

Teaching Sound Doctrine

What Must I Do?

It should be our constant concern to know our responsibilities and obligations to our Maker. Right relationship with God is dependent, not only upon the mercy of God, but also upon our appreciation and application of the principles of his mercy. This is simply to say that man must meet the responsibilities placed upon him by the Lord if he is to enjoy the benefits of God's grace and goodness. After Peter had preached on Pentecost that Jesus was "both Lord and Christ," and after he had specified God's terms of accepting Christ, he then exhorted the people to save yourselves from this crooked generation." (Acts 2:40). There is a human side, as well as the divine side, to the story of salvation.

Meaning of the Word "Must"

A careful study of the scriptural use of the word "must" will greatly increase our understanding of man's responsibility to God. Thayer defines the Greek word which is translated into our language as "must" in this way: ". . . it denotes any sort of necessity; as a. necessity lying in the nature of the case: ... b. necessity brought on by circumstances or by the conduct of others toward us: ... or imposed by a condition of mind: . . . c. necessity in reference to what is required to attain some end: ... d. a necessity of law and command, of duty, equity: ... e. necessity established by the counsel and decree of God. . . ." From this definition, it is obvious that the central idea in this word is the idea of necessity. It is not synonymous with such words as expedient, should, and advisable. When the word "must" is used, it relates something that is necessary or absolutely essential. If the word of God reveals a principle or an action to be a must, then it is irrevocable and cannot be altered.

There are some men (even in the church of our Lord) who shy away from the word "must" much as a young mule shies away from a bridge. They choose not to talk in terms of essentiality, and some even go to the extent of extracting the words "essential," "necessary," and must, from their religious vocabulary. But Jesus has selected this word to express part of his message, and the inspired apostles have retained it in revealing God's will. To reject the idea that there are some things which are essential to our right relationship with God, is nothing short of spiritual treason.

Things Jesus Viewed As Musts

In the life of Christ, there were many things which he considered to be musts. To him, they were essential and compelling. His life was driven, directed, and dominated by the bringing about of the things which he said must be done.

1. Jesus considered the accomplishing of the work of God as a must. "I must work the work of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work." (Jn. 9:4). So, urgent was the fulfilling of this task, that at the age of twelve, Jesus was found in the temple asking questions of the religious teachers. When pressed for an explanation of his action he said, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business." (Lk. 2:49).

2. Jesus viewed his death on the cross as absolutely essential "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up; that whomsoever believeth may in him have eternal life." (Jn. 3:14). After the resurrection of Christ, when his disciples stood perplexed at the empty tomb, they were confronted by two men in shining garments who said to them, "Why seek ye the living among the dead: he is not here, but is risen: remember how he spake unto you when he was yet in Galilee, saying that the Son of man must be delivered up into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again." (Lk. 24:5,6). The death of Christ was not an accident, nor an advisable action. It was an absolute must if the sons of men were to be redeemed and to have access to eternal life.

3. Christ looked upon the events of his life as necessary to the fulfilling of Old Testament scriptures. "And he said unto them, These are my words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must needs be fulfilled, which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets, and the psalms, concerning me." (Lk. 24:44). From beginning to end, the life which Jesus lived was a positive necessity. Had he failed in any phase of the work assigned to him, the human race would still be dead in sin and doomed to a dreadful death. It is impossible to properly appreciate the life of Christ apart from the essentials which characterized his actions.

In view of the many musts which faced our Lord, does it not seem strange that some would take from his example anything that was not essential. But what would be stranger yet, is, if after placing on his only begotten Son the musts of his life, God required nothing of an essential nature of us. However, such is not the case. The Bible reveals a number of things which we must do if we are to be saved. And these things are no less essential to our pleasing the Lord than were they necessary events in the life of Christ.

Motivation for Obeying God

Before we embark on a specific study of the necessities laid on us by God's word, we need to be aware of one other fact. Simply because the Bible describes certain actions to be absolutely essential is not, within itself, sufficient motive to prompt obedience. A command of God does not inherently contain the motivating power necessary to carrying it out. The incentive comes, not from the necessity of the command, but from love and respect for the one issuing the command. This is another way of saying that the essentiality of the command may exist because of a condition imposed by God rather than being in the nature of the case. When God, commanded Abraham to offer Isaac on the altar, the actuating power was to be found in Abraham's faith and devotion to God. There was nothing within the order to make him desire to obey it. In fact, there are some commands of God which are of such nature that they, within themselves, make obedience undesirable. Yet, as John informs us, "his commands are not grievous" or burdensome. This is true because the incentive for carrying them out is found in God's love for us and in our love, devotion, reverence, respect or fear for him. The Bible teaches that there are two activating influences which prompt men to carry out God's instructions. In Rom. 2:4, Paul stated that the goodness of God leads to repentance, and in II Cor. 5:11 he wrote, "Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men . . ." The love and fear of God provide the reasons for our actions and cause us to submit to his will. When these motives have been fully developed and when our minds have been properly informed, then obedience will invariably follow. We need to realize that God's commands are musts because in his infinite wisdom, he has issued them. And our faith and confidence in him cause us to submit to his will both when we can and when we cannot see a logical reason. Without this greater motivation, compliance can become mere formality and thus be robbed of its real significance.

Things Which We Must Do

We are now ready to search the scriptures for those things that the Lord has made essential. In keeping with Thayer's definition of the Greek word, we shall see that some are musts from the very nature of the case. Their being essential is readily seen and acknowledged. Others are necessary because they have been established by the council and decree of God. Their being essential may not be so readily recognized according to the fleshly mind; but with the individual who is dedicated to, the, purpose of pleasing God, their necessity is of equal force.

1. He who would be an acceptable child of God **MUST** believe in God and in his Son. "And without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him; for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that seek after him." (Heb. 11:6). No man can nor will seek God until he believes that he exists and that he has the power to reward those who follow after him. The necessity of faith is evident. It lies in the nature of the case. We do not expect the

scoffer and the infidel to be God-fearing men. Faith in Jesus Christ as the Son of God is essential. When the Philippian jailer had been awe-stricken by the miraculous events described in Acts 16, he cried out to Paul and Silas, "Sirs, what MUST I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30,). Paul and Silas did not say, "Now just a minute. You have expressed that too strongly. There is nothing which you MUST do to be saved. We will tell you what the Lord expects of you, but you should not look upon it as being essential." Instead, in response to his direct question Paul and Silas replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus, and thou shalt be saved, thou and thy house." (Acts 16:31). They knew faith in Christ to be an absolute requirement for salvation and they answered the jailer accordingly. The fact that the logic of this must is evident does not change the fact that it is a necessary condition imposed by God.

2. The one who would be a member of the family of God MUST be born again. In John 3:7, Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye MUST be, born anew." In verse five Jesus had explained the new birth to be one of water and the Spirit. "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except one be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Here again we see that our Lord has made the new birth an absolute requirement for entrance into his kingdom. It matters not how morally good, religious, and neighborly a person may be, if he has not been born of the water and Spirit he is not a child of God. Neither sincerity nor good intentions can replace this positive injunction. Let us notice also that Jesus has inseparably connected WATER and THE SPIRIT as the means of being born anew. It is the birth which is of both water and the Spirit which is a must. This means that it cannot be set aside by some supposed experience for this is not a birth of WATER and the Spirit. Neither will the idea of "baptismal regeneration" meet the requirement for this is not a birth of water and THE SPIRIT. One is born anew when, through the word of God, the Holy Spirit authorizes him to put off the old man of sin by repentance and to put on the new man of righteousness through baptism. This is the birth which Jesus made essential for entrance into his kingdom.

3. In connection with the above thought, we learn from the New Testament that baptism is a MUST to the person who would be saved from his sins. When Christ appeared unto Saul on the Damascus road and spoke to him saying, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" Saul responded by asking, "Who art thou Lord?" Even after he had been blinded by the light and had been startled by the voice, Saul did not know who was back of the transaction. It is entirely impossible for him to have been saved when he asked: "Who art thou Lord?" But immediately after Jesus identified himself, Saul inquired of the Lord what He would have him do and Jesus said to him, "But rise, and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou MUST do." (Acts 9:6,). That which Saul was told that he MUST

do is recorded in Acts 22:16, Ananias said to him, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name." Jesus told Saul that there was some action which he MUST take and the only specific thing which he was commanded to do at this time was to be baptized. Even a blind man could see this point. But there are many who object to this being essential of baptism because they cannot see the reason for it. It is at this very point that our faith in God is put to the test. Here is an act which human reason can see no logic in but which the word of God sets forth as, a necessary requirement for the remission of sins. So then, the question arises as to which we shall do; follow human wisdom and reject the necessity of baptism, or follow the word of God and submit to what he requires. This does not mean that there is power in baptism itself, nor that the water is meritorious, but it does mean that baptism is a necessity established by "the council and decree of God." The motive for our obedience is not within the command itself as witnessed by the many who object to baptism. The motive which causes men and women to submit to New Testament baptism is confidence and trust in God.

4. The person who would please God and be accepted of him, MUST worship him in spirit and truth. In talking to the woman at the well, Jesus said, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth." These requirements fix the manner and limit the means by which we can acceptably worship God. To worship in spirit one must worship sincerely and from the heart. To worship in truth one must worship according to God's word, for his word is truth (John 17:17). Worship which is based on the commandments of men is false and vain (Matt. 15:9). Also, worship which is decided and dictated according to man's own wishes is not pleasing to God. In Col. 2:23 Paul stated that will worship (that is, worship which man's will arranges) is not of any value against the indulgence of the flesh. God accepts only the worship which is in keeping with the specifications of his word. For example, the New Testament authorizes worship in song but does not authorize the use of mechanical instruments. Those who add these to their worship do so without God's approval. Their worship is decided either by the commandments of men or by their own will and therefore is not in truth. Worshipping God according to his word is a must, not because it lies in the nature of the case, but because it has been established by the decree of God. We may be unable to see the reason why God desires vocal music, but since he has made worship according to his word a MUST, we will obey it because we believe and desire to please him. Of course, the same principle applies to all parts of our worship. We must do only the things which God has specified in the manner which he has specified.

When God reveals to us an action which MUST be done, we will be held accountable for doing it. And this will be true regardless of whether we, in our

human wisdom, can see the purpose. Even though the command, within itself, does not contain the motive to prompt our obedience, we must comply with the Lord's will because we recognize his superior wisdom and we trust in him to lead us in the right way. When viewed from this standpoint, bickering and complaining about the essentials of things God sets forth as MUSTS amounts to a lack of trust in his wisdom and knowledge. Let us realize that the Lord's ways are not our ways neither are his thoughts our thoughts.