

THE COMPETENCY OF THE SOUL

"So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Romans 14:12).

In the divine council which preceded the creation of man, the proposal was, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness." Genesis 1:26. The Bible then declares "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." Genesis 1:27. It is thus evident that man was a being of great dignity, a person with the God-like faculties of intellect, emotion and will. Man was made a rational being. He was created a holy being. It was great for him to be made like God in his intellectual excellencies, but it was his greatest glory to be made like Him in his moral perfections.

After the holy, righteous, loving and merciful God had made man in His own image, He placed him in perfect surroundings in the beautiful garden of Eden. He gave him very congenial employment, and above all the inestimable joy and privilege of direct fellowship with Him. It is difficult to refrain from contemplating the happy condition of the primeval pair. They walked in the unclouded light of the divine countenance. Their souls were filled with love and peace and joy. Every desire was gratified, and every want was supplied. Their hearts were lifted in thanksgiving to God and their voices were lifted in praise for the blessings bestowed upon them in richest profusion.

In the midst of the garden God placed the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Of the fruit of this one tree Adam was forbidden to eat on pain of death. The serpent sought to decoy Eve by raising a doubt in her mind as to the goodness of God. The doubt which Satan thus injected into her mind caused her to distort God's Word by exaggerating the severity of the prohibition and minimizing the danger of transgression. Eve disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the divine permission as to the other trees, overstated the restrictions by so misquoting the divine prohibition, and underrated her obligations by misquoting the divine penalty.

Having insisted that God had cheated her out of life's highest privileges, Satan appealed to Eve's pride by promising her two things provided she would eat of the forbidden fruit: that her eyes would be opened, and that she would be as a god, knowing good and evil. In this temptation there was an appeal to the physical, the aesthetic and the intellectual. By yielding to the temptation she came to know good without the power to do it, and evil without the power to resist it.

When Eve sinned by eating the forbidden fruit, she went immediately and influenced Adam to do likewise. How true to life that is! Oh, that God's people were as zealous to get other Christians to do right as sinners are to get others to join them in their sin.

While Eve was beguiled and sinned under deception, Adam sinned, as we say, with his eyes open. Adam acted intelligently and voluntarily. He knew what he was doing. His sin also had a far more important connection with the human race than the sin of Eve. The man, and not the woman, was to be the head and the representative of the race. We are therefore told that "by one man sin entered the world," (Romans 5:12); and that "in Adam all die" (I Corinthians 15:22).

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God their perfection was marred. Their sin brought upon

them terrible penalties, and also defiled their posterity. On account of their disobedience God was forced to pronounce judgment.

Since the fall man has been depraved. His depravity is total in the sense that it reaches to all the faculties of the soul. The mind is defiled, the understanding is darkened, the heart is deceived, the conscience is weakened, the will is enslaved, and the affections are perverted. Sin has permeated every faculty of man's being just as a drop of poison would permeate every molecule of a glass of water. By nature man is destitute of spiritual life, alienated from God, and utterly unable to deliver himself from this unhappy condition.

In the light of these facts, it is encouraging to learn from the Scriptures that man does not need to remain in this state because Christ has provided for him that which he never could have obtained otherwise. God deals with men as individuals. His Word emphasizes the supreme worth of the individual and the dignity of human personality.

One thing which makes Baptists different from all other religious groups is their belief in the competency of the individual soul. This doctrine has been stated in different ways. Dr. E. Y. Mullins said, "All men have an equal right to direct access to God." Dr. W. R. White said, "The individual not only must act for himself; he is the only one who can. God made him competent." Dr. J. B. Lawrence said, "The Baptist distinctive is the belief that every person who ever lived or ever would live has as much inherent right to deal personally with God as any other person who ever die or ever would live Baptists believe that every individual is sovereign in his own soul and stands face to face with a sovereign God; that all matters between him and God are personal; that he must act for himself, believe for himself, repent for himself, and worship God in his own way without let or hindrance by any outside authority."

In giving His commandments God singled out the individual. He said: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image," "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain," and so on through all the Ten Commandments. There were many thousands in Israel, but God pointed to the individual and laid the responsibility on him. When Christ spoke the first and greatest commandment, He said, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength." (Mark 12:30), "And the second is like this, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself'" (Mark 12:31).

Salvation is personal. "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life." To the anxious question of the Philippian jailer, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" Paul replied: "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." It was Paul who said, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Each person is competent in the sense that he has the ability and the responsibility to approach God. This doctrine of the competency of the soul cannot be overemphasized. However, we must remember that it is competency under God and not apart from Him or the means which He has provided. It is not competency apart from the Bible, which

is the revelation of God to men, but under the guidance of it. It is not competency apart from the Holy Spirit, Who is the divine Guide and Teacher, but in partnership with Him.

Every man can deal directly with God for himself, and he must do so. Others may instruct him, but he must act for Himself with reference to God and his relationship with Him. Others may tell him about the necessity for repentance, but they cannot repent for him; they may point him to the Saviour, but they cannot believe for him; they may teach him what he ought to do, but they cannot obey for him. Parents cannot repent for their children, or believe for their children, or obey for their children. The individual does not need another to perform religious acts in his stead.

There is no such thing as salvation by proxy. Salvation is strictly a personal matter. It is the result of a personal acceptance of Christ as Saviour. We do not have the right or the ability to pass to anyone else the authority to intervene between God and us. If we are to come to God at all, we must come personally and directly.

Every normal human being has the capacity for the right to direct relations with God. He has the right to approach God directly through Christ for salvation. In John 14:6 we read: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." First Timothy 2:5 reads as follows: "For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Moreover, each individual has the right to approach God through Christ in prayer. The throne of grace is open to each one of us without anyone interfering with us or standing between us and God. Our Lord said: "And whatever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son" (John 14:13).

Each of God's children is the object of God's grace, power and care. Not only does he have direct access to God through prayer, but also he has the right to read and to interpret the Bible for himself. Through his study of the Word of God, he ascertains the will of God. Therefore, the Christian, who possesses a copy of the Bible, is without excuse when it comes to his personal disobedience. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (II Timothy 2:15).

Each of us is obligated to think right, live right, and do right. Christ has saved us in order that we may be clean, pure, self-sacrificing and devout. Even though others are careless about their obligations to the Lord, we cannot escape ours. It is not a question of what others do or fail to do, each of us must be true to God. Nobody can evade his personal responsibility to Him. Each must act for himself, for he is the only one who can do so.

No human authority has any right to come between a soul and God, whether that interference be from parental authority, religious teachers, or human government. Religious acts cannot be performed by one person for another. There must never be any coercion in religious matters.

God's Word says" "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." You will not have to render an account for what father, mother, brother, sister, husband, wife, son daughter, or friend does, but you will have to render an account for what you think, say and do. You must repent for yourself, believe for yourself, be baptized for yourself, worship for yourself, serve for yourself, obey for yourself. If you were not competent to give an account of yourself to God, He certainly would not require you to do it. God never required anybody to do anything that he is not able to do. God wants you to remember that "every one of us shall give account of himself to God."