

Bryan Station Baptist Church

INDEPENDENT

MISSIONARY

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

ORGANIZED 1786

VOL. 16, NO. 10
JULY, 1985

"Preaching The Same Truth We Preached Before Kentucky Was A State"

GOD'S COMPETITORS

Satan: "Ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."
(Genesis 3:5)

The Lord: "Behold the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil."
(Genesis 3:22)

Introduction: Preachers can tell interesting stories of how, in the providence of God, sermons come to them. We will have personal experiences in which a certain text of scripture will grip us and refuse to leave us until we have pondered it and studied it and wrestled with it and prayed over and preached from it. This sermon came to me through controversy. Several years ago, I published a series of sermons on eternal punishment, and a copy of these sermons fell into the hands of one J. Robinson of Louisville, who replied to them in an effort to refute the truth of eternal punishment. He predicated his denial of eternal punishment on the denial of eternal existence for the wicked. He said that to believe in the eternal existence of the wicked is to believe the devil's lie when he said to Eve, "Ye shall be as gods." He mutilated my first text and made it read "Ye shall BE--as gods," and making it mean that the devil promised

eternal existence as the price for sinning. I then began a careful study of the two texts: the one a promise of Satan to Eve, the other, a declaration of God about man. And you will notice that the two texts are in agreement. What Satan predicted God said had come to pass.

My theme--COMPETITION WITH GOD--interprets these texts and gives us a striking and ancient definition of sin. Sin is competition with God for authority.

That the infinite, incomprehensible, and incomparable God should have competitors is the wonder of the ages. That the eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, immutable and independent God should be opposed is the height of creature folly. That the Creator, Ruler, Preserver, and Saviour should be denied and caricatured is so amazing as to be shocking. Notwithstanding, the Almighty and All-wise God has His competitors, opponents, and slanderers.

A competitor is one who strives with another for supremacy. Competition is the struggle for a common object or position. Men in business and professional life compete for the patronage of their fellowmen. And

in the world of sports, there is competition for mastery and consequent glory. The most terrible competition among mortals is now going on in this war. But competition with God is sin--and sin is the only thing that is fraught with eternal danger.

I. Our texts speak of competition with God for sovereignty--competition in the realm of authority. It raises the question as to who is Lord of my life. It finds exemplification in Pharaoh who blurted out: "Who is the Lord that I should obey him?"

A. The Lord God of the Bible is the one and only rightful Sovereign. He is the only one who has the right and ability to do as He pleases, the only one who has the right to act for his own personal pleasure and glory. As Creator and Ruler, He consults His own pleasure about all He does, and calls upon His creatures to live for His glory. He is the Supreme lawgiver and all His moral creatures are charged to keep his law and be subject to his dominion. To deny this and to act as if it were not true is to sin. Every sin in a denial of the sovereignty of God.

B. The Bible declares

in no uncertain terms, the sovereignty and supremacy of God. Daniel 4:35 says, "And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing; and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?" See also Psalm 135:6, Isaiah 40:14, and Revelation 4:11.

Men deny and defy God's authority whenever they consult their own opinion or desires or conscience instead of God's word. Our Lord was the only man who ever acted like that and he said: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." We Baptists have great confessions of faith. We say that the Bible is all-sufficient and infallible as a rule of faith and practice, and then consult everything but the Bible about what we believe and do. Wrapped in our declaration of faith, we are a great people; but, wrapped in ourselves, we are a very small package. How did Adam and Eve know what they could or could not do and what they could or could not have in the garden? Why, God told them what they could have and what they could do.

C. Angels were the first to deny the sovereignty of God. Led by their chief, many of them rebelled against God's authority--tried to become like God. That slimy, slippery, sweet, and beautiful thing we call sin was born that day when Lucifer, the anointed cherub, perfect in beauty and the sum of all creature wisdom said, "I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will be like the Most High." (Isaiah 14:13, 14) Jude tells of angels who kept not their first estate or principality --they wanted more authority

--they did not want to be subject to God's law and will for their lives. And that is sin.

D. The devil became the instigator of sin on the part of man. He persuaded man to compete with God for authority. God created man and put him in a garden and gave him all he needed for his happiness. But God reminded man that He was sovereign. He put man under law. He did not leave him to do as he pleased. He would test him for obedience. He reserved one tree of the garden for himself and warned of fatal results of disobedience. He named the tree "The Knowledge of Good and Evil." That tree stood there as a constant and silent reminder that God alone is to say or determine what is good and what is wrong.

Now sovereignty was the bait the devil held out to Eve. He said, "Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." He told them violation of God's law would mean liberty, power, and wisdom. He told them their eyes would be opened, not their physical eyes, for they were not blind physically, but the eyes of their understanding, so that they would be able to determine what is right and what is wrong. They would not have to be subject to what God says. They would be sovereign and do as they pleased. They would not have to be tied to "God's apron string." They could do what was right in their own eyes. So they entered into cut-throat competition with God for authority. God had said, This is my will for your life. They said, we will, and died--became separated from God and his favor.

The issue is still over the question as to who has the right to determine what is right and what is wrong. You cannot get anybody to say that it is right to do wrong, but the trouble is that people insist on saying for themselves what is right and proper. And that is sin.

II. DEEPER MEANING OF THE TEXTS. The devil said man would become like God, and God said, "Behold, man is become as one of us, to know good and evil." Now in what sense did man become like God in sinning?

A. Not with respect to character. Man did not acquire the holy character of God by sinning. Sin makes for bad character. Sin ruined the good character man had by creation.

B. Not with respect to divine attributes, such as power and wisdom and holiness. Man lost power to live a good life and died. He lost his estate of holiness and became depraved. He lost his original wisdom and became a fool. Sin is consummate folly.

C. Man did not become like God actually, that is in fact. There is only one possible sense in which man became like God in sinning, and that was in spirit and aim. God does as he pleases and so man would do as he pleased. God is independent, so man became independent in spirit. God is a law unto Himself, He asks leave to be from none, and so man would do as he pleased. And since there is only one sovereign and supreme being, when man followed his own will, he entered into competition with God. The spirit and aim and essence of sin is competition with God for authority. It is saying, "I will," against God's will. In sinning, man caught the spirit of inde-

pendency. He took sovereignty into his own hands. He followed his own way instead of God's way.

What is the difference between Satan's promise and God's statement? Only this: Satan promised that man would become like God in fact; God declared that man had become like Him in aim and spirit--man was trying to become God. God acted immediately to prevent their venture from being a success. God executed His threat--instead of actually becoming like God, man became a competitor with God--and this meant his fall and ruin.

III. RESULTS OF COMPETITION WITH GOD. Satan promised success and man hoped for happiness, but the results were misery and woe. Who can describe the misery caused by sin? Sin is a colossal failure. It is a cheat. It promises happiness and pays off in sorrow. It promises a long life and pays off in death. It promises peace and pays off in pain. It baits with temporary pleasure and hides the hook of eternal punishment. There is pleasure in sin; but, remember, it is only for a season. Moses refused to even nibble at the devil's bait when he chose to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.

Man is become as one FROM us. The thought is that of a break with God. You cannot be God's competitor and partner too. God will suffer no competitors. "I am God and beside me there is none else." You have to take the long look to see whether a life or an act is prosperous. I guess it seemed prosperous enough to Adam and Eve, while they were eating the forbidden fruit; but, when they had to face God, it was the horse

of another color. Was their sin a success? Take a long look and what do you see? Murder in the first home--Cain killed Abel. History of war and strife and bloodshed. "Man's inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn. Blessed is the nation that has no history, because the history of the nations is written in blood." Men cannot be at war with God and live at peace among themselves.

IV. SALVATION THROUGH A COOPERANT. If God's competitor is saved, it must be through a cooperant. There is such a cooperant--even Jesus Christ. The first Adam competed with God for authority and ruined all of us; the last Adam cooperated with God for our salvation. The first Adam, "I will,"; the last Adam said, "Not my will, but thy will be done." "I delight to do thy will, O God," even though that will led him along the rough road of suffering through gloomy Gethsamane to the horrible agonies of Calvary, where he cried, "I have finished the work thou gavest me to do."

In conversion, the sinner becomes a cooperant in spirit. He takes side with God against himself--this is repentance. He agrees with God about His son--and gains eternal life in Him. And he has the spirit of obedience. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" Acts 9:6. (See also Romans 7:18.)

The Cooperant suffered for the competitors that he might bring us to God. Through faith in Christ, the sinner is delivered from the condemnation of a competitor to receive the justification of a cooperant. Salvation is in a person. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved."

C. D. COLE

Could I Be Called A Christian

Could I be called a Christian, if everybody knew
My secret thoughts and feelings and everything I do?
Could I be called a Christian, if everyone could know
That I am found in places where Jesus would not go?
Oh, could they see the likeness of Christ in me each day
Or could they hear Him speaking
In every word I say?
Or, could they hear his echo in every song I sing
In eating, drinking, and dressing
Could they see Christ in me?
Could I be called a Christian
If judged by what I read?
By all my recreations, and every thought and deed?
Could I be counted Christlike
As I now work and pray,
Unselfish, kind, forgiving, to others every day?

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DON'T BE DEPRESSED

1. The Christian has a Father in Heaven who loves him, cares for him and has blessed him with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (Jn. 16:27; Lk. 12:22-28; Eph. 1:3).
2. He has a Great High Priest in heaven to sympathize with him, succour and support him and to conduct him into heavenly things (Heb. 2:17; 4:14-16; 8:1-6).
3. He has a Great and Good Shepherd to lead him and to feed him all the way home (Ps. 23; Heb. 13:20-21).
4. He has an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the Righteous, who pleads his cause and always prevails (1 Jn. 1:8-10; 2:1).
5. He has a Divine Counsellor to go to for advice at all times (Isa. 9:6; Micah 4:9).
6. He has an Abiding Comforter (the Holy Spirit) to guide him into all truth, to teach him all things and to talk of the things of Christ and show them unto him (Jn. 14:16-17; 16:13-14).
7. He has a Throne of Grace to go to where he can obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need (Heb. 4:16).
8. He has the Holy Scriptures to search and study, which testify of the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow (1 Pet. 1:11).
9. Angels minister unto him, being an heir of salvation (Heb. 1:14).
10. He is an heir to an inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven, and is kept by the power of God until he comes into possession (1 Pet. 1:3-5).
11. He has the interest of Christ to engage him until the return of his Lord (Eph. 6:18-19; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; 1 Tim. 2:1-6).
12. He has before him the bright and blessed hope of the Lord's appearing in glory when all His saints will appear with Him and be like Him and reign with Him for ever and ever (Titus 2:13-14).

- F. E. A. -