

What Must I Do?

by Dr. Manford George Gutzke

What can be done about living?

This world is where I live. In this world are human beings like myself who have joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, happiness and sadness. Men want to live, yet men die. Men want to feel good, yet men suffer pain. Men want to have, yet men lose. Men want to win, yet men are defeated. Men want peace, yet men have trouble. Is it possible to live with joy?

In this world there are results which come as consequences of what happened before. "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." I have a feeling that I can choose whether my garden will have beans or potatoes or nothing. I know I cannot decide everything, nor can I guarantee anything because of other factors, but I can choose whether I will plant beans. And if I do it is beans I can expect to have. Of course I can choose not to plant anything, in which case I cannot expect anything.

But living is not quite as simple as it sounds. "The world is full of a number of things." There are so many other things I could do than to plant beans. I do not have time or strength to do everything, and so I must prefer some things, or perhaps for the moment one thing, so that I can make my choice and do what will bring the consequences I want.

Yet, living for me is still more complicated because I have so many interests. I want so many different things. Thus I am faced with an obvious problem: since I cannot do everything I want to do, which shall I choose to do? There are things I could do that would bring benefit: these we say are good. There are things I could do that would bring pleasure: these we say are nice. But this is not all.

There are other people. Often they want to do what I want to do, and thus I am involved in competition, rivalry, jealousy, conflict. In time I develop hostility toward some, and they become hostile to me. In our conflicts we hurt each other and destroy each other's possessions. Often it happens that much energy and thought is spent in such warfare so that everybody involved loses much that could be valuable.

Actually other people are necessary for my own joy and happiness. "It is not good for man to be alone." I would not be better off if all other people were gone. I would be richer and happier if we were all friendly.

But now I must admit there is yet one more factor that makes living hard. There is something the matter with me just as there is with every other human being. Something inside of me just doesn't work right. It is as if there were some screws loose inside my own being. When I respond to any situation, or react to any stimulus, I do not respond directly, in a straight line. My reaction at any time is so colored by my own self-interest, my desires, my appetites, my vanity, my own ego, that I swerve from an honest open response. I deviate according to my own previous ideas or interests. There is an element in me that is crooked: the Bible calls it "sin."

And now you can see why I have troubles in living. The world is too much for me. People are too many for me. I do not know enough; am not strong enough; am not wise enough; am not good enough to do what would bring the results which would bring benefits that would enable me to live in peace and joy. No wonder I ask, "Can I get any help?" "Is there a balm in Gilead?"

Ye Must Be Born Again

Over 1900 years ago there was One who told the world, "I am come that they might have life, and

have it more abundantly." When Jesus of Nazareth "saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." In Himself He lived successfully: "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." This seems to say that "Christ is the answer."

Nicodemus, a leader among the Jews, came to Jesus by night to learn more about what Jesus was teaching. Doubtless he had seen Jesus as He walked and worked among people. Thus he would have seen how Jesus dealt in kindness, and in grace and power with all men who came to Him. No doubt Nicodemus could see the unselfishness, the humility, the integrity of this Teacher. But above all he was impressed by the effectiveness, the power, in all that Jesus of Nazareth did.

"Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him" (John 3:2).

And Nicodemus was puzzled as he realized that Jesus of Nazareth was teaching that the manner of life He was demonstrating was available to men. So he came with the question: "How can one have this manner of life that you are showing forth?"

The immediate answer from Jesus of Nazareth was the first of three imperatives recorded in the 3rd chapter of John. These three statements sketch the course of successful living in this world. Let us now look at them in order.

First, "You must be born again." No human being in himself, in his own human nature, can live successfully in this world. "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." Christ Jesus came into this world "to seek and to save the lost." A lost soul is saved, not by doing in his own strength what ought to be done but by receiving Christ Jesus, the Son of God, as his Savior and Lord. From that time on "it is God that worketh in you to will and to do of His good pleasure." And so successful living is to be the consequence of "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

The meaning of what has just been written is very far reaching. We teach our children right and wrong. We emphasize that doing right will be good for you and doing wrong will be bad for you. And this is important to help these children understand about living. But the truth is that such knowledge will not and cannot make them good. It is tragic to see parents who seem to think the child could do right and good if he only wanted to, without realizing that because of sin the child does not really want to do what is right and good: he actually wants to do what he pleases to do, even if it is wrong and bad. That child must be "born again."

How often do we hear preaching and teaching attempting to describe and explain conduct that would be helpful and good on the assumption that if men only knew what to do they would do it! The fact is that natural man does not do what should be done: he does what he wants to do! The only person who ever lived by doing all things as they should be done is the Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth. But now in the Gospel there is a way in which anybody, "whosoever will," can come to Christ Jesus and receive the Spirit of Christ into his own heart and life.

This truth will help us to be more generous and sympathetic with other people, at the same time as it will guard us against vain optimism about human beings. The fact is that human nature is essentially selfish whereas the will of God requires self-denial. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself. . . ." (Matt. 16:24) (Luke 14:33). One reason we do not feel the error of the appeal to human effort is because it seems so proper, so right. There is nothing actually wrong about such an appeal to men to do the right thing. It is only that it is so useless. Also it could easily give the wrong impression that we

think men could. Human beings actually should not be so much condemned as they should be told that what they could not do for themselves, Christ Jesus has actually done for them. By accepting Him a man could be forgiven and born again.

If we realize this truth we will never make the mistake of trusting in man or depending upon any human being or human situation. We will realize the primary need in any person's life is that that person should accept Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Any young person thinking of marriage will realize how sad will be the future if the Christian marries one who is not a believer. The non-believer could do this to advantage, but the believer would have nothing to expect but grief and heartache. Parents would realize that the most important thing for the child is to know and to accept Jesus Christ. Business men would not be deceived by the fair words and big promises of anybody who is not a real believer in God. Men are not to be trusted.

But every Christian will want others to know what is possible. Every believer will want to share in Evangelism, in Christian Education, in Church Witnessing so that souls may hear and come to know that each one could be saved. "For there is no other name given under heaven among men whereby we must be saved."

When Nicodemus heard that the human being must be "born again," he was puzzled even more. He protested this would be impossible. Jesus of Nazareth did not argue to prove the truth of what He had said. He simply told him again that man must be "born again." But He did tell him this would not be a second physiological biological birth. "Being born again" is not a "second chance," a "re-run" to do the same things over, a second time. It will be different. The first birth was "of flesh," the new birth is of the Spirit! But the flesh must be removed. And to tell him this, Jesus of Nazareth referred to an Old Testament incident.

As Israel was travelling across the desert in the exodus from Egypt there was a day when Israel in discouragement complained against God. God sent a plague of fiery serpents who bit the people and caused death. In grace God heard their cry for mercy and instructed Moses to make a serpent of brass, put it upon a pole, and promised that if any person bitten by a serpent looked upon that brassen serpent, he would live.

The Son of Man Must Be Lifted Up

Jesus of Nazareth took this incident to tell Nicodemus that the Son of Man must be "lifted up" so that anyone looking on Him might live. Thus He pointed forward to His own physical death on Calvary as being necessary in God's plan of salvation. The Son of God became incarnate as Jesus of Nazareth. It was here that "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us." When Jesus of Nazareth took His flesh to Calvary that He should die and "be raised in the newness of life," He showed forth a necessary phase in the life and experience of every believer. He stated it in the words which are the second imperative we shall notice "even so must the Son of Man be lifted up."

Thus did Jesus of Nazareth teach that the flesh must die, in order that the person might live in the Spirit. Paul discusses this carefully in Chapters 6-7-8 in his epistle to the Romans. The believer must accept the truth that when he accepts Jesus Christ as Savior "he is baptised into His death." Paul spoke of himself as being "crucified with Christ." This is necessary so that the Christian might be one with Christ in His resurrection and be able to "walk in newness of life" (Romans 6:3-6). For our own purpose here we need notice especially that denial of the flesh by reckoning it dead so that the believer can live in

the Spirit, is the operation by which the fact of the new birth is accomplished. This truth is so profound that it will mean much more than a young believer can fully attain or grasp at the beginning of his life in Christ.

When I was pastor I tried to help my church members realize this great principle that a Christian must reckon himself to be dead in the flesh that he might experience the new life of the resurrection from the dead by the operation of the Holy Spirit. One of my members, who was a college student, tried very earnestly to understand all that was involved. It all became very clear to him in a personal incident he told me about later.

He had been dating a college girl in his class for some time, and had become emotionally attracted to her so much that he thought they might eventually get married. Their times together had become more and more intimate. Each succeeding date brought them more closely together until they were at the point of committing themselves to each other as if they were already married.

After he had heard my discussion of Romans 6:11-12 he felt he knew how they could avoid yielding to their physical desires. The next time he called at her home, it was not long until the girl noticed a difference. "What's the matter?" she said, "You are not the same as you were." "Yes," he replied, "You are right. I am not the same. You are sitting beside a dead man."

The shock of his statement was absorbed as he explained to her how a Christian could "reckon" himself to be "dead", and thus be delivered from temptation. And when he was telling me he was still rejoicing in this freedom from his flesh.

It was a wonderful thing to hear his further testimony that the girl herself that very night accepted Christ as her Savior, too.

Truly the flesh must die, being crucified with Christ, that the new life may become operative in resurrection power.

To accept Jesus Christ as Savior is really not a complicated matter. Any child can know what it is to receive Jesus Christ. The truth is so simple that "a wayfaring man need not err therein." In some ways it is like getting married. What happens at a wedding is certainly not difficult: the man says, "I do" and the woman says, "I do," and it is done! Even so any one can say, "God be merciful to me a sinner." And if one has lingering misgivings any one can say, "I believe; Lord, help thou my unbelief."

He Must Increase, I Must Decrease

But there are things to be learned: as with marriage, so with becoming a Christian. Peter wrote, "as new born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby." It is more than head knowledge, more than intellectual understanding: it is a matter of growing in personal commitment to Christ. John the Baptist spoke the words recorded in John 3:30 which may be taken as the third imperative to guide spiritual living. "He must increase, I must decrease."

Each believer who accepts Jesus Christ is not only forgiven and freed from his old sins, but he is reconciled to God. He is adopted as a child of God. God gives him His Holy Spirit and comes to dwell in his heart (John 14:23). Thus each Christian has in him two natures: the flesh and the Spirit. These two are "contrary one to the other" (Galatians 5:17). Many a believer knows from personal inner experience how distracting and distressing this inner conflict can be. But he has the promise and the assurance of ultimate victory within himself by the grace of God.

These two contrary elements within the heart and the life of a Christian do not remain constant. When

they are equally balanced the life of the believer can be a nightmare of indecision and prolonged uncertainty. If the flesh which centers in self, the ego, becomes the stronger, the behavior of the person is carnal and leads into death, which is alienation and separation from God. There is no peace and no joy for such a soul. If the Spirit which centers in Christ becomes the stronger, the behavior of this person is spiritual and leads into life, with "joy and peace in believing." It is to guide the sincere believer that we now stress this third imperative: "He must increase, I must decrease."

As a young believer grows in grace and knowledge, he may have one experience after another in which he is challenged to deny himself that he might obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is given to show the believer the things of Christ. In a very real sense He activates the will of the living Lord in the heart of the believer. As situations develop in the life of the Christian he will be able to recognize the work of God the Father who is watching over the growing Christian. "My Father is the husbandman. . . . every branch that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. . . . Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit" (John 15:1-8).

And so for the Christian the problem of living in this world is solved through the Lord Jesus Christ. No matter how difficult and perilous living in this world may be there is One who succeeded in doing so. In Him the believer is victorious.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). In all kindness and grace the Christian gently but firmly will say to all men "Ye must be born again."

To interested persons who are willing to turn to Christ as set forth in the Gospel there is one simple but grave truth that must be accepted and obeyed: human nature must be crucified with Christ.

"The Son of Man must be lifted up."

"If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."

And for those who have chosen to follow Him be ready to follow through on your marching orders:

"He must increase, I must decrease."