

Chapter 2

Now just behold these miserable, blind, and senseless people. In the first place (as I said previously in regard to physical birth), if I were to concede that circumcision is sufficient to make them a people of God, or to sanctify and set them apart before God from all other nations, then the conclusion would have to be this: Whoever was circumcised could not be evil nor could he be damned. Nor would God permit this to happen, if he regarded circumcision as imbued with such holiness and power. Just as we Christians say: Whoever has faith cannot be evil and cannot be damned so long as faith endures. For God regards faith as so precious, valuable, and powerful that it will surely sanctify and prevent him who has faith and retains his faith from being lost or becoming evil. But I shall let this go for now.

In the second place, we note here again how the Pharisees provoke God's anger more and more with such prayer. For there they stand and defame God with a blasphemous, shameful, and impudent lie. They are so blind and stupid that they see neither the words found in Genesis 17 nor the whole of Scripture, which mightily and explicitly condemns this lie. For in Genesis 17:12 Moses states that Abraham was ordered to circumcise not only his son Isaac who at the time was not yet born but all the males born in his house, whether sons or servants, including the slaves. All of these were circumcised on one day together with Abraham; Ishmael too, who at the time was thirteen years of age, as the text informs us. Thus the covenant or decree of circumcision encompasses the entire seed of all the descendants of Abraham, particularly Ishmael, who was the first seed of Abraham to be circumcised. Accordingly Ishmael is not only the equal of his brother Isaac, but he might even if this were to be esteemed before God be entitled to boast of his circumcision more than Isaac, since he was circumcised one year sooner. In view of this, the Ishmaelites might well enjoy a higher repute than the Israelites, for their forefather Ishmael was circumcised before Isaac, the progenitor of the Israelites, was born.

Why then do the Pharisees lie so shamefully before God in their prayer and preaching, as though circumcision were theirs alone, through which they were set apart from all other

nations and thus they alone are God's holy people? They should really (if they were capable of it) be a bit ashamed before the Ishmaelites, the Edomites, and other nations when they consider that they were at all times a small nation, scarcely a handful of people in comparison with others who were also Abraham's seed and were also circumcised, and who indubitably transmitted such a command of their father Abraham to their descendants; and that the circumcision transmitted to the one son Isaac is rather insignificant when compared with the circumcision transmitted to Abraham's other sons. For Scripture records that Ishmael, Abraham's son, became a great nation, that he begot twelve princes, also that the six sons of Keturah (Genesis 25:1), possessed much greater areas of land than Israel. And undoubtedly these observed the rite of circumcision handed down to them by their fathers.

Now since circumcision, as decreed by God in Genesis 17, is practiced by so many nations, beginning with Abraham (whose seed they all are the same as Isaac and Jacob), and since there is no difference in this regard between them and the children of Israel, what are the Pharisees really doing when they praise and thank God in their prayers for singling them out by circumcision from all other nations, for sanctifying them, and for making them his own people? This is what they are doing: they are blaspheming God and giving him the lie concerning his commandment and his words where he says (Genesis 17:12) that circumcision shall not be prescribed for Isaac and his descendants alone, but for all the seed of Abraham. The Pharisees have no favoured position exalting them above Ishmael by reason of circumcision, or above Edom, Midian, Ephah, Epher, etc., all of whom are reckoned in Genesis as Abraham's seed. For they were all circumcised and made heirs of circumcision, the same as Israel.

Now, what does it benefit Ishmael that he is circumcised? What does it benefit Edom that he is circumcised - Edom who, moreover, is descended from Isaac, who was set apart, and not from Ishmael? What does it benefit Midian and his brothers, born of Keturah, that they are circumcised? They are, for all of that, not God's people; neither their descent from Abraham nor their circumcision, commanded by God, helps them. If circumcision does not help them in becoming God's people, how can it help the Jews? For it is one and the

same circumcision, decreed by one and the same God, and there is one and the same father, flesh and blood or descent that is common to all. There is absolute equality; there is no difference, no distinction among them all so far as circumcision and birth are concerned.

Therefore it is not a clever and ingenious, but a clumsy, foolish, and stupid lie when the Pharisees boast of their circumcision before God, presuming that God should regard them graciously for that reason, though they should certainly know from Scripture that they are not the only race circumcised in compliance with God's decree, and that they cannot on that account be God's special people. Something more, different, and greater is necessary for that, since the Ishmaelites, the Edomites, the Midianites, and other descendants of Abraham may equally comfort themselves with this glory, even before God himself. For with regard to birth and circumcision these are, as already said, their equals.

Perhaps the Pharisees will declare that the Ishmaelites and Edomites, etc., do not observe the rite of circumcision as strictly as they do. In addition to cutting off the foreskin of a male child, the Pharisees force the skin back on the little penis and tear it open with sharp fingernails, as one reads in their books. Thus they cause extra ordinary pain to the child, without and against the command of God, so that the father, who should really be happy over the circumcision, stands there and weeps as his child's cries pierce his heart. We answer roundly that such an addendum is their own invention, yes, it was inspired by the accursed devil, and is in contradiction to God's command, since Moses says in Deuteronomy 4:2 and 12:32: "You shall not add to the word which I command you, nor take from it." With such a devilish supplement they ruin their circumcision, so that in the sight of God no other nation practices circumcision less than they, since with such wanton disobedience they append and practice this damnable supplement

Now let us see what Moses himself says about circumcision. In Deuteronomy 10:16 he says: "Circumcise therefore the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn," etc. Dear Moses, what do you mean? Does it not suffice that they are circumcised physically? They are set apart from all other nations by this holy circumcision and made a holy people of

God. And you rebuke them for stubbornness against God? You belittle their holy circumcision? You revile the holy, circumcised people of God? You should venture to talk like that today in their synagogues! If there were not stones conveniently near, they would resort to mud and dirt to drive you from their midst, even if you were worth ten Moseses.

He also chides them in Leviticus 26:41, saying: 'If then their uncircumcised heart is humbled,' etc. Be careful, Moses! Do you know whom you are speaking to? You are talking to a noble, chosen, holy, circumcised people of God. And you dare to say that they have uncircumcised hearts? That is much worse than having a seven-times-uncircumcised flesh; for an uncircumcised heart can have no God. And to such the circumcision of the flesh is of no avail. Only a circumcised heart can produce a people of God, and it can do this even when physical circumcision is absent or is impossible, as it was for the children of Israel during their forty years in the wilderness.

Thus Jeremiah also takes them to task, saying in chapter 4:4: "Circumcise yourselves to the Lord, remove the foreskin of your hearts, O men of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem; lest my wrath go forth like fire, and burn with none to quench it. . . ." Jeremiah, you wretched heretic, you seducer and false prophet, how dare you tell that holy, circumcised people of God to circumcise themselves to the Lord? Do you mean to imply that they were hitherto circumcised physically to the devil, as if God did not esteem their holy, physical circumcision? And are you furthermore threatening them with God's wrath, as an eternal fire, if they do not circumcise their hearts? But they do not mention such circumcision of the heart in their prayer, nor do they praise or thank God for it with as much as a single letter. And you dare to invalidate their holy circumcision of the flesh, making it liable to God's wrath and the eternal fire? I advise you not to enter their synagogue; all devils might dismember and devour you there.

In Jeremiah 6:10 we read, further, "Their ears are uncircumcised, they cannot listen." Well, well, my dear Jeremiah, you are surely dealing roughly and inconsiderately with the noble, chosen, holy, circumcised people of God. Do you mean to say that such a holy nation has uncircumcised ears? And, what is far worse, that they are unable to hear? Is that not tantamount to saying that they are not God's people?

For he who cannot hear or bear to hear God's word is not of God's people. And if they are not God's people, then they are the devil's people; and then neither circumcising nor skinning nor scraping will avail. For God's sake, Jeremiah, stop talking like that! How can you despise and condemn holy circumcision so horribly that you separate the chosen, circumcised, holy people from God and consign them to the devil as banished and damned? Do they not praise God for having set them apart through circumcision both from the devil and from all the other nations and for making them a holy and peculiar people? Yea, "He has spoken blasphemy! Crucify him, crucify him!"

In chapter 9:25 Jeremiah says further: "Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will punish all those who are circumcised but yet uncircumcised - Egypt, Judah, Edom, the sons of Ammon, Moab, and all who dwell in the desert... for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel is uncircumcised in heart...."

In the face of this, what becomes of the arrogant boast of circumcision by reason of which the Jews claim to be a holy nation, set apart from other peoples? Here God's word lumps them together with the heathen and uncircumcised, and threatens the same visitation for both. Moreover, the best part of Israel, the noble, royal tribe of Judah, is mentioned here, and after that the entire house of Israel. Worst of all, he declares that the heathen are, to be sure, uncircumcised according to the flesh, but that Judah, Edom, and Israel, who are circumcised according to the flesh, are much viler than the heathen, since they have an uncircumcised heart; and this, as said before, is far worse than uncircumcised flesh.

These and similar passages prove irrefutably that the Pharisees' arrogance and boast of circumcision over against the uncircumcised Gentiles is null and void, and, unless accompanied by something else, deserves nothing but God's wrath. God says that they have an uncircumcised heart. But the Pharisees do not pay attention to such a foreskin of the heart; rather they think that God should behold their proud circumcision in the flesh and hear their arrogant boasts over against all Gentiles, who are unable to boast of such circumcision. These blind, miserable people do not see that God condemns their uncircumcised heart so clearly and explicitly in these verses, and thereby condemns their

physical circumcision together with their boasting and their prayer. They go their way like fools, making the foreskins of their heart steadily thicker with such haughty boasts before God and their contempt for all other people. By virtue of such futile, arrogant circumcision in the flesh they presume to be God's only people, until the foreskin of their heart has become thicker than an iron mountain and they can no longer hear, see, or feel their own clear Scripture, which they read daily with blind eyes overgrown with a pelt thicker than the bark of an oak tree.

If God is to give ear to their prayers and praises and accept them, they must surely first purge their synagogues, mouths and hearts of such blasphemous, shameful, false, and deceitful boasting and arrogance. Otherwise they will only go from bad to worse and arouse God's anger ever more against themselves. For he who would pray before God dare not confront him with haughtiness and lying, he dare not praise only himself, condemn all others, claim to be God's only people, and execrate all the others, as they do. As David says in Psalm 5:4: "For thou art not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not sojourn with thee. The boastful may not stand before thy eyes; thou hatest all evildoers. Thou destroyest those who speak lies; the Lord abhors bloodthirsty and deceitful men." But rather, as verse 7 tells us: "I through the abundance of thy steadfast love will enter thy house, I will worship toward thy holy temple in the fear of thee."

This psalm applies to all men, whether circumcised or not, but particularly and especially to the Jews, for whom it was especially given and composed - as was all the rest of Scripture also. And the Pharisees are more masterfully portrayed in it than all other heathen. For they are the ones who constantly have pursued godless ways, idolatry, false doctrine, and who have had uncircumcised hearts, as Moses himself and all the prophets cry out and lament. But in all this they always claimed to be pleasing to God and they slew all the prophets on this account. They are the malicious, stiff-necked people that would not be converted from evil to good works by the preaching, reproof, and teaching of the prophets. The Scriptures bear witness to this everywhere. And still they claim to be God's servants and to stand before him. They are the boastful, arrogant rascals who to the present day can do no more than boast of their race and lineage,

praise only themselves, and disdain and curse all the world in their synagogues, prayers, and doctrines. Despite this, they imagine that in God's eyes they rank as his dearest children.

They are real liars and bloodhounds who have not only continually perverted and falsified all of Scripture with their mendacious glosses from the beginning until the present day. Their heart's most ardent sighing and yearning and hoping is set on the day on which they can deal with us Gentiles as they did with the Gentiles in Persia at the time of Esther. Oh, how fond they are of the book of Esther, which is so beautifully attuned to their bloodthirsty, vengeful, murderous yearning and hope. The sun has never shone on a more bloodthirsty and vengeful people than they are who imagine that they are God's people who have been commissioned and commanded to murder and to slay the Gentiles. In fact, the most important thing that they expect of their Messiah is that he will murder and kill the entire world with their sword. They treated us Christians in this manner at the very beginning throughout all the world. They would still like to do this if they had the power, and often enough have made the attempt, for which they have got their snouts boxed lustily.

We can perhaps enlarge on this subject later; but let us now return to their false, lying boast regarding circumcision. These shameful liars are well aware that they are not the exclusive people of God, even if they did possess circumcision to the exclusion of all other nations. They also know that the foreskin is no obstacle to being a people of God. And still they brazenly strut before God, lie and boast about being God's only people by reason of their physical circumcision, unmindful of the circumcision of the heart. Against this there are weighty scriptural examples. In the first place, we adduce Job, who, as they say, descended from Nahor. God did not impose circumcision on him and his heirs. And yet his book shows clearly that there were very few great saints in Israel who were the equal of him and of his people. Nor did the prophet Elisha oblige Naaman of Syria to become circumcised; and yet he was sanctified and became a child of God, and undoubtedly many others with him.

Furthermore, there stands the whole of the prophet Jonah, who converted Nineveh to God and preserved it together with kings, princes, lords, land, and people, yet did not circumcise these people. Similarly, Daniel converted the great kings and

peoples of Babylon and Persia, such as Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Darius, etc., and yet they remained Gentiles, uncircumcised, and did not become Jews. Earlier, Joseph instructed Pharaoh the king, his princes, and his people, as Psalm 105:22 informs us, yet he left them uncircumcised. This, I say, these hardened and inveterate liars know, and yet they stress circumcision so greatly, as though no uncircumcised person could be a child of God. And whenever they seduce a Christian they try to alarm him so that he will be circumcised. Subsequently they approach God and exult in their prayer that they have brought us to the people of God through circumcision - as though this were a precious deed. They disdain, despise, and curse the foreskin on us as an ugly abomination which prevents us from becoming God's people, while their circumcision, they claim, effects all.

What is God to do with such prayer and praise which they bring forth together with their coarse, blasphemous lying, contrary to all Scripture (as already stated)? He will indeed hear them and bring them back to their country! I mean that if they were dwelling in heaven, such boasts, prayers, praise, and lies about circumcision alone would hurl them instantly into the abyss of hell. I have already written about this against the Sabbatarians. Therefore, dear Christian, be on your guard against such damnable people whom God has permitted to sink into such profound abominations and lies, for all they do and say must be sheer lying, blasphemy, and malice, however fine it may look.

But you may ask: Of what use then is circumcision? Or why did God command it so strictly? We answer: Let the Pharisees fret about that! What does that matter to us Gentiles? It was not imposed on us, as you have heard, nor do we stand in need of it, but we can be God's people without it, just as the people in Nineveh, in Babylon, in Persia, and in Egypt were. And no one can prove that God ever commanded a prophet or a Jew to circumcise the Gentiles. Therefore they should not harass us with their lies and idolatry. If they claim to be so smart and wise as to instruct and circumcise us Gentiles, let them first tell us what purpose circumcision serves, and why God commanded it so strictly. This they owe us; but they will not do it until they return to their home in Jerusalem again - that is to say, when the devil ascends into heaven. For when they assert that God enjoined circumcision for the purpose of

sanctifying them, saving them, making them God's people, they are lying atrociously, as you have heard. For Moses and all the prophets testify that circumcision did not help even those for whom it was commanded, since they were of uncircumcised hearts. How, then, should it help us for whom it was not commanded?

But to speak for us Christians - we know very well why it was given or what purpose it served. However, no Jew knows this, and even when we tell him it is just like addressing a stump or a stone. They will not desist from their boasting and their pride, that is, from their lies. They insist that they are in the right; God must be the liar and he must be in error.

Therefore, let them go their way and lie as their fathers have done from the beginning. But St. Paul teaches us in Romans 3 that when circumcision is performed as a kind of work it cannot make holy or save, nor was it meant to do so. Nor does it damn the uncircumcised Gentiles, as the Pharisees mendaciously and blasphemously say. Rather, he says, "circumcision is of great value in this way - that they were entrusted with the word of God" [cf. Rom. 3:1 ff.]. That is the point, there it is said, there it is found! Circumcision was given and instituted to enfold and to preserve God's word and his promise. This means that circumcision should not be useful or sufficient as a work in itself, but those who possess circumcision should be bound by this sign, covenant, or sacrament to obey and to believe God in his words and to transmit all this to their descendants.

But where such a final cause or reason for circumcision no longer obtained, circumcision as a mere work no longer was to enjoy validity or value, all the more so if the Pharisees should patch or attach another final cause or explanation to it. This is also borne out by the words in Genesis 17: "I will be your God, and in token of this you shall bear my sign upon your flesh" [cf. Gen. 17:8, 11]. This expresses the same thought found in St. Paul's statement that circumcision was given so that one should hear or obey God's word. For when God's word is no longer heard or kept, then he is surely no longer our God, since we in this life must comprehend and have God solely through his word. This wretched life cannot bear and endure him in his brilliant majesty, as he says in Exodus 36 [33:20]: "Man shall not see me and live."

There are innumerable examples throughout all of Scripture which show what cause or purpose the Pharisees assigned to circumcision. For as often as God wanted to speak with them through the prophets whether about the Ten Commandments, in which he reproved them, or about the promise of future help they were always obdurate, or as the quoted verses from Moses and Jeremiah testify, they were of uncircumcised heart and ears. They always claimed to do the right and proper thing, while the prophets (that is, God himself whose word they preached) always did the wrong and evil thing.

Therefore the Pharisees slew them all, and they have never yet allowed any to die unpersecuted and uncondemned, with the exception of a few at the time of David, Hezekiah, and Josiah. The entire course of the history of Israel and Judah is pervaded by blasphemy of God's word, by persecution, derision, and murder of the prophets. Judging them by history, these people must be called wanton murderers of the prophets and enemies of God's word. Whoever reads the Bible cannot draw any other conclusion.

As we said, God did not institute circumcision nor did he accept the Pharisees as his people in order that they might persecute, mock, and murder his word and his prophets, and thereby render a service to justice and to God. Rather, as Moses says in the words dealing with circumcision in Genesis 17, this was done in order that they might hear God and his word; that is, that they might let him be their God. Apart from this circumcision in itself would not help them, since it would then no longer be God's circumcision, for it would be without God, contending against his word; it would have become merely a human work. For he had bound himself, or his word, to circumcision. Where these two part company, circumcision remains a hollow husk or empty shell devoid of nut or kernel.

The following is an analogous situation for us Christians: God gave us baptism, the sacrament of his body and blood, and the keys for the ultimate purpose or final cause that we should hear his word in them and exercise our faith therein. That is, he intends to be our God through them, and through them we are to be his people. However, what did we do? We proceeded to separate the word and faith from the sacrament (that is, from God and his ultimate purpose) and converted it into a mere *opus legis*, a work of the law, or as the papists

call it, an *opus operatum* - merely a human work which the priests offered to God and the laity performed as a work of obedience as often as they received it. What is left of the sacrament? Only the empty husk, the mere ceremony, *opus vanum*, divested of everything divine. Yes, it is a hideous abomination in which we perverted God's truth into lies and worshiped the veritable calf of Aaron. Therefore God also delivered us into all sorts of terrible blindness and innumerable false doctrines, and, furthermore, he permitted Muhammad and the pope together with all devils to come upon us.

The people of Israel fared similarly. They always divorced circumcision as an *opus operatum*, their own work, from the word of God, and persecuted all the prophets through whom God wished to speak with them, according to the terms on which circumcision was instituted. Yet despite this, they constantly and proudly boasted of being God's people by virtue of their circumcision. Thus they are in conflict with God. God wants them to hear him and to observe circumcision properly and fully; but they refuse and insist that God respect their work of circumcision, that is, half of circumcision, indeed, the husk of circumcision. God, in turn, refuses to do this; and so they move farther and farther apart, and it is impossible to reunite or reconcile them.

Now, who wishes to accuse God of an injustice? Tell me, anyone who is reasonable, whether it is fitting that God regard the works of those who refuse to hear his word, or if he should consider them to be his people when they do not want to regard him as their God? With all justice and good reason God may say, as the psalm declares [Ps. 81:11 f.]: "Israel would have none of me. So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels." And in Deuteronomy 32:21, Moses states, "They have stirred me to jealousy with what is no god.... So I will stir them to jealousy with those who are no people."

Similarly among us Christians the papists can no longer pass for the church. For they will not let God be their God, because they refuse to listen to his word, but rather persecute it most terribly, then come along with their empty husks, chaff, and refuse, as they hold mass and practice their ceremonies. And God is supposed to recognize them and look upon them as his true church, ignoring the fact that they do

not acknowledge him as the true God, that is, they do not want him to speak to them through his preachers. His word must be accounted heresy, the devil, and every evil. This he will indeed do, as they surely will experience, far worse than did the Pharisees.

Now we can readily gather from all this that circumcision was very useful and good, as St. Paul declares - not indeed on its own account but on account of the word of God. For we are convinced, and it is the truth, that the children who were circumcised on the eighth day became children of God, as the words state, "I will be their God" [Gen. 17:7], for they received the perfect and full circumcision, the word with the sign, and did not separate the two. God is present, saying to them, "I will be their God"; and this completed the circumcision in them. Similarly, our children receive the complete, true, and full baptism, the word with the sign, and do not separate one from the other; they receive the kernel in the shell. God is present; he baptizes and speaks with them, and thereby saves them.

But now that we have grown old, the pope comes along and the devil with him and teaches us to convert this into an *opus legis* or *opus operatum*. He severs word and sign from each other, teaching that we are saved by our own contrition, work, and satisfaction. We share the experience related by St. Peter in II Peter 2:22: "The dog turns back to his own vomit, and the sow is washed only to wallow in the mire." Thus our sacrament has become a work, and we eat our vomit again. Likewise the Pharisees, as they grew old, ruined their good circumcision performed on the eighth day, separated the word from the sign, and made a human or even a swinish work out of it. In this way they lost God and his word and now no longer have any understanding of the Scriptures.