

circumcision is *that* of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Aspiration.] SUFFER us not, O Lord, to rest in the externals of religion, or to make a vain boast of our relation to thee, while we are destitute of the power of godliness. But grant us the true circumcision of the heart, that we may love thee with a supreme affection, be subject to thy authority, and sincerely obey thy commands. Amen.

CHAP. III.

1—8 *The apostle answers some objections which might be raised against what he had advanced.* 9—18 *He proves that all men are sinners, whether they be Jews or Gentiles.* 19—31 *He then applies this to the main point he had in view, that justification is only by the free grace of God, through faith in the righteousness of Jesus Christ.*

WHAT advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?

2 Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

3 For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

4 God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

5 But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man.)

6 God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

7 For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner?

8 And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.

flesh," and is merely ritual and ceremonial; "but he is a Jew who is one inwardly," in the secret recesses of his soul; and the true "circumcision is that of the heart," in the putting away of that inward impurity which is so offensive to God, Deut. x. 16. and xxx. 6. Jer. iv. 4. This is the circumcision which is "in the spirit," consisting in a change made there by the Holy Spirit himself, and not in an external conformity to "the letter" of the law, of which the worst of men may be capable. The person of whom I now speak is one, "whose praise is not of men, but of God," who knoweth the heart.

CHAP. III. Ver. 1—6. *What advantage then hath the Jew?*] The whole of the Old Testament implies and teaches, that the posterity of Abraham were peculiarly favoured of God, and distinguished from the heathen world by many privileges. The apostle clearly shows, that he did not mean to deny this, while he maintained that these outward privileges were not a sufficient ground of hope respecting justification before God, and eternal salvation. It is asked by the objector, "What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?" To which the apostle answers, "Much every way," or in all respects; "chiefly, because unto them were committed the oracles of God;" the law of Moses, the writings of the prophets, and the predictions concerning the Messiah. This, by the way, is a remarkable testimony to the divine inspiration of the Old Testament; the matters contained in it are "the oracles of God." It behoves us to consider, that the scriptures are committed to us also, as an invaluable treasure, of which we ought to make the most diligent use, for our own advantage, and for the advantage of all about us. "For what it some did not believe" these oracles of God, but rejected that Messiah which they held forth, "shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?" No. It could not make void the veracity and faithfulness of God in his promises concerning the Messiah; for the Father sent his Son at the appointed time, to be the Saviour of the world, according to what he had promised. "God forbid" that any thought-like this should ever be entertained, that the veracity of God may be nullified by the unbelief of men. Let the blessed Jehovah ever be acknowledged to be true and faithful, though every man be "esteemed a liar," and unfit to have any confidence reposed in him; as it is written, "That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings," or in the words which thou hast spoken, "and mightest overcome when thou art judged," or called into judgment, Psalm li. 4. The word signifies, "that thou mightest carry the cause;" that they, who insolently dare to arraign the equity of thy conduct, may be put to confusion. David, in the passage quoted, acknowledged, that God was justified in the threatenings denounced against him by the prophet Nathan. This is brought in to prove, that God is always true to his word, whatever unfaithfulness may be found in men. But it may be farther objected, if our unrighteousness give occasion to the more illustrious display of divine justice, will not

God be unrighteous if he take vengeance on us for those actions which eventually set forth his glory?—This objection the apostle introduced "as a man," who is an unbeliever, who wishes to justify himself, and find fault with the sentence of God against him. But the apostle rejects the thought with abhorrence, "God forbid," or, literally, "let it not be." Let it never be supposed that God cannot justly punish those crimes which make way for the display of his glory. "For how then could God judge the world?" The Judge of all the earth will do right, Gen. xviii. 25. And therefore he cannot be unrighteous in taking vengeance on sinners. The great truth of God's judging the world in righteousness should for ever silence all our doubtings of his justice, and all reflections upon the equity of his proceedings. The sentence of the supreme court, from whence lies no appeal, is not to be called in question. The apostle's argument stands thus, If God be unjust in punishing sinners, then he cannot be the Judge of the world: but he is the Judge of the world; therefore he is not unjust; and they are unjust and wicked who charge him with injustice. "He is a rock, his work is perfect; all his ways are judgment; just and right is he."

Ver. 7, 8. *For if the truth of God hath more abounded, &c.*] The apostle is not speaking his own language; for he says, "I speak as a man," a wicked man, an objector, who makes this wretched use of the doctrine I have advanced. It is a most vile suggestion, an inference which at first sight appears too black to be urged, and fit to be cast out with abhorrence. The objector says, "If the truth of God hath more abounded to his glory, by means of my lie," that is, my falsehood and wickedness of any kind; if he has taken occasion to accomplish his own word, and the honour of his administration by what I have said or done, why yet am I also judged as a sinner?" Why am I arraigned for that as a crime, which God overrules for his glory?—But sentiments of this kind, if admitted, would justify the greatest crimes in the world, and confound the nature of good and evil. "And not rather, as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come." As if the apostle had said to the objector, Why do not you go on? Why do you stop here, and not rather say, as we are evil spoken of, and unjustly reproached; for some ignorantly and audaciously "affirm that we say" and teach such doctrine as this, "Let us do evil, that good may come." This was a slander cast upon the preaching of Paul, and of his fellow apostles; and we find the same reproach is thrown out upon the ministers of the gospel, who advance the same truths, in later days. Ministers are charged with holding and teaching such things as they utterly detest and abhor. Should this be thought strange, when Christ himself was charged with being in league with Beelzebub? It is an artifice of the prince of darkness to cast dirt upon the servants of God, to hinder their usefulness, and to harden men's hearts against the truth. But the apostle adds, "Whose damnation is just." That is, the condemnation