

INTRODUCTION

THE Epistle to the Romans was written by the Apostle Paul from Corinth, the capital of Achaia, after his second journey to that celebrated city for the purpose of collecting the pecuniary aid destined for the church at Jerusalem. This appears from the fifteenth chapter, where he says that he was going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints. 'For,' he adds, 'it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.' The Epistle appears to have been carried to Rome by Phebe, a deaconess of the church at Cenchrea, which was the port of Corinth; and we learn from the nineteenth and twentieth chapters of the Acts, and from different parts of the two Epistles to the Corinthians, that, after having remained about three years at Ephesus, Paul purposed to pass through Macedonia and Achaia, to receive the contributions of the Corinthians, and afterwards proceed to Jerusalem.

As to the period when this Epistle was written, it is certain that it was at a time previous to Paul's arrival at Rome. On this account, he begins by declaring to the disciples there that he had a great desire to see them, and to preach to them the Gospel; that he had often purposed this, but had hitherto always been prevented. This statement he repeats in the fifteenth chapter. It appears to be earlier in date than the Epistles to the Ephesians and Philippians, and those to the Hebrews and Philemon, and the Second to Timothy; for all of these were written during the Apostle's first or second imprisonment at Rome, but later than the two Epistles to the Corinthians. It is generally supposed that it was written in the year 57 of the Christian era, about twenty-four years after the resurrection of our Lord.

Notwithstanding that this Epistle was written after some of the rest, it has been placed first in order among them on account of its excellence, and the abundance and sublimity of its contents. It contains, indeed, an abridgment of all that is taught in the Christian religion. It treats of the revelation of God in the works of nature and in the heart of man, and exhibits the necessity and the strictness of the last judgment. It teaches the Doctrine of the fall, and corruption of the whole human race, of which it discovers the

source and its greatness. It points out the true and right use of the law, and why God gave it to the Israelites; and also shows the variety of the temporal advantages over other men which the law conferred on them, and which they so criminally abused. It treats of the mission of our Lord Jesus Christ, of justification, of sanctification, of free will and grace, of salvation and condemnation, of election and of reprobation, of the perseverance and assurance of the salvation believers in the midst of their severest temptations, of the necessity of inflictions, and of the admirable consolations under them — of the calling of the Gentiles, of the rejection of the Jews and of their final restoration to the communion of God. Paul afterwards lays down the principal rules of Christian morality, containing all that we owe God, to ourselves, our neighbors, and to our brethren in Christ, and declares the manner in which we should act in our particular employments; uniformly accompanying his precepts with just and reasonable motives to enforce their practice. The form, too, of this Epistle is not less admirable than its matter. Its reasoning is powerful and conclusive; the style condensed, lively, and energetic; the arrangement orderly and clear, strikingly exhibiting the leading doctrines as the main branches from which depend all the graces and virtues of the Christian life. The whole is pervaded by a strain of the most exalted piety, true holiness, ardent zeal, and fervent charity.

This Epistle, like the greater part of those written by Paul, is divided into two general parts, — the first of which contains the doctrine, and extends to the beginning of the twelfth chapter; and the second, which relates to practice, goes on to the conclusion. The first is to instruct the spirit, and the other to direct the heart; the one teaches what we are to believe, the other what we are to practice. In the first part he discusses chiefly the two great questions which at the beginning of the Gospel were agitated between the Jews and the Christians, namely, that of justification before God, and that of the calling of the Gentiles. For as, on the one hand, the Gospel held forth a method of justification very different from that of the law, the Jews could not relish a doctrine which appeared to them novel, and was contrary to their prejudices; and as, on the other hand, they found themselves in possession of the covenant of God, to the exclusion of other nations, they could not endure that the Apostles should call the Gentiles to the knowledge of the true God, and to the hope of His salvation, nor

that it should be supposed that the Jews had lost their exclusive pre-eminence over the nations. The principal object, then, of the Apostle was to combat these two prejudices. He directs his attention to the former in the first nine chapters, and treats of the other in the tenth and eleventh. As to what regards the second portion of the Epistle, Paul first enjoins general precepts for the conduct of believers, afterwards in regard to civil life, and finally with regard to church communion.

In the first five chapters, the great doctrine of justification by faith, of which they exclusively treat, is more fully discussed than in any other part of Scripture. The design of the Apostle is to establish two things: the one is, that there being only two ways of justification before God, namely, that of works, which the law proposes, and that of grace by Jesus Christ, which the Gospel reveals, — the first is entirely shut against men, and, in order to their being saved, there remains only the last. The other thing that he designs to establish is, that justification by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ, respects indifferently all men, both Jews and Gentiles, and that it abolishes the distinction which the law had made between them. To arrive at this, he first proves that the Gentiles, as well as the Jews, are subject to the judgment of God; but that, being all sinners and guilty, neither the one nor the other can escape condemnation by their works. He humbles them both. He sets before the Gentiles the blind ignorance and unrighteousness both of themselves and of their philosophers, of whom they boasted; and he teaches humility to the Jews, by showing that they were chargeable with similar vices. He undermines in both the pride of self-merit, and teaches all to build their hopes on Jesus Christ alone; proving that their salvation can neither emanate from their philosophy nor from their law, but from the grace of Christ Jesus.

In the first chapter, the Apostle commences by directing our attention to the person of the Son of God in His incarnation in time, and His Divine nature from eternity, as the great subject of that Gospel which he was commissioned to proclaim. After a most striking introduction, every way calculated to arrest the attention and conciliate the affection of those whom he addressed, he briefly announces the grand truth, which he intends afterwards to establish, that ‘the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth,’ because in it is revealed ‘THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.’ Unless such a righteousness had been provided,

all men must have suffered the punishment due to sin, seeing God hath denounced His high displeasure against all '*ungodliness and unrighteousness.*' These are the great truths which the Apostle immediately proceeds to unfold. And as they stand connected with every part of that salvation which God has prepared, he is led to exhibit a most animating and consolatory view of the whole plan of mercy, which proclaims 'glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will towards men'.

The first point which the Apostle establishes, is the ruined condition of men, who, being entirely divested of righteousness, are by nature all under sin. The charge of 'ungodliness,' and of consequent 'unrighteousness,' he proves first against the Gentiles. They had departed from the worship of God, although in the works of the visible creation they had sufficient notification of His power and Godhead. In their conduct they had violated the law written in their hearts, and had sinned in opposition to what they knew to be right, and to the testimony of their conscience in its favor. All of them, therefore, laws under the sentence of condemnation, which will be pronounced upon the workers of iniquity in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men. In the second chapter, a similar charge of transgression and guilt is established against the Jews, notwithstanding the superior advantage of a written revelation with which they had been favored.

Having proved in the first two chapters, by an appeal to undeniable facts, that the Gentiles and the Jews were both guilty before God, in the third chapter, after obviating some objections regarding the Jews, Paul takes both Jews and Gentiles together, and exhibits a fearful picture, drawn from the testimony of the Old Testament Scriptures, of the universal guilt and depravity of all mankind, showing that 'there is none righteous, no, not one,' and that all are depraved, wicked, and alienated from God. He thus establishes it as an undeniable truth, that every man in his natural state lies under the just condemnation of God, as a rebel against Him, in all the three ways in which He had been pleased to reveal Himself, whether by the works of creation, the work of the law written on the heart, or by the revelation of grace. From these premises he then draws the obvious and inevitable conclusion, that by obedience to law no man living shall be justified; that so far from justifying, the law proves every one to be guilty and under condemnation. The way is thus prepared for the grand display

of the grace and mercy of God announced in the Gospel, by which men are saved consistently with the honor of the law. What the law could not do, not from any deficiency in itself, but owing to the depravity of man, God has fully accomplished. Man has no righteousness of his own which he can plead, but God has provided a righteousness for him. This righteousness, infinitely superior to that which he originally possessed, is provided solely by grace, and received solely by faith. It is placed to the account of the believer for his justification, without the smallest respect either to his previous or subsequent obedience. Yet so far from being contrary to the justice of God, this method of justification, ‘freely by His grace,’ strikingly illustrates His justice, and vindicates all His dealings to men. So far from making the law void, it establishes it in all its honor and authority. This way of salvation equally applies to all, both Jews and Gentiles — men of every nation and every character; ‘there is no difference,’ for all, without exception, are sinners.

The Apostle, in the fourth chapter, dwells on the faith through which the righteousness of God is received, and, in obviating certain objections, further confirms and illustrates his doctrine, by showing that Abraham himself, the progenitor of the Jews, was justified not by works but by faith, and that in this way he was the father of all believers, the pattern and the type of the justification of both Jews and Gentiles. And in order to complete the view of the great subject of his discussion, Paul considers, in the fifth chapter, two principal effects of justification by Jesus Christ, namely, peace with God and assurance of salvation, notwithstanding the troubles and afflictions to which believers are exposed. And because Jesus Christ is the Author of this Divine reconciliation, he compares Him with Adam, who was the source of condemnation, concluding with a striking account of the entrance of sin and of righteousness, both of which he had been exhibiting. He next shows the reason why, between Adam and Jesus Christ, God caused the law of Moses to intervene, by means of which the extent of the evil of sin, and the efficiency of the remedy brought in by righteousness, were both fully exhibited, to the glory of the grace of God. These five chapters disclose a consistent scheme in the Divine conduct, and exhibit a plan of reconciling sinners to God, that never could have been discovered by the human understanding. It is the perfection of wisdom, yet in all its features it is opposed to the wisdom of this world ^{fl}.

As the doctrine of the justification of sinners by the imputation of the righteousness of Christ, without regard to their works, which manifests, in all their extent, the guilt, the depravity, and the helplessness of man, in order to magnify grace in his pardon, might be charged with leading to licentiousness, Paul does not fail to state this objection; and solidly to refute it. This he does in the sixth and seventh chapters, in which he proves that, so far from setting aside the necessity of obedience to God, the doctrine of justification stands indissolubly connected with the very foundation of holiness and obedience. This foundation is union with the Redeemer, through that faith by which the believer is justified. On the contrary, the law operates, by its restraints, to stimulate and call into action the corruptions of the human heart, while at the same time it condemns all who are under its dominion. But, through their union with Christ, believers are delivered from the law; and, being under grace, which produces love, they are enabled to bring forth fruit acceptable to God. The law, however, is in itself holy, and just, and good. As such, it is employed by the Spirit of God to convince His people of sin, to teach them the value of the remedy provided in the Gospel, and to lead them to cleave unto the Lord, from a sense of the remaining corruption of their hearts. This corruption, as the Apostle shows, by a striking description of his own experience, will continue to exert its power in believers so long as they are in the body.

As a general conclusion from all that had gone before, the believer's entire freedom from condemnation through union with his glorious Head, and his consequent sanctification, are both asserted in the eighth chapter, neither of which effects could have been accomplished by the law. The opposite results of death to the carnal mind, which actuated man in his natural state, and of life to the spiritual mind, which he receives in his renovation, are clearly pointed out; and as the love of God had been shown in the fifth chapter to be so peculiarly transcendent, from the consideration that Christ died for men, not as friends and worthy objects, but as 'without strength,' 'ungodly,' 'sinners,' 'enemies,' so here the natural state of those on whom such unspeakable blessings are bestowed is described as 'enmity against God.' The effects of the inhabitation of the Holy Spirit in those who are regenerated are next disclosed, together with the glorious privileges which it secures. Amidst present sufferings, the highest

consolations are presented to the children of God, while their original source and final issue are pointed out.

The contemplation of such ineffable blessings as he had just been describing, reminds the Apostle of the mournful state of the generality of his countrymen, who, though distinguished in the highest degree by their external privileges, still, as he himself had once done, rejected the Messiah. And as the doctrine he had been inculcating seemed to set aside the promises which God had made to the Jewish people, and to take from them the Divine covenant under which they had been placed, Paul states that objection, and obviates it, in the ninth chapter, — showing that, on the one hand, the promises of spiritual blessings regarded only believers, who are the real Israelites, the true seed of Abraham; and, on the other, that faith itself being an effect of grace, God bestows it according to His sovereign will, so that the difference between believers and unbelievers is a consequence of His free election, of which the sole cause is His good pleasure, which He exercises both in regard to the Jews and the Gentiles. Nothing, then, had frustrated the purpose of God; and His word had taken effect so far as He had appointed. The doctrine of God's sovereignty is here fully discussed; and that very objection which is daily made, 'why doth He yet find fault,' is stated, and for ever put down. Instead of national election, the great subject in this chapter is national rejection, and the personal election of a small remnant, without which the whole nation of Israel would have been destroyed; so devoid of reason is the objection usually made to the doctrine of election, that it is a cruel doctrine. In the end of the ninth chapter, the Apostle is led to the consideration of the fatal error of the great body of the Jews, who sought justification by works and not by faith. Mistaking the intent and the end of their law, they stumbled at this doctrine, which is the common stumbling-stone to unregenerate men.

In the tenth chapter, Paul resumes the same subject, and by new proofs, drawn from the Old Testament, shows that the righteousness of God, which the Jews, going about to establish their own righteousness for their justification, rejected, is received solely by faith in Jesus Christ, and that the Gospel regards the Gentiles as well as the Jews; and if rejected by the Jews, it is not surprising, since this had been predicted by the prophets. The Jews thus excluded themselves from salvation, not discerning the true

character of the Messiah of Israel as the end of the law, and the Author of righteousness, to every believer. And yet, when they reflected on the declaration of Moses, that to obtain life by the law, the perfect obedience which it demands must in every case be yielded, they might have been convinced that on this ground they could not be justified; on the contrary, by the law they were universally condemned. The Apostle also exhibits the freeness of salvation through the Redeemer, and the certainty that all who accept it shall be saved. And since faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God, the necessity of preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles is inferred and asserted. The result corresponded with the prediction. The righteousness which is by faith was received by the Gentiles, although they had not been inquiring for it; while the Jews, who followed after the law of righteousness, had not attained to righteousness.

The mercies of God, as illustrated by the revelation of the righteousness which is received by faith, was the grand subject which had occupied Paul in the preceding part of this Epistle. He had announced at the beginning that he was ‘not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; because it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth — to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.’ This great truth he had undertaken to demonstrate, and he had done so with the authority and force of inspiration, by exhibiting, on the one hand, the state and character of man; and, on the other, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

In the prosecution of this subject, the Apostle had shown that the wrath of God is revealed against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men; and, by arguments the most irresistible, and evidence that could not be gainsaid, he had brought in both Jews and Gentiles as guilty and condemned sinners, justly obnoxious to the vengeance of Heaven. Had the Almighty been pleased to abandon the apostate race of Adam, as He did the angels, to perish in their sins, none could have impeached His justice, or arraigned the rigor of the Divine procedure. But in the unsearchable riches of the mercies of God, He was pleased to bring near a righteousness, by which His violated law should be magnified, and a multitude whom no man can number rescued from destruction. This righteousness is revealed in the Gospel, — a righteousness worthy of the source from which it flows, — a righteousness which shall for ever abase the pride of the creature, and bring glory to God in the highest. The mercies of God are thus dispensed in such

a way as to cut off all ground for boasting on the part of those who are justified. They are, on the contrary, calculated to exalt the Divine sovereignty, and to humble those in the dust who are saved before Him who worketh all things according to the counsel of His own will, and, without giving any account of His matters, either justifies or condemns the guilty according to His supreme pleasure.

In the eleventh chapter, the Apostle finishes his argument, and in a manner concludes his subject. He here resumes the doctrine of the personal election of a remnant of Israel, of which he had spoken in the ninth chapter, and affirms, in the most express terms, that it is wholly of grace, which consequently excludes as its cause every idea of work, or of merit, on the part of man. He shows that the unbelief of the Jews has not been universal, God having still reserved some of them by His gratuitous election, while as a nation He has allowed them to fall; and that this fall has been appointed, in the wise providence of God, to open the way for the calling of the Gentiles. But in order that the Gentiles may not triumph over that outcast nation, Paul predicts that God will one day raise it up again, and recall the whole of it to communion with Himself. He vindicates God's dealings both towards Jews and Gentiles, showing that, since all were guilty and justly condemned, God was acting on a plan by which, both in the choice and partial rejection, as well as in the final restoration of the Jews, the Divine glory would be manifested, while in the result, the sovereign mercies of Jehovah would shine forth conspicuous in all His dealings toward the children of men. A most consolatory view is accordingly given of the present tendency and final issue of the dispensations of God, in bringing in the fullness of the Gentiles, and in the general salvation of Israel. And thus, also, by the annunciation of the reception which the Gospel should meet with from the Jews, first in Rejecting it for a long period, and afterwards in embracing it, the doctrine of the sovereignty of Him who hath mercy on whom He will have mercy, and hardeneth whom He will, is further displayed and established. Lost in admiration of the majesty of God, as discovered in the Gospel, the Apostle prostrates himself before his Maker, while, in language of adoring wonder, he summons all whom he addresses to unite in ascribing glory to Him who is the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the Almighty.

From this point, Paul turns to survey the practical results which naturally flow from the doctrine he had been illustrating. He was addressing those who were at Rome, 'beloved of God, called saints;' and by the remembrance of those mercies of which, whether Jews or Gentiles, they were the monuments, he beseeches them to present their bodies a living sacrifice to God, whose glory is the first and the last end of creation. In thus demanding the entire surrender or sacrifice of their bodies, he enforces the duty by designating it their reasonable service. Nothing can be more agreeable to the dictates of right reason, than to spend and be spent in the service of that God, whose glory is transcendent, whose power is infinite, whose justice is inviolable, and whose tender mercies are over all His works. On this firm foundation the Apostle establishes the various duties to which men are called, as associated with each other in society, whether in the ordinary relations of life, or as subjects of civil government, or as members of the Church of Christ. The morality here inculcated is the purest and most exalted. It presents nothing of that incongruous medley which is discernible in the schemes of philosophy. It exhibits no traces of confusion or disorder. It places everything on its right basis, and in its proper place. It equally enjoins our duty towards God and our duty towards man; and in this it differs from all human systems, which uniformly exclude the former, or keep it in the background. It shows how doctrine and practice are inseparably connected — how the one is the motive, the source, or the principle — how the other is the effect; and how both are so united, that such as is the first, so will be the last. According to our views of the character of God, so will be our conduct. The corruption of morals, which degraded and destroyed the heathen world, was the natural result of what infidels have designated 'their elegant mythology.' The abominable character of the heathen gods and goddesses were at once the transcript and the provocatives of the abominations of their worshippers. But wherever the true God has been known, wherever the character of Jehovah has been proclaimed, there a new standard of morals has been erected; and even those by whom His salvation is rejected are induced to counterfeit the virtues to which they do not attain. True Christianity and sound morals are indissolubly linked together; and just in proportion as men are estranged from the knowledge and service of God, so shall we find their actions stained with the corruptions of sin.

Where in all the boasted moral systems of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Epictetus, Seneca, or the rest of the Greek and Roman philosophers, shall be found anything comparable to the purity and beauty of the virtues enjoined by Paul in the closing chapters of this Epistle? Even modern writers on Ethics, when departing from the only pure standard of virtue, discover the grossest ignorance and inconsistency. But Paul, writing without any of the aids of human wisdom, draws his precepts from the fountain of heavenly truth, and inculcates on the disciples of Jesus a code of duties, which, if habitually practiced by mankind, would change the world from what it is a scene of strife, jealousy, and division — and make it what it was before the entrance of sin, a paradise fit for the Lord to visit, and for man to dwell in.