

NOTES ON THE EPISTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER III.

DID not that which the Apostle had been saying tend to lower the dignity of the chosen people of God and to depreciate the value of its privileges? *What advantage hath the Jew, or what profit is there of circumcision?* To this question he replies in Verse 2. *Much every way, chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.* Here for *chiefly* we should read, *in the first place.* The Apostle begins an enumeration which he does not continue, being diverted from it into a different line of thought. There was no necessary connection between circumcision and the having the oracles of God committed to them, but it was a matter of fact that the people who observed the ordinance of circumcision was that which was entrusted with the oracles of God. *The oracles of God* is an expression which covers all the contents of the Old Testament. These oracles consisted of commandments, threats, and promises, more particularly the promises relating to the Messiah, which are found in the earliest record of Moses, and are continually renewed.

It might, however, be objected that the advantage of this privilege was contingent on the will of man, and depended on the belief of those to whom these oracles were committed, and so, that God's gracious designs might be disappointed, and his faith, that is his faithfulness in making his promises good, of none effect.

This, in Verse 4, the Apostle indignantly denies. *God forbid, yea, let God be,—literally, become, that*

is, prove, turn out to be *faithful*, true to his word, —*though every man should be found to be a liar*. Then follows the quotation from the Psalms: *That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged. Rather, Mightest gain thy cause when thou pleadest with men.*

The Apostle then proceeds to consider a new objection. *If our unrighteousness commend, that is, establish, or bring into clearer light, the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous, who taketh vengeance?* Literally, who inflicts the marks of his wrath.—*I speak as a man*, that is, not according to the real state of the case, or by virtue of my apostolical character, or as moved by the Holy Ghost. It is only the language of human infirmity drawing a wrong inference from true premises; for though our unrighteousness does establish the righteousness of God, it does not follow that God is unrighteous in any of his dealings. This is an inference which the Apostle, at Verse 6, rejects with the same expression of abhorrence as the one immediately preceding, *God forbid*; and he points out its absurdity in the question: *For then how shall God judge the world?* If God was not a righteous Judge, He could not be a Judge at all. *Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*

In Verse 7 *the truth of God* is contrasted with the lie of man: it comprehends the holiness of his nature, as *the lie* all that is evil in man; as in the Apocalypse, Chap. xxii. 15, *Whosoever loveth and maketh a lie is excluded from the kingdom.*

At Verse 8 there is a break in the structure of the sentence. Having begun with a series of ques-

tions, instead of proceeding with it to the end he exchanges the interrogative form for the hortative—*Let us do evil, that good may come.*

St. Paul's argument in this passage may be thrown into the form of a little dialogue between himself and an imaginary opponent:—

O.—If *my lie* has been the occasion of a more abundant display of God's truth for the promotion of his glory, why am I to be punished?

P.—On two accounts: in the first place you confess yourself to be a sinner, one whose character is as completely opposite to the character of God as falsehood to truth, and therefore that you deserve punishment. And, secondly, you recognize God as your Judge, and so virtually admit that the judgment which He passes upon you is perfectly just. Moreover, your whole plea is a sophistical cavil, which leads by direct inference to the abominable maxim, which has been calumniously imputed to us Christians when we are accused of saying, *Let us do evil, that good may come!*

It is only from this passage that we know that Christians in St. Paul's day were charged with such a maxim; but we can very easily conceive that it may often have been thrown in their teeth by their adversaries on occasion of the controversies about the observance of the law. It is only another form of the doctrine that means may be justified by the end; and we know that this doctrine very early gained admission into the Church. St. Peter perhaps was the first recorded example of it, in the *dissimulation* for which he was *blamed* by St. Paul at Antioch; and ecclesiastical history bears witness

by innumerable examples to its continually-increasing prevalence down to the present day. It is not indeed quite easy to draw a clear distinction between some of St. Paul's own proceedings and the dissimulation of St. Peter. But it is, in fact, a universal temptation of human nature. It presented itself to our Lord, and He, perhaps, alone ever gained a complete triumph over it.

The exact meaning of Verse 9 is extremely obscure and doubtful. The Commentators are divided in their opinions as to the true reading, as to the sense of the word which is rendered *Are we better*, as to its connection with the context, and as to the mode of reconciling St. Paul's answer to his own question in this verse with that which he gives apparently to the same question in verse 2. The word rendered, *Are we better*, would, according to its more ordinary sense, be translated, *Have we a plea wherewith to shelter ourselves?* But, on the whole, the sense which harmonizes best with the context, and which, though very rare, is not inadmissible, is that which is given in our translation. But in verse 2 the answer given to the question, *What advantage hath the Jew?* is, *Much every way.* Here the answer to the question, *Are we better than they?* is, *No, in nowise.* This appearance of a direct self-contradiction cannot be removed, as some have proposed, by the substitution of the words, *Not altogether*, or, *Not in every point of view*, which would require the Greek words to be placed in a different order. There is, however, no real contradiction, but only an ambiguity, which raises the appearance of one.

The question, *Are we better?* may be understood in either of two senses, viz., either in the sense, *Have we an outward advantage?* which would be exactly identical with the question in verse 1; or, *Are we inwardly better,—better in the sight of God?* which is a totally different question, and would call for an opposite answer. And this answer St. Paul says he has already given in the former part of his discourse, in which he has charged both Jews and Gentiles with being all under sin, that is, subject to the dominion of sin. And he then proceeds in Verse 10 to confirm this statement by a series of quotations from the Psalms. These quotations, however, are evidently not to be considered in the light of a formal demonstration, for we know nothing either as to their authorship or as to the occasions on which they were composed and the class of persons to which they were addressed; and if we did, large allowance would have to be made for poetical exaggeration and the excitement of personal feelings, so that, strictly speaking, no conclusion could be drawn from them as to the universal sinfulness of mankind. Nor, probably, did St. Paul intend that they should be considered as anything more than an illustration. But at the end, at Verse 19, he brings them home to the Jews by the remark, *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law.*

As the quotations are all taken from the Psalms, this proves that by *the law* is meant everything contained in the Old Testament, and not, as otherwise might be supposed, the Thorah, or Penta-

teuch, only.—*Under the law*: subject to its authority, bound by its obligations.—*That every mouth may be stopped*. It is disputed whether the word *that* is to be understood of the design, or only of the actual consequence. From St. Paul's point of view this question would seem to be of little importance. *That every mouth may be stopped*: that is, that every plea in justification or excuse may be silenced.—*And all the world*: Jew as well as Heathen; *may become guilty*: more properly, *may be shewn to be guilty, may be convicted of guilt in the sight of God*.

VERSE 20.—*Therefore*, should be, *because that*.—*By the deeds of the law*: by that which is done in obedience to the law.—*No flesh*: not simply equivalent to no human being, but with a tacit reference to the weakness of human nature.—*For by the law is the knowledge of sin*: that is, nothing more than the knowledge of sin. It causes the power of sin to be felt, but does not remove or weaken it.

VERSE 21.—*But now*: the word rendered *now* is not an adverb of time, but signifies, in the present new state of things, brought about by the appearance of Jesus Christ.—*The righteousness of God* (see Chap. i. 17): not God's righteousness, but the righteousness which is of Him, that of which He is the Author.—Instead of *without the law is manifested*, we should read, *has been manifested without the law*: that is, without any co-operation of the law, but yet in perfect conformity to the witness of the law and the prophets, contained in the types, promises, and predictions of the Old Testament.

VERSE 22.—*By faith of Jesus Christ*: it should be, *IN Jesus Christ*.—*Unto all and upon all them that believe*: *unto all*, designed for all; and *upon all*, actually extending to all that believe.

VERSE 23.—*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God*: that is, have missed, lost, forfeited the *glory of God*; the *glory* which God gives by his approbation, by that which, in Chap. ii. 29, is called *the praise, not of men, but of God*.

VERSE 24.—*Being justified freely by his grace*. The participle here is not to be understood as if it was meant to qualify the preceding statement, in the sense of, *and yet justified*; it is simply, while we are justified by his grace: that is, while if we are justified, it is not because we have not forfeited the glory of God, or have any merit of our own to plead, but the justifying grace is conferred freely and gratuitously through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.

VERSE 25.—*Whom God hath set forth* · hath (visibly) set forth, has exhibited by his sufferings, death, and resurrection.—*To be a propitiation*, i.e., a means of propitiation.—*Through faith in his blood*: i.e., in the efficacy of his Passion.—*To declare his righteousness*, that is, the righteousness which He has shewn, not, as in our Translation, *for the remission*, but *in the overlooking of sins that are past*, i.e., of the sins for the period antecedent to the appearance of Christ.—*Through the forbearance, or long-suffering of God*.

VERSE 26.—*To declare, I say, at this time*. Emphasis is to be laid on the words *at this time*, as

contrasted with the forbearance and long-suffering of the time past, before the coming of Christ (which might have seemed to cast a doubt on his righteousness), and to *shew that He is just, while justifying him that believeth in Jesus.*

VERSE 27.—*Where is boasting then?* Where then is there any ground for boasting or self-confidence on the part of the Jews?—*It is excluded. By what law? of works?* (Is it by a law which enjoins works?) *Nay, but by the law of faith.* That is to say, by that law which is not satisfied by any outward acts, but, as the Psalmist says, *requires truth in the inward parts.*

VERSE 28.—*Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law:* the meaning would be better expressed, and guarded from dangerous misapprehension if, for *without the deeds of the law*, we read, *and not by the deeds of the law*, which is evidently what St. Paul meant.—*Without the deeds of the law*, i.e., without the co-operation of *the deeds of the law* as the grounds of his justification.

In Verse 29, where we read, *Is he the God of the Jews only?* the Greek text has, *OR is He the God of the Jews only?* as it would seem must be the case if a man is justified by the deeds of the law, but is evidently untrue, as the God of the Jews is the God of the Gentiles also. And in Verse 30,—*seeing it is one and the same God which shall justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith*,—there is no difference of meaning signified by the prepositions *by* and *through*, as otherwise there must be some difference as to the means of justification

between the circumcision and the uncircumcision, which would be quite irreconcilable with St. Paul's doctrine.

VERSE 31.—*Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid.* It might have seemed that the inevitable inference to be drawn from all that has gone before was to do away altogether with the authority of the law, and this it was of which St. Paul was constantly accused by the Jews, as holding a doctrine which struck at the root of the whole Mosaic system; and therefore St. Paul's answer to his own question must have been considered by his Jewish adversaries as either a shameless falsehood or the wildest of paradoxes.—*Yea, we establish the law.* St. Paul himself has not directly explained in what sense he meant this to be understood, and some have supposed that, having made this startling assertion, he immediately dropped the subject; this, however, is in the highest degree improbable, and the statement seems to be closely connected with the contents of the next Chapter.—*Through faith:* by transferring our confidence and our boasting, from the law to *faith*. Instead of this we are so far from attempting to invalidate the authority of the law that we uphold, confirm, and establish it.

This would be clear if it could be shewn that the law itself teaches the same doctrine; and this he proceeds to prove by an example which every Jew would admit to be of supreme authority, taken from the history of Abraham.¹ CONNOP THIRLWALL.

¹ Here, I regret to say, the Bishop's Manuscript comes to an end.—EDITOR.