teaching, and public service shaped American Presbyterianism and the founding generation.

This volume follows Volume I of the Philadelphia edition of 1802, the second American edition, revised and corrected. It opens with the American recommendations and advertisement. It then presents John Rodgers's memorial sermon, Witherspoon's works on justification and regeneration, and sixteen sermons. The 1802 edition governs the order, titles, sermon numbers, and those edition documents. John Rodgers wrote *The Faithful Servant Rewarded* for Witherspoon's funeral. It is the biographical account the American editors placed before the works.

Ligature collated every page against the Princeton copy and completed a second visual proof against the Harvard copy. New York Public Library pages resolved text lost through damage or cropping.

This is a faithful reading edition. It preserves Witherspoon's words, spelling, sentence order, paragraph order, headings, and source notes. It removes running heads, printed page numbers, signatures, and other production matter. It rejoins words divided at page and line endings. It uses modern quotation marks, apostrophes, spacing, Bible-book abbreviations, and Arabic Scripture chapter numbers.

Numbered footnotes reproduce notes from a source edition. Notes introduced by "Editor's note" identify a person, define an obsolete term, or supply needed historical context. They do not recast Witherspoon's doctrine.

The historical conversations identify the main disputes behind the works. The annotated source guide identifies books, writers, and movements named or clearly implied in the volume. Inferred identifications are marked as such. The Scripture Index identifies passages cited or quoted in the volume. It corrects clear printed citation errors within the index while leaving the reading text unchanged.

—The Editors  
Ligature Press



## RECOMMENDATIONS

Philadelphia, July 26th, 1799.

Dr. Witherspoon's character as a writer is so highly and deservedly esteemed by all the friends of Evangelical truth, who have been acquainted with his publications, that it is presumed to be superfluous to solicit their patronage by any commendation of the work now proposed for publication. To those who have not been favoured with the perusal of the Doctor's Sermons and Essays, the subscriber takes the liberty to observe, that their merit is superior to their praise.

John B. Smith, Minister  
of the Third Presbyterian Church,  
Philadelphia.

Philadelphia, July 30th, 1799.

Sir,

It has given me much pleasure to hear that you are about to publish an edition of the works of the late Dr. Witherspoon. I know not how you could do a greater service to the public than by this undertaking; and I sincerely hope you may find it advantageous to yourself. In all the Doctor's tracts there is manifest that closeness and clearness of thought, that acuteness of discernment and accuracy of discrimination, that faculty of separating the matter discussed from every thing extraneous, that constant attention to radical principles, and systematic consistency, that lucid order, and that power of presenting his whole subject in the most striking and impressive manner to the mind of the reader, which distinguish the writer of penetration and comprehensive views. His style is uniformly simple and nervous — perfectly intelligible to those who have not had the advantages of education, and yet pleasing to those whose taste is the most cultivated and correct. The Doctor has given specimens of talent as a critic, a satyrst and a politician, which demonstrate that he might have attained high eminence in each of these characters. But from a sense of duty, as well as from a love to the employment, he devoted himself principally to the discussion of religious truth; and always with a view to its practical application. His Sermons and Essays on various topics in divinity, will be read with pleasure and with profit by serious Christians of all denominations. The pious and eloquent Wilberforce has noticed them with approbation in his late popular book.

If the Doctor's works had been generally read in this country, it would be equally unnecessary and assuming for me to characterize or recommend them. But for ten years past I believe they have not been vended by any American bookseller, and I am informed they are now out of print in Britain. If, therefore, you suppose that my opinion of them will be any way serviceable to you in their publication, you are at liberty to use what I have here written for that purpose.

Yours sincerely,  
Ashbel Green.

Mr. Woodward.

New-York, August 6th, 1799.

Dear Sir,

It was with singular satisfaction I learned you were issuing proposals for printing the works of the late Rev. Dr. Witherspoon—those already in print, are justly esteemed by all good judges on both sides of the Atlantic, among the first in our language on the subjects of which they treat—the addition you contemplate of several Discourses and small Tracts never yet published, will not a little enrich your collection, and render it deservedly acceptable to the Friends of Literature and Piety, of all denominations. Your success in this business will give heart-felt pleasure to

Your Friend and Humble Servant,  
John Rodgers.

Mr. William W. Woodward,  
Printer of Philadelphia.

# ADVERTISEMENT

## *To the Second American Edition*

In offering to the public this edition of the works of Dr. Witherspoon, the editor cannot forbear to express his great satisfaction at the liberal and extensive patronage he has received. Without pretending to be less influenced than is usual by a regard to personal emolument, he can still say with truth, that much of his gratification is derived from considerations of another and a higher kind. He views it as no inconsiderable proof of the good dispositions of a great proportion of his countrymen, that in almost every quarter of the union, there has been such a demand for the writings of Dr. Witherspoon, as to warrant a second edition of his works within a year after the publication of the first; that the demand seems to be still increasing; and that men of the first reputation and influence are among his subscribers. In religion, in morals, in taste, and in politics, the principles which the Dr. has inculcated are of the soundest and purest kind; and that these should be popular, cannot but be considered as the best cause of felicitation to the country in which the fact is realized.

Animated by the countenance which he has received, the editor has used his best endeavors to free the present edition from the imperfections of the former. The whole has been attentively and separately reviewed by two gentlemen of letters, for the purpose of correcting the errors in language, spelling and pointing, which had before escaped attention. No attempt, however, has been made to alter the Dr.'s phraseology, this being considered as an unjustifiable license, but only to rectify those mistakes which were fairly imputable to inadvertence, or chargeable to the printers who have published his pieces either in this country or in Europe. The business of inspecting the proof sheets the editor has taken wholly on himself, and he insists that no error of any consequence will be found, though he is sensible that absolute perfection in this particular is scarcely attainable.

In this edition the arrangement of the several tracts is very different from any that has heretofore been made. Discussions which relate to the same or similar subjects, or which belong to the same class or denomination of composition, have generally been kept together. Some of these, it will be observed, were written in an earlier, and some in a later part of the author's life; some in Scotland and some in America; but it was judged better to put them in an order dictated by the nature

of the subject, than in one which should correspond to the various periods at which they were composed. The time and circumstances to which they refer may commonly be learned from their contents.

As the whole of the Dr.'s works are now collected, it is proper to specify distinctly those that are posthumous: for as no order or intimation was given by himself relative to the publication of any of his pieces after his death, he ought not to be charged either with the inaccuracy of compositions which he did not design for the press, or with finally determining to publish what he might have written with that intention, but afterwards resolved to suppress. It will be remembered then, that in these volumes, the following pieces are posthumous, viz.—The lectures on Moral Philosophy, Eloquence and Divinity: The sermons entitled, Devotedness to God—The righteous scarcely saved, and the wicked certainly destroyed—The success of the gospel entirely of God—The yoke of Christ—The glory of the Redeemer in the perpetuity of his work—The petitions of the insincere unavailing.—The essays entitled, Observations on the improvement of America—Reflections on public affairs—On the controversy about independence—On conducting the American controversy—Thoughts on American liberty—Memorial and manifesto of the United States—A description of the State of New-Jersey—Aristides—On the Federal City—On the Georgia constitution<sup>1</sup>—Supplication to the elders of the church of Scotland.—The speeches entitled, On the interest of loan office certificates—On the conference proposed by Lord Howe—On the confederation—On the finances—On the appointment of plenipotentiaries—On the convention with General Burgoyne—On the transportation of Dr. C——. Defence in the synod of Glasgow.—The addresses or letters entitled, On the proposed market in General Washington's camp—Address to General Washington—On the affairs of the United States—On the contest between Great Britain and America.

Whatever praise or blame the publication of the pieces here specified may be thought to deserve, the editor takes to himself. They had not probably been preserved if his exertions had not been used in bringing them to light. He has to lament that the Lectures on Divinity, and a number of the sermons and speeches, as well as some of the essays and letters, are unfinished. For the lectures and sermons, however, he thinks that no apology will be thought necessary; and for the rest he can only say, that the parts which are given appeared to him so valuable, as to

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<sup>1</sup>It is supposed that some of these essays, particularly the three last, may have been published in the newspapers of the day. But this is not certainly known. Copies of them in the Dr.'s own hand writing, were found among his papers.

be worth preserving, though the whole could not be obtained. Sometimes they cast light on the transactions of congress, or on the history of the revolutionary war of our country: sometimes they serve to exhibit the peculiar character and genius of the author, or to make known some circumstance of his life which will afford gratification to his friends: and sometimes they contain a few ponderous or splendid thoughts, which, like fragments of golden ore, are precious, though they are found detached from the mine. It is hoped that not much will be observed, that even suspicion itself will impute merely to a desire of swelling the volumes; and the Dr.'s manner is so striking in all, that no one acquainted with it will doubt that the whole has proceeded from his pen.

In the former edition the following note was prefixed to the lectures on Moral Philosophy:

In justice to the memory of Dr. Witherspoon, it ought to be stated that he did not intend these lectures for the press, and that he once compelled a printer who, without his knowledge, had undertaken to publish them, to desist from the design, by threatening a prosecution as the consequence of persisting in it. The Dr.'s lectures on morals, notwithstanding they assume the form of regular discourses, were in fact, viewed by himself as little more than a syllabus or compend, on which he might enlarge before a class at the times of recitation; and not intending that they should go further, or be otherwise considered, he took freely and without acknowledgment from writers of character, such ideas, and perhaps expressions, as he found suited to his purpose. But though these causes would not permit the Dr. himself to give to the public these sketches of moral philosophy, it is believed that they ought not to operate so powerfully on those into whose hands his papers have fallen since his death. Many of his pupils whose eminence in literature and distinction in society give weight to their opinions, have thought that these lectures, with all their imperfections, contain one of the best and most perspicuous exhibitions of the radical principles of the science on which they treat that has ever been made, and they have very importunately demanded their publication in this edition of his works: Nor is it conceived that a compliance with this demand, after the explanation here given can do any injury to the Dr.'s reputation. And to the writer of this note it does not seem a sufficient reason that a very valuable work should be consigned to oblivion, because it is in some measure incomplete, or because it is partly a selection from authors to whom a distinct reference cannot now be made.

It may be remarked that the lectures on Eloquence and Divinity, though equally compendious with those on Moral Philosophy, do not seem to need any acknowledgment in regard to the liberty taken of borrowing from other authors. They are in a remarkable degree original. It may, perhaps, be proper to state, what is known to

hundreds, that the lectures on Eloquence were written exactly as they now appear before Blair's lectures on the same subject were ever in print. Dr. Witherspoon has been heard to declare explicitly, that no communication whatever took place between him and Dr. Blair, relative to the topics which they have both discussed; and the correspondence which appears in their leading ideas, he used to remark, was a striking proof of the lasting effect produced by imbibing the same principles and studying under the same masters in early life.

The editor has only to state farther, that he most sincerely regrets that no more of the manuscript sermons of Dr. Witherspoon can be obtained. Of many excellent discourses which he has been heard to deliver, not a trace can now be found. They were probably committed to the flames through mistake, with a large collection of his papers which he ordered to be burned a little before his death.

The Editor.

## PREFACE

The following Treatises were originally published at different times, and some of them on particular occasions; but the attentive reader will easily perceive one leading design running through the whole. The author hath long been of opinion, that the great decay of religion in all parts of this kingdom, is chiefly owing to a departure from the truth as it is in Jesus, from those doctrines which chiefly constitute the substance of the gospel. It may perhaps be justly imputed to other general causes in part, and in some measure to less universal causes in particular places; but as all moral action must arise from principle, otherwise it ought not to be called by that name, the immediate and most powerful cause of degeneracy in practice, must always be a corruption in principle.

I am sensible that many will be ready to cry out on this occasion, "Such notions arise from narrowness of mind and uncharitable sentiments." I answer, that it is surprising to think how easily the fashionable or cant phrases of the age, will pass among superficial thinkers and readers, without the least attention either to their meaning, or to the evidence on which they are founded.

Thus at present, if a man shall write or speak against certain principles, and stile them pernicious, it will be thought a sufficient vindication of them to make a beaten common-place encomium on liberty of conscience and freedom of enquiry. Blessed be God, this great and sacred privilege is well secured to us in this nation: But pray, is it not mine as well as yours? And is it not the very exercise of this liberty for every man to endeavor to support those principles which appear to him to be founded on Reason and Scripture, as well as to attack, without scruple, every thing which he believes to be contrary to either.

Let it also be observed, that if freedom of inquiry be a blessing at all, it can be so for no other reason than the excellence and salutary influence of real truth, when it can be discovered. If truth and error are equally safe, nothing can be more foolish than for a man to waste his time in endeavoring to distinguish the one from the other. What a view does it give us of the weakness of human nature, that the same persons so frequently hold inconsistent principles? How many will say the strongest things in favor of an impartial search after truth, and with the very same breath tell you, "It is of no consequence at all, either for time or eternity, whether you hold one opinion or another."

These reflections are only designed to procure a candid unprejudiced hearing to what is offered in the following pages, in defence of what appears to me the fundamental doctrines of the gospel, which are now so greatly neglected, or so openly despised. I am encouraged to this republication by the great demand there has been for some of the pieces, particularly *The Essay on Justification*.

I must observe here, that I have received several letters on this subject, desiring that the phrase imputed righteousness might be changed, as liable to great exceptions; a request which I would readily have complied with, if it could be made appear to be either unscriptural or dangerous. But as I apprehend it is fully warranted by Rom. 4:6. and many other passages; so I do not see what can be understood by it, different from, or more dangerous than, forgiveness of sin and acceptance with God, not for our own but for Christ's sake. As the case stands, therefore it is to be feared, that a studied endeavor to avoid the expression would do more harm on the one hand than it could do service on the other.

In the *Treatise on Regeneration*, now first published, the same general design is pursued, but in a way more directly practical; and indeed I am fully convinced, that it is not only of much greater moment to make experimental than speculative Christians, but that to explain and enforce the doctrines of the gospel is a better way to produce an unshaken persuasion of their truth, than to collect and refute the cavils of adversaries, which, though they are often trifling, are notwithstanding innumerable. I hope this will excuse the introducing several passages of Scripture in the last mentioned *Treatise*, and applying them on what appears to me to be their obvious meaning, without taking the least notice of the unwearied pains frequently taken by wire drawing critics to interpret them in a contrary sense.

London, June, 1764.

J. W.

# THE FAITHFUL SERVANT REWARDED

## FULL ORIGINAL TITLE

The Faithful Servant Rewarded: A Sermon, Delivered at Princeton, before the Board of Trustees of the College of New-Jersey, May 6, 1795, occasioned by the death of the Rev. John Witherspoon, D.D. LL.D. President of said College, by John Rodgers, D.D. Senior Minister of the United Presbyterian Churches, in the city of New-York.

Published by particular request of the Board.

## MATT. 25:21

“His Lord said unto him, ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.’”

The doctrine of a future state of rewards and punishments, lies deep at the foundation of our holy religion: It is a doctrine perfectly consonant to reason and supported by it; and is either asserted, or justly taken for granted, in every page of the sacred oracles. This is the immortality, for the blessedness of which we became incapacitated, by our apostacy from God; and that, for the enjoyment of which, it is one great design of the religion of Jesus Christ to prepare us. The whole frame of this religion is wisely calculated for this end. Among the many evidences of these truths, we may appeal to the discourses of our Divine Master; and particularly to this, of which our text is a part.

In the preceding chapter, he had given his disciples an instructive discourse on the certainty and solemnity of his second coming. He continues the subject in this chapter, and enforces the great duty of preparation for it, by the parable of the ten virgins, from the first verse to the thirteenth; by the parable of the talents, from thence to the thirtieth verse; and by a more particular account of the process of the judgment of the great day, from thence to the end of the chapter.

The more immediate design of the parable of the talents, of which our text is a part, is to enforce the duty, and illustrate the happiness of being prepared for giving up our account, when he shall come to judge the world in righteousness. You may read it at your leisure. The “man travelling into a far country,” in this parable means our Lord himself; who is the great head of his church, which is his family.

The “servants,” of whom we here read, mean all professing Christians; all who call themselves the servants of Christ, whatever their nation or denomination may be; though some suppose the Ministers of the Gospel are more particularly intended.

By the talents, we are to understand the various gifts of Heaven, whether of a common or of a special nature. They include the bounties of Providence, such as health, strength, reason, genius, riches, honor, power, learning, reputation, the several advantages arising from our stations in life; and, together with these, those graces of the spirit that constitute the Christian temper. These are all so many talents put into our hands, to be improved for God, and the best interests of our fellow-creatures; and they are different to different persons. To one God gives more of these gifts or graces, and to another less; which is designed in the parable by the master’s giving to one servant five talents, and to another two, and to another one.

By “the Lord of those servants coming, after a long time, to reckon with them,” we are to understand that particular judgment which every one passes under at death, when our final states are determined: and also, and principally, our Lord’s coming to judge the world in righteousness, at the last day, “When every one shall receive the things done in the body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.” At both these solemn periods, the faithful servant of Christ, whatever his character and station in life may have been, shall be received with a “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

There are two things in these words that particularly deserve our notice. The character of those who shall meet with the approbation of their Lord, in the great day of final awards; they have been good and faithful servants. And the reward such shall receive, on that solemn occasion, from the judge of quick and dead—They shall be each one received with a “Well done, thou good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”

Agreeably to this view of my text, I shall,

I. Briefly consider the character of the good and faithful servant of Christ.

II. The nature of that reward here promised to all such, in the great day of the Lord.

Let us enquire,