

## THE CONCISION AND THE CIRCUMCISION.

"Beware of the concision; for we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh." – Phil. 3:2,3.

THE Lord and the apostles take special care to point out to the Church the serious significance of her present position, upon which the weighty considerations of her eternal welfare depend. They mark out the specially perilous times, and forewarn us what to expect in the way of persecution and fiery trials of faith and patience, and then minister to us beforehand all the words of counsel, warning, encouragement, hope and promise that are necessary to enable us to war a good warfare and lay hold upon eternal life.

But while the Lord promises grace sufficient for every time of need, he never encourages any to rest supinely upon his promises: the exhortations are always to activity, alertness and indomitable energy and perseverance. While he says, "I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go," he also adds, "Be not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle." (Psa. 32:8,9.) In this intelligent and proper attitude he would have us beware – be cautious, careful and watchful – against all the deceptions and dangers that beset our way; because we have a wily adversary who is the leader of the hosts of darkness against the Lord and against his anointed – "For we wrestle not against [mere] flesh and blood [the visible tools of the adversary], but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places [under the power and control of the prince of this world, Satan]." The exhortations to beware of dangers are quite numerous – "Beware of *false prophets*" (Matt. 7:15-20); "Beware of [*evil*] *men*" (Matt. 10:17); "Beware of the *leaven* [the false doctrine] of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Matt. 16:6,12); "Beware of *covetousness*" (Luke 12:15); "Beware lest any man spoil you

through *philosophy and vain deceit*" (Col. 2:8); "Beware lest ye, also, being *led away* with the [R1671 : page 216] error of the wicked, *fall from your own steadfastness*" (2 Pet. 3:17); and, in the words of the above text, "Beware of *dogs*, beware of *evil workers*, beware of the *concision*," etc.

While the wholesome dread of all these should be ever before our minds and keep us continually on guard against sudden attacks of the enemy, the Apostle in our text calls special attention to three things against which he would have us on guard. In the Scriptures, dogs are generally used as symbols of evil, the reference being, not to our domesticated and often noble animal, but to such as are more common in eastern countries, which are indeed disgusting creatures – lazy, filthy, greedy, snapping, snarling, treacherous and generally pestiferous – apt symbols of a very dangerous and wicked class of people. Beware, then, of all such dispositions, no matter by what name they disguise themselves. If any man be an idler – delinquent in his own duties, but busy in those of other men; if he be filthy, breeding spiritual contagion wherever he goes; if he be greedy – self-seeking; if his disposition be to snap and snarl, to bite and devour, or to treacherously lie in wait to deceive, – beware of that man. He is not fit company for a child of God: his influence is contaminating. "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

And "give not that which is holy [the truth] unto the [such] dogs; neither cast ye your pearls before swine [the two being classed together], lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you." (Matt. 7:6.) "Light [truth] is sown for *the righteous*," and not for those of the dog and swine disposition. When, therefore, we find any such, we are to beware of them – be cautious, and on guard against their contaminating influence. The only preaching proper for such is, "Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out;" and "Flee from the wrath to come;" for "God will bring every work into judgment with every secret thing." "He will reward righteousness and punish iniquity." [R1671 : page 217]

Beware of evil workers: of those who go about to do evil, who have no bridle on their tongue, but who are given to evil-speaking and evil-surmisings which are improper. Indeed, evil surmising and evil speaking have become so common that very many professed children of God seem to think nothing of it; and little by little the habit grows, crowding out all spirituality; and thereby many are defiled and great reproach is brought upon the cause of Christ. Beware of all such evil workers: shun them as you would a pestilence; for it is a moral pestilence, most ruinous and fatal in its character. Our communications with such should be only to the extent of reproof, and, if that should fail, of exposing the evil work. The spirit that leads to slander is a murderous spirit, and should be recognized and dealt with accordingly.

"Beware of the concision," says the Apostle, – of those not fully and truly consecrated to God; but who stir up strife and factions in the Church; "for we are of the circumcision" – whose circumcision is in the heart. Yes, let us beware of all such; for the influence of the semi-worldly mind is often more subtle, and therefore more dangerous, than that which makes no profession or effort toward godliness. The works of the flesh are covetousness and ambition – for money, fame or any or all of the desires common to the natural man. But the works of the truly and fully circumcised heart are the opposite of all these: they are faith, love, joy, peace, heavenly hopes and aspirations, and the daily crucifying of the flesh.

No natural man of the fallen race ever had a fully circumcised heart. And such as have it are dead to the world. Its hopes, aims and ambitions are crucified to them, and they are alive toward God. Any one who has the realization of such a condition of heart has in this fact a blessed evidence of his acceptance with God and of his heirship of all the exceeding great and precious promises – if so be that he so *continue*, faithful even unto death.

But let all such beware of the concision, the spirit of strife and division; for in the fiery trials of this evil day all such will surely fall,

and only such as worship God in spirit and in truth can stand. Already the test of endurance is proving a severe test for some; and it will surely be yet more severe. "Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin." There is no assurance whatever that any will be able to stand in this evil day who have not devoted themselves fully and unreservedly to the Lord. But those who have done so, and who are still faithful to their covenant, have cause to rejoice in Christ Jesus, whose grace is sufficient for them, and whose precious blood purchased their ransom.

### **"NO CONFIDENCE IN THE FLESH."**

Like the Apostle, we are to have "no confidence in the flesh" – in any works of the flesh or advantages of fleshly inheritance. Our confidence rests in God who accepts us through the merit of his beloved Son.

A very false construction, often put upon these words of the Apostle, infers from these words that he did not trust himself or anyone else; – that he put no confidence in any human being; – that he was always ready to be suspicious.

That this is a wrong view of the Apostle's words is very clear: (1) from the fact that in his various epistles he repeatedly expresses confidence in himself and in other believers, and (2) from the context of this passage. The following verses (4-9) show that the Apostle meant that his confidence toward God was not based upon his being a circumcised Hebrew, nor on his zeal for God and his law, etc. These things in which he did have confidence, once, he now counts as loss and dross. He no longer has confidence therein, but rejects them as so much "loss" and "dross" and "dung." His confidence now is based upon faith in Christ's great sacrifice, and a full consecration to his service. – Verses 10-14.

Let us be like-minded, and have great confidence in God and Christ and in all who have their word and spirit; and let us put no confidence in works of the flesh – in anything that we or others have done or can do

aside from the salvation which God has provided in Christ Jesus,  
"through faith in his blood."

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