

CHAPTER 2

The scope of the first two chapters of this epistle may be gathered from ~~ROM~~ Romans 3:9, “We have before proved both Jews and Gentiles that they are all under sin.” This we have proved upon the Gentiles (Romans 1), now in this chapter he proves it upon the Jews, as appears by v. 17, “thou art called a Jew.”

- I. He proves in general that Jews and Gentiles stand upon the same level before the justice of God, to v. 11.
- II. He shows more particularly what sins the Jews were guilty of, notwithstanding their profession and vain pretensions (v. 17 to the end).

~~ROM~~ ROMANS 2:1-16

EQUITY OF THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT

In the former chapter the apostle had represented the state of the Gentile world to be as bad and black as the Jews were ready enough to pronounce it. And now, designing to show that the state of the Jews was very bad too, and their sin in many respects more aggravated, to prepare his way he sets himself in this part of the chapter to show that God would proceed upon equal terms of justice with Jews and Gentiles; and now with such a partial hand as the Jews were apt to think he would use in their favour.

I. He arraigns them for their censoriousness and self-conceit (v. 1): *Thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest.* As he expresses himself in general terms, the admonition may reach those *many masters* (~~SORE~~ James 3:1), of whatever nation or profession they are, that assume to themselves a power to censure, control, and condemn others. But he intends especially the Jews, and to them particularly he applies this general charge (v. 21), *Thou who teachest another teachest thou not thyself?* The Jews were generally a proud sort of people, that looked with a great deal of scorn and contempt upon the poor Gentiles, as not worthy to be set with the dogs of their flock; while in the mean time they were themselves as bad and immoral — though not idolaters, as the Gentiles,

yet sacrilegious, v. 22. *Therefore thou art inexcusable*. If the Gentiles, who had but the light of nature, were inexcusable (~~1~~ Romans 1:20), much more the Jews, who had the light of the law, the revealed will of God, and so had greater helps than the Gentiles.

II. He asserts the invariable justice of the divine government, v. 2, 3. To drive home the conviction, he here shows what a righteous God that is with whom we have to do, and how just in his proceedings. It is usual with the apostle Paul, in his writings, upon mention of some material point, to make large digressions upon it; as here concerning the justice of God (v. 2), That the *judgment of God is according to truth*, — according to the eternal rules of justice and equity, — according to the heart, and not according to the outward appearance (~~1~~ 1 Samuel 16:7), — according to the works, and not with respect to persons, is a doctrine which we are all sure of, for he would not be God if he were not just; but it behoves those especially to consider it who condemn others for those things which they themselves are guilty of, and so, while they practise sin and persist in that practice, think to bribe the divine justice by protesting against sin and exclaiming loudly upon others that are guilty, as if preaching against sin would atone for the guilt of it. But observe how he puts it to the sinner's conscience (v. 3): *Thinkest thou this, O man?* O man, a rational creature, a dependent creature, made by God, subject under him, and accountable to him. The case is so plain that we may venture to appeal to the sinner's own thoughts: “Canst thou think that *thou shalt escape the judgment of God?* Can the heart-searching God be imposed upon by formal pretences, the righteous Judge of all so bribed and put off?” The most plausible politic sinners, who acquit themselves before men with the greatest confidence, cannot *escape the judgment of God*, cannot avoid being judged and condemned.

III. He draws up a charge against them (v. 4, 5) consisting of two branches: —

1. Slighting the goodness of God (v. 4), *the riches of his goodness*. This is especially applicable to the Jews, who had singular tokens of the divine favour. Means are mercies, and the more light we sin against the more love we sin against. Low and mean thoughts of the divine goodness are at the bottom of a great deal of sin. There is in every wilful sin an interpretative contempt of the goodness of God; it is spurning at his bowels, particularly the goodness of his patience, his forbearance and

long-suffering, taking occasion thence to be so much the more bold in sin, ^{<281>}Ecclesiastes 8:11. *Not knowing*, that is, not considering, not knowing practically and with application, that *the goodness of God leadeth thee*, the design of it is to lead thee, *to repentance*. It is not enough for us to know that God's goodness leads to repentance, but we must know that it leads *us* — *thee* in particular. See here what method God takes to bring sinners to repentance. He leads them, not drives them like beasts, but leads them like rational creatures, allures them (^{<284>}Hosea 2:14); and it is goodness that leads, bands of love, ^{<2810>}Hosea 11:4. Compare ^{<2813>}Jeremiah 31:3. The consideration of the goodness of God, his common goodness to all (the goodness of his providence, of his patience, and of his offers), should be effectual to bring us all to repentance; and the reason why so many continue in impenitency is because they do not know and consider this.

2. Provoking the wrath of God, v. 5. The rise of this provocation is a *hard and impenitent heart*; and the ruin of sinners is their walking after such a heart, being led by it. To sin is to walk in the way of the heart; and when that is a hard and impenitent heart (contracted hardness by long custom, besides that which is natural), how desperate must the course needs be! The provocation is expressed by *treasuring up wrath*. Those that go on in a course of sin are treasuring up unto themselves wrath. A treasure denotes abundance. It is a treasure that will be spending to eternity, and yet never exhausted; and yet sinners are still adding to it as to a treasure. Every wilful sin adds to the score, and will inflame the reckoning; it brings a *branch to their wrath*, as some read that (^{<2687>}Ezekiel 8:17), they *put the branch to their nose*. A treasure denotes secrecy. The treasury or magazine of wrath is the heart of God himself, in which it lies hid, as treasures in some secret place sealed up; see ^{<5231>}Deuteronomy 32:34; ^{<3447>}Job 14:17. But withal it denotes reservation to some further occasion; as the treasures of the hail are reserved against the day of battle and war, ^{<3822>}Job 38:22, 23. These treasures will be broken open like the fountains of the great deep, ^{<1071>}Genesis 7:11. They are treasured up *against the day of wrath*, when they will be dispensed by the wholesale, poured out by full vials. Though the present day be a day of patience and forbearance towards sinners, yet there is a day of wrath coming — wrath, and nothing but wrath. Indeed, every day is to sinners a day of wrath, for God is *angry with the wicked every day* (^{<1971>}Psalms 7:11), but there is the *great day of wrath* coming, ^{<4167>}Revelation 6:17. And that day of wrath will be *the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God*. The wrath of God is not like our wrath,

a heat and passion; no, fury is not in him (²⁹⁷⁰Isaiah 27:4): but it is a righteous judgment, his will to punish sin, because he hates it as contrary to his nature. This righteous judgment of God is now many times concealed in the prosperity and success of sinners, but shortly it will be manifested before all the world, these seeming disorders set to rights, and the heavens shall declare his righteousness, ¹⁸¹⁶Psalms 50:6. *Therefore judge nothing before the time.*

IV. He describes the measures by which God proceeds in his judgment. Having mentioned the righteous judgment of God in v. 5, he here illustrates that judgment, and the righteousness of it, and shows what we may expect from God, and by what rule he will judge the world. The equity of distributive justice is the dispensing of frowns and favours with respect to deserts and without respect to persons: such is the righteous judgment of God.

1. He will *render to every man according to his deeds* (v. 6), a truth often mentioned in scripture, to prove that the Judge of all the earth does right.

(1.) In dispensing his favours; and this is mentioned twice here, both in v. 7 and v. 10. For he delights to show mercy. Observe,

[1.] The objects of his favour: *Those who by patient continuance*, etc. By this we may try our interest in the divine favour, and may hence be directed what course to take, that we may obtain it. Those whom the righteous God will reward are, *First*, Such as fix to themselves the right end, that *seek for glory, and honour, and immortality*; that is, the glory and honour which are immortal — acceptance with God here and for ever. There is a holy ambition which is at the bottom of all practical religion. This is seeking the kingdom of God, looking in our desires and aims as high as heaven, and resolved to take up with nothing short of it. This seeking implies a loss, sense of that loss, desire to retrieve it, and pursuits and endeavours consonant to those desires. *Secondly*, Such as, having fixed the right end, adhere to the right way: *A patient continuance in well-doing.*

1. There must be well-doing, working good, v. 10. It is not enough to know well, and speak well, and profess well, and promise well, but we must do well: do that which is good, not only for the matter of it, but for the manner of it. We must do it well.

2. A continuance in well-doing. Not for a fit and a start, like the morning cloud and the early dew; but we must endure to the end: it is perseverance that wins the crown.

3. A patient continuance. This patience respects not only the length of the work, but the difficulties of it and the oppositions and hardships we may meet with in it. Those that will do well and continue in it must put on a great deal of patience.

[2.] The product of his favour. He will render to such eternal life. Heaven is life, eternal life, and it is the reward of those that patiently continue in well-doing; and it is called (v. 10) *glory, honour, and peace*. Those that seek for glory and honour (v. 7) shall have them. Those that seek for the vain glory and honour of this world often miss of them, and are disappointed; but those that seek for immortal glory and honour shall have them, and not only *glory and honour*, but *peace*. Worldly glory and honour are commonly attended with trouble; but heavenly glory and honour have peace with them, undisturbed everlasting peace.

(2.) In dispensing his frowns (v. 8, 9). Observe,

[1.] The objects of his frowns. In general those that do evil, more particularly described to be *such as are contentious and do not obey the truth*. Contentious against God. every wilful sin is a quarrel with God, it is *striving with our Maker* (^{<28B>}Isaiah 45:9), the most desperate contention. The Spirit of God strives with sinners (^{<00B>}Genesis 6:3), and impenitent sinners strive against the Spirit, rebel against the light (^{<K243>}Job 24:13), hold fast deceit, strive to retain that sin which the Spirit strives to part them from. *Contentious, and do not obey the truth*. The truths of religion are not only to be known, but to be obeyed; they are directing, ruling, commanding; truths relating to practice. Disobedience to the truth is interpreted a striving against it. *But obey unrighteousness* — do what unrighteousness bids them do. Those that refuse to be the servants of truth will soon be the slaves of unrighteousness.

[2.] The products or instances of these frowns: *Indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish*. These are the wages of sin. *Indignation and wrath* the causes — *tribulation and anguish* the necessary and unavoidable effects. And this *upon the soul*; souls are the vessels of that wrath, the subjects of that tribulation and anguish. Sin qualifies the soul for this wrath. The soul is that in or of man which is alone immediately

capable of this indignation, and the impressions or effects of anguish therefrom. Hell is eternal tribulation and anguish, the product of wrath and indignation. This comes of contending with God, of setting briers and thorns before a consuming fire, ^{<23704>}Isaiah 27:4. Those that will not bow to his golden sceptre will certainly be broken by his iron rod. Thus will God render to every man according to his deeds.

2. *There is no respect of persons with God*, v. 11. As to the spiritual state, there is a respect of persons; but not as to outward relation or condition. Jews and Gentiles stand upon the same level before God. This was Peter's remark upon the first taking down of the partition-wall (^{<4403E>}Acts 10:34), that God is no respecter of persons; and it is explained in the next words, that *in every nation he that fears God, and works righteousness, is accepted of him*. God does not save men with respect to their external privileges or their barren knowledge and profession of the truth, but according as their state and disposition really are. In dispensing both his frowns and favours it is both to Jew and Gentile. If to *the Jews first*, who had greater privileges, and made a greater profession, yet *also to the Gentiles*, whose want of such privileges will neither excuse them from the punishment of their ill-doing nor bar them out from the reward of their well-doing (see ^{<5018E>}Colossians 3:11); for shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?

V. He proves the equity of his proceedings with all, when he shall actually come to Judge them (v. 12-16), upon this principle, that that which is the rule of man's obedience is the rule of God's judgment. Three degrees of light are revealed to the children of men: —

1. The light of nature. This the Gentiles have, and by this they shall be judged: *As many as have sinned without law shall perish without law*; that is, the unbelieving Gentiles, who had no other guide but natural conscience, no other motive but common mercies, and had not the law of Moses nor any supernatural revelation, shall not be reckoned with for the transgression of the law they never had, nor come under the aggravation of the Jews' sin against and judgment by the written law; but they shall be judged by, as they sin against, the law of nature, not only as it is in their hearts, corrupted, defaced, and imprisoned in unrighteousness, but as in the uncorrupt original the Judge keeps by him. Further to clear this (v. 14, 15), in a parenthesis, he evinces that the light of nature was to the Gentiles instead of a written law. He had said (v. 12) they had *sinned without law*,

which looks like a contradiction; for where there is no law there is no transgression. But, says he, though they had not the written law (^(HEZ)Psalm 147:20), they had that which was equivalent, not to the ceremonial, but to the moral law. They *had the work of the law*. He does not mean that work which the law commands, as if they could produce a perfect obedience; but that work which the law does. The work of the law is to direct us what to do, and to examine us what we have done. Now,

(1.) They had that which directed them what to do by the light of nature: by the force and tendency of their natural notions and dictates they apprehended a clear and vast difference between good and evil. They *did by nature the things contained in the law*. They had a sense of justice and equity, honour and purity, love and charity; the light of nature taught obedience to parents, pity to the miserable, conservation of public peace and order, forbade murder, stealing, lying, perjury, etc. Thus they were a *law unto themselves*.

(2.) They had that which examined them as to what they had done: *Their conscience also bearing witness*. They had that within them which approved and commended what was well done and which reproached them for what was done amiss. Conscience is a witness, and first or last will bear witness, though for a time it may be bribed or brow-beaten. It is instead of a thousand witnesses, testifying of that which is most secret; and their *thoughts accusing or excusing*, passing a judgment upon the testimony of conscience by applying the law to the fact. Conscience is that candle of the Lord which was not quite put out, no, not in the Gentile world. The heathen have witnessed to the comfort of a good conscience.

— *Hic murus ahoncus esto,
Nil conscire sibi* —

*Be this thy brazen bulwark of defence,
Still to preserve thy conscious innocence. — Hos.*

and to the terror of a bad one:

— *Quos diri consein facti
Mens habet attonitos, et surdo verberare cuodit* —

*No lash is heard, and yet the guilty heart
Is tortur'd with a self-inflicted smart — Juv. Sat. 13.*

Their *thoughts the meanwhile, metaxy allelon* — among themselves, or one with another. The same light and law of nature that witnesses against sin in them, and witnessed against it in others, accused or excused one another. *Vicissim*, so some read it, *by turns*; according as they observed or broke these natural laws and dictates, their consciences did either acquit or condemn them. All this did evince that they had that which was to them instead of a law, which they might have been governed by, and which will condemn them, because they were not so guided and governed by it. So that the guilty Gentiles are left without excuse. God is justified in condemning them. They cannot plead ignorance, and therefore are likely to perish if they have not something else to plead.

2. The light of the law. This the Jews had, and by this they shall be judged (v. 12): *As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law.* They sinned, not only having the law, but *en nomo* — in the law, in the midst of so much law, in the face and light of so pure and clear a law, the directions of which were so very full and particular, and the sanctions of it so very cogent and enforcing. These shall be judged *by the law*; their punishment shall be, as their sin is, so much the greater for their having the law. *The Jew first*, v. 9. It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon. Thus Moses did accuse them (~~185~~ John 5:45), and they fell under the many stripes of him that knew his master's will, and did it not, ~~112~~ Luke 12:47. The Jews prided themselves very much in the law; but, to confirm what he had said, the apostle shows (v. 13) that their having, and hearing, and knowing the law, would not justify them, but their doing it. The Jewish doctors bolstered up their followers with an opinion that all that were Jews, how bad soever they lived, should have a place in the world to come. This the apostle here opposes: it was a great privilege that they had the law, but not a saving privilege, unless they lived up to the law they had, which it is certain the Jews did not, and therefore they had need of a righteousness wherein to appear before God. We may apply it to the gospel: it is not hearing, but doing that will save us, ~~187~~ John 13:17; ~~112~~ James 1:22.

3. The light of the gospel: and according to this those that enjoyed the gospel shall be judge (v. 16): *According to my gospel*; not meant of any fifth gospel written by Paul, as some conceit; or of the gospel written by *Luke*, as Paul's amanuensis (*Euseb. Hist. lib 3, cap. 8*), but the gospel in general, called Paul's because he was a preacher of it. As many as are under that dispensation shall be judged according to that dispensation,

^{<4136>}Mark 16:16. Some refer those words, *according to my gospel*, to what he says of the day of judgment: “There will come a day of judgment, according as I have in my preaching often told you; and that will be the day of the final judgment both of Jews and Gentiles.” It is good for us to get acquainted with what is revealed concerning that day.

- (1.) There is a day set for a general judgment. The day, the great day, his day that is coming, ^{<4373>}Psalm 37:13.
- (2.) The judgment of that day will be put into the hands of Jesus Christ. God shall judge by Jesus Christ, ^{<4473>}Acts 17:31. It will be part of the reward of his humiliation. Nothing speaks more terror to sinners, or more comfort to saints, than this, that Christ shall be the Judge.
- (3.) The secrets of men shall then be judged. Secret services shall be then rewarded, secret sins shall be then punished, hidden things shall be brought to light. That will be the great discovering day, when that which is now done in corners shall be proclaimed to all the world.

^{<4127>}ROMANS 2:17-29

THE PRETENSIONS OF THE JEWS

In the latter part of the chapter the apostle directs his discourse more closely to the Jews, and shows what sins they were guilty of, notwithstanding their profession and vain pretensions. He had said (v. 13) that not the hearers but the doers of the law are justified; and he here applies that great truth to the Jews. Observe,

- I. He allows their profession (v. 17-20) and specifies their particular pretensions and privileges in which they prided themselves, that they might see he did not condemn them out of ignorance of what they had to say for themselves; no, he knew the best of their cause.
 1. They were a peculiar people, separated and distinguished from all others by their having the written law and the special presence of God among them.
 - (1.) *Thou art called a Jew*; not so much in parentage as profession. It was a very honourable title. Salvation was of the Jews; and this they were very

proud of, to be a people by themselves; and yet many that were so called were the vilest of men. It is no new thing for the worst practices to be shrouded under the best names, for many of the synagogue of Satan to say they are Jews (^{<619>}Revelation 2:9), for a generation of vipers to boast they have *Abraham to their father*, (^{<407>}Matthew 3:7-9).

(2.) *And retest in the law*; that is, they took a pride in this, that they had the law among them, had it in their books, read it in their synagogues. They were mightily puffed up with this privilege, and thought this enough to bring them to heaven, though they did not live, up to the law. To rest in the law, with a rest of complacency and acquiescence, is good; but to rest in it with a rest of pride, and slothfulness, and carnal security, is the ruin of souls. *The temple of the Lord*, (^{<2474>}Jeremiah 7:4. *Bethel their confidence*, (^{<2483>}Jeremiah 48:13. *Haughty because of the holy mountain*, (^{<3691>}Zephaniah 3:11. It is a dangerous thing to rest in external privileges, and not to improve them.

(3.) *And makest thy boast of God*. See how the best things may be perverted and abused. A believing, humble, thankful glorying in God, is the root and summary of all religion, (^{<1342>}Psalms 34:2; (^{<2365>}Isaiah 45:15; (^{<411>}1 Corinthians 1:31. But a proud vainglorious boasting in God, and in the outward profession of his name, is the root and summary of all hypocrisy. Spiritual pride is of all kinds of pride the most dangerous.

2. They were a knowing people (v. 18): *and knowest his will, to thelema* — *the will*. God's will is the will, the sovereign, absolute, irresistible will. The world will then, and not till then, be set to rights, when God's will is the only will, and all other wills are melted into it. They did not only know the truth of God, but the will of God, that which he would have them to do. It is possible for a hypocrite to have a great deal of knowledge in the will of God. — *And apprest the things that are more excellent* — *dokimazeis ta diapheronta*. Paul prays for it for his friends as a very great attainment, (^{<3011>}Philippians 1:10. *Eis to dokimazein hymas ta diapheronta*. Understand it,

(1.) Of a good apprehension in *the things of God*, reading it thus, *Thou discernest things that differ*, knowest how to distinguish between good and evil, to separate between the precious and the vile (^{<2159>}Jeremiah 15:19), to make a difference between the unclean and the clean, (^{<8147>}Leviticus 11:47. Good and bad lie sometimes so near together that it is not easy to distinguish them; but the Jews, having the touchstone of the

law ready at hand, were, or at least thought they were, able to distinguish, to cleave the hair in doubtful cases. A man may be a good casuist and yet a bad Christian — accurate in the notion, but loose and careless in the application. Or, we may, with *De Dieu*, understand *controversies* by the *ta diapheronta*. A man may be well skilled in the controversies of religion, and yet a stranger to the power of godliness.

(2.) Of a warm affection to the things of God, as we read it, *Approvest the things that are excellent*. There are excellences in religion which a hypocrite may approve of: there may be a consent of the practical judgment *to the law, that it is good*, and yet that consent overpowerd by the lusts of the flesh, and of the mind: —

— *Video meliora proboque
Deteriora sequor.*

I see the better, but pursue the worse.

and it is common for sinners to make that approbation an excuse which is really a very great aggravation of a sinful course. They got this acquaintance with, and affection to, that which is good, but being *instructed out of the law, katechoumenos* — *being catechised*. The word signifies an early instruction in childhood. It is a great privilege and advantage to be well catechised betimes. It was the custom of the Jews to take a great deal of pains in teaching their children when they were young, and all their lessons were *out of the law*; it were well if Christians were but as industrious to teach their children *out of the gospel*. Now this is called (v. 20), *The form of knowledge, and of the truth in the law*, that is, the show and appearance of it. Those whose knowledge rests in an empty notion, and does not make an impression on their hearts, have only the form of it, like a picture well drawn and in good colours, but which wants life. A form of knowledge produces but a form of godliness, ~~STRE~~ 2 Timothy 3:5. A form of knowledge may deceive men, but cannot impose upon the piercing eye of the heart-searching God. A form may be the vehicle of the power; but he that takes up with that only is *like sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal*.

3. They were a teaching people, or at least thought themselves so (v. 19, 20): *And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind*. Apply it,

(1.) To the Jews in general. They thought themselves guides to the poor blind Gentiles that sat in darkness, were very proud of this, that whoever

would have the knowledge of God must be beholden to them for it. All other nations must come to school to them, to learn what is good, and what the Lord requires; for they had the lively oracles.

(2.) To their rabbis, and doctors, and leading men among them, who were especially those that judged others, v. 1. These prided themselves much in the possession they had got of Moses's chair, and the deference which the vulgar paid to their dictates; and the apostle expresses this in several terms, *a guide of the blind, a light of those who are in darkness, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes*, the better to set forth their proud conceit of themselves, and contempt of others. This was a string they loved to be harping upon, heaping up titles of honour upon themselves. The best work, when it is prided in, is unacceptable to God. It is good to instruct the foolish, and to teach the babes: but considering our own ignorance, and folly, and inability to make these teachings successful without God, there is nothing in it to be proud of.

II. He aggravates their provocations (v. 21-24) from two things: —

1. That they sinned against their knowledge and profession, did that themselves which they taught others to avoid: *Thou that teachest another, teachest thou not thyself?* Teaching is a piece of that charity which begins at home, though it must not end there. It was the hypocrisy of the Pharisees *that they did not do as they taught* (^{413B}Matthew 23:3), but pulled down with their lives what they built up with their preaching; for who will believe those who do not believe themselves? Examples will govern more than rules. The greatest obstructors of the success of the word are those whose bad lives contradict their good doctrine, who in the pulpit preach so well that it is a pity they should ever come out, and out of the pulpit live so ill that it is a pity they should ever come in. He specifies three particular sins that abound among the Jews: —

(1.) Stealing. This is charged upon some that declared God's statutes (^{411G}Psalm 50:16, 18), *When thou sawest a thief, then thou consentedst with him*. The Pharisees are charged with devouring widows' houses (^{414A}Matthew 23:14), and that is the worst of robberies.

(2.) Adultery, v. 22. This is likewise charged upon that sinner (^{413B}Psalm 50:18), *Thou hast been partaker with adulterers*. Many of the Jewish rabbins are said to have been notorious for this sin.

(3.) Sacrilege — robbing in holy things, which were then by special laws dedicated and devoted to God; and this is charged upon those that professed to abhor idols. So the Jews did remarkably, after their captivity in Babylon; that furnace separated them for ever from the dross of their idolatry, but they dealt very treacherously in the worship of God. It was in the latter days of the Old-Testament church that they were charged *with robbing God in tithes and offerings* (^{308B}Malachi 3:8, 9), converting that to their own use, and to the service of their lusts, which was, in a special manner, set apart for God. And this is almost equivalent to idolatry, though this sacrilege was cloaked with the abhorrence of idols. Those will be severely reckoned with another day who, while they condemn sin in others, do the same, or as bad, or worse, themselves.

2. That they dishonoured God by their sin, v. 23, 24. While God and his law were an honour to them, which they boasted of and prided themselves in, they were a dishonour to God and his law, by giving occasion to those that were without to reflect upon their religion, as if that did countenance and allow of such things, which, as it is their sin who draw such inferences (for the faults of professors are not to be laid upon professions), so it is their sin who give occasion for those inferences, and will greatly aggravate their miscarriages. This was the condemnation in David's case, *that he had given great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme*, ¹⁰⁴2 Samuel 12:14. And the apostle here refers to the same charge against their forefathers: *As it is written*, v. 24. He does not mention the place, because he wrote this to those that were instructed in the law (in labouring to convince, it is some advantage to deal with those that have knowledge and are acquainted with the scripture), but he seems to point at ^{251B}Isaiah 52:5; ²⁶²Ezekiel 36:22, 23; and ¹⁰⁴2 Samuel 12:14. It is a lamentation that those who were made *to be to God for a name and for a praise* should be to him a shame and dishonour. The great evil of the sins of professors is the dishonour done to God and religion by their profession. "*Blasphemed through you*; that is, you give the occasion for it, it is through your folly and carelessness. The reproaches you bring upon yourselves reflect upon your God, and religion is wounded through your sides." A good caution to professors to walk circumspectly. See ⁵⁰¹1 Timothy 6:1.

III. He asserts the utter insufficiency of their profession to clear them from the guilt of these provocations (v. 25-20): *Circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law*; that is, obedient Jews shall not lose the reward of their obedience, but will gain this by their being Jews, that they

have a clearer rule of obedience than the Gentiles have. God did not give the law nor appoint circumcision in vain. This must be referred to the state of the Jews before the ceremonial polity was abolished, otherwise circumcision to one that professed faith in Christ was forbidden,

^{<481>}Galatians 5:1. But he is here speaking to the Jews, whose Judaism would benefit them, if they would but live up to the rules and laws of it; but if not “*thy circumcision is made uncircumcision*; that is, thy profession will do thee no good; thou wilt be no more justified than the uncircumcised Gentiles, but more condemned for sinning against greater light.” The uncircumcised are in scripture branded as *unclean* (^{<251>}Isaiah 52:1), as *out of the covenant*, (^{<401>}Ephesians 2:11, 12) and wicked Jews will be dealt with as such. See ^{<249>}Jeremiah 9:25, 26. Further to illustrate this,

1. He shows that the uncircumcised Gentiles, if they live up to the light they have, stand upon the same level with the Jews; if *they keep the righteousness of the law* (v. 26), *fulfil the law* (v. 27); that is, by submitting sincerely to the conduct of natural light, perform the matter of the law. Some understand it as putting the case of a perfect obedience to the law: “If the Gentiles could perfectly keep the law, they would be justified by it as well as the Jews.” But it seems rather to be meant of such an obedience as some of the Gentiles did attain to. The case of Cornelius will clear it. Though he was a Gentile, and uncircumcised, yet, *being a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house* (^{<440>}Acts 10:2), he was accepted, v. 4. Doubtless, there were many such instances: and *they were the uncircumcision, that kept the righteousness of the law*; and of such he says,

(1.) That they were accepted with God, as if they had been circumcised. *Their uncircumcision was counted for circumcision*. Circumcision was indeed *to the Jews* a commanded duty, but it was not to all the world a necessary condition of justification and salvation.

(2.) That their obedience was a great aggravation of the disobedience of the Jews, who had the letter of the law, v. 27. *Judge thee*, that is, help to add to thy condemnation, who *by the letter and circumcision dost transgress*. Observe, To carnal professors the law is but the letter; they read it as a bare writing, but are not ruled by it as a law. They did transgress, not only notwithstanding the letter and circumcision, but by it, that is, they thereby hardened themselves in sin. External privileges, if

they do not do us good, do us hurt. The obedience of those that enjoy less means, and make a less profession, will help to condemn those that enjoy greater means, and make a greater profession, but do not live up to it.

2. He describes the true circumcision, v. 28, 29.

(1.) It is *not that which is outward in the flesh and in the letter*. This is not to drive us off from the observance of external institutions (they are good in their place), but from trusting to them and resting in them as sufficient to bring us to heaven, taking up with a name to live, without being alive indeed. *He is not a Jew*, that is, shall not be accepted of God as the seed of believing Abraham, nor owned as having answered the intention of the law. To be Abraham's children is to do the works of Abraham, ^{<RB>}John 8:39, 40.

(2.) It is *that which is inward, of the heart, and in the spirit*. It is the heart that God looks at, the circumcising of the heart that renders us acceptable to him. See ^{<RB>}Deuteronomy 30:6. This is *the circumcision that is not made with hands*, ^{<RB>}Colossians 2:11, 12. *Casting away the body of sin*. So it is in the spirit, in our spirit as the subject, and wrought by God's Spirit as the author of it.

(3.) The praise thereof, though it be *not of men*, who judge according to outward appearance, yet it is *of God*, that is, God himself will own and accept and crown this sincerity; for *he seeth not as man seeth*. Fair pretences and a plausible profession may deceive men: but God cannot be so deceived; he sees through shows to realities. This is alike true of Christianity. He is not a Christian that is one outwardly, nor is that baptism which is outward in the flesh; but he is a Christian that is one inwardly, and baptism is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men but of God.