

THE GREATEST NEED IN THE WORLD

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36).

We often see one part of a man dead while the other parts are living. For example, the eyes are sightless — dead to the world of light. The ear is deaf — dead to the world of sound; or the arm is paralyzed — dead to the world of motion. These parts are dead, while the other parts of the body are living. So before one is brought into vital union with Jesus Christ his physical nature lives, but his spiritual nature, the nature which deals with God and with divine things, is dead. It does not recognize God, nor discern the things of the Spirit, nor see the invisible realities of heaven and eternity. Man's greatest need, therefore, is something which he does not have -- a spiritual life. He may possess many redeeming virtues, many attractive qualities, many excellencies of character; yet without this divine principle he is spiritually dead. "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins" (Ephesians 2:1).

To give emphasis to this thought, let us look at a picture. Here is man physically dead. His body is placed in a handsome casket. Friends collect garlands of beautiful flowers and wreath them about this corpse. One comes and looks at it and says, "Lovely." Another comes and says, "The features are perfect." Still another says, "What is lacking here?" And the very silence answers, "Life, physical life."

Here is another picture -- a living man without Christ. What is the matter with him? One says, "He needs a change of environment." Another says, "He needs education and culture." Another says, "Let him imitate Jesus." Still another says, "He ought by all means to join the church and live up to its rules." God says, "No, you are all wrong; the man is spiritually dead; his greatest need is spiritual life."

Man must have a new life first of all. He cannot live the Christian life without the Christian birth. Regeneration is to the dead faculties of the spiritual nature of man what life is to the corpse. This is the greatest need of your life. For, "except a man be born again he cannot see the kingdom of heaven." This is God's way by which man may find himself. Intellectual acumen, kindness of disposition, philanthropy and morality are commendable and not to be despised, still, except a man be born from above, he has no spiritual life. Unless this new life of God implanted in his heart gives him new vision, he cannot see; unless it gives him new hearing he cannot hear, unless it gives him new understanding he cannot enter into the thoughts of the Most High. Without spiritual regeneration a man is only playing the Christian. He is no better spiritually than a galvanized corpse. Under the power of electricity there may be some movement of the body, but there is no glow upon the cheeks, no fire in the eyes, no warmth in the body, no blood in the veins, no breath in the nostrils.

No man can live a life which he does not possess. A sick man cannot live the life of a well man. A slave cannot live the life of a free man. A traitor cannot live the life of a loyal subject. An unregenerate man cannot live the life of a regenerate man. To live a life presupposes a nature from which that life is to proceed. "Men do not gather grapes of thorns nor figs of thistles." To live the natural life presupposes the natural birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). A gentleman said to me, "I believe in doing your religion, that's all there is in it." I said, "So do I believe in doing your religion, but there is this difference between us; you believe in a man's doing his religion before he gets it, and I believe in his doing his religion after he gets it. That is to say: you believe a boy ought to live the natural life in order to get the natural birth, and I believe in a boy's living the natural life because he has received the

natural birth." God puts salvation at the beginning, not at the end of the Christian life. Nowhere in the Bible does God command the unregenerate to live the life of the regenerate. God commands the penitent sinner to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. "And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house" (Acts 16:30-31). Then to the saved man He says, "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling," etc. "Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling: For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Philippians 2:12-13).

That is to say, work it out to its uttermost results, out to its splendid fulfillment, out to its glorious consummation.

There must first be life, then development. The order in the New Testament church was regeneration, organization, education. In many quarters the order now is organization, education, and the observance of the Christian ordinances. Some pulpits emphasize the necessity for a changed habit, instead of the necessity for a new life which produces the changed habit. The trenchant doctrines of scripture are too often passed over lightly and great emphasis is placed on the practical duties of life. The things that a man must do have been discussed with great vigor, while what a man is and must be have been neglected. The great Sermon on the Mount, which teaches how the man who has life -- the disciple -- should live, may be emphasized to the neglect of the greater sermon in John, chapter six, beginning with verse twenty-seven, which teaches how the unsaved man must first get life. Training, growth, development, are out of the question till they have some foundation on which to rest -- some vital root out of which to grow. Dead men cannot be trained or educated. Food sustains life, but it does not originate it. Changing the environment or expanding the intellect will not evolve a Christian from a sinner, any more than putting a tiger in a cage and feeding him on milk will make him a lamb.

Today many pulpits are teaching Christian ethics to men and women who lack Christian life. As well might a farmer expect to raise a new crop of corn by cultivating the old stalks of last year.

There is no possibility of growth except to such as have entered into life. Life is the prerequisite. I may thrust a dry stick into the ground and foster it with all possible care, giving it access to the sunlight and the dews of the morning, but I shall never have anything but a dry stick -- no growth, no foliage, no fruit -- because there was no life in the beginning.

The purpose of Christ's death was not to introduce a new system of ethics, but to bring a new life. "I am come that they might have life" (John 10:10). Notice clearly, Christ did not come that men might have a better life, but that they might have life, and thus be enabled to live the best life.

Away with the idea that salvation is the result of imitating Christ. You might as well try to quiet Vesuvius with a porous plaster as to quell the passions of an unrenewed soul by preaching the moral beauties of Christ's character.

Christianity without the blood is a lifeless thing. It may be as fair as an angel in its ethics, but if there be not coursing through it the blood of vicarious sacrifice, it is only a corpse, and as such can never save a perishing humanity. Like the Venus of Milo it may have a face to charm all beholders but it has no arm to lift up the fallen.

Sin has plunged man beyond self-recovery and shut him up in the prisonhouse of helplessness and despair. "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God neither indeed can be" (Romans 8:7). "Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil" (Jeremiah 13:23).

"But," says someone, "we are living in an advanced age and in a transition period." Be it so; every age is an advanced age and every period a transition period; but God is always the same, and human nature and human needs are always the same, and sin, in its nature and essence, is always the same. Therefore, the necessity for spiritual life is the same. The necessity for repentance is the same. The necessity for faith in the blood of Christ is the same. And the gospel is the same. It is the "everlasting gospel." It has lost none of its power to give new life to those who will accept the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal sacrifice for sin.

"Dear, dying lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved to sin no more."

Our greatest need is not a development but a new creation -- the impartation of spiritual life. Human nature is too far gone ever to be mended. So it is not the old nature worked over and patched up. For by no course of education, by no kind of ethical culture, by no process of evolution, can the natural man be made into the spiritual.

God gives the sinner who trusts in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ something absolutely new. "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you" (Ezekiel 36:26).

"Therefore, if any man be in Christ he is a new creature" (II Corinthians 5:17). "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but a new creature" (Galatians 6:15). "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature" (II Peter 1:4).

How can men destitute of this spiritual life come into its possession?

In the Scriptures faith is everywhere the recognized bond of union between Christ and His people.

"He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life" (John 3:36). "Verily verily, I say unto you, he that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life" (John 5:24). "But these are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God; and that believing ye might have life through his name" (John 20:31). "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:26).

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God" (John 1:12-13). "He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:12).

The essential cause in the regeneration of a sinner is the Grace of God. But what is grace? "Grace is the child of goodness and badness; neither can produce it without the

other. Just as the brilliant electric light is produced by the meeting of the two opposite currents, and it can be produced in no other way. It is when the positive of God's holiness and the negative of man's sinfulness meet that the glorious light of grace is flashed forth.

Alas, how many are trying to find the light of grace by bringing their merit, real or fancied, to God's merit. As well try to produce an electric flash with two positive currents. If you would know God's grace in regeneration you must bring your badness to meet God's goodness."

The sinner is nothing in himself, but a poor, lost, and ruined soul. He is justly condemned by the infinitely holy law of an infinitely holy God. But Christ died to do all the saving for every sinner who will do all the trusting. You are lost and cannot save yourself, but you can receive Jesus Christ as your Saviour. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12). You can look to him as your Sin-bearer. "The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!" (John 1:29). A sick man can take medicine, a pauper can receive a gift, a prisoner can accept pardon, and a lost man can trust Christ for salvation.

Yield yourself to Him without delay. Do not resist his will. Oh, sinner, without Christ you are nothing. He comes to give you life. Yield to Him, I entreat you. Yield wholly. Yield unreservedly. Yield just now, and you will be a new creature in Christ Jesus.

Years ago Ole Bull was wandering in the American forest. In the midst of the forest there stood a hut occupied by a hermit who had formerly been a man in public life; but becoming tired of the selfishness of his fellows, he withdrew from them, and built himself a little hut in the heart of the wilderness. As Ole Bull pushed the door open and stepped in he looked upon the white beard of the old hermit and wondered. On the wall of the hut hung a violin. He asked, "What is that?" The hermit said, "That is my violin." "Can you play?" "Well I reckon I can," replied the hermit, "I got that thirty-five years ago in London." "Would you mind playing a little?" said Ole Bull. "Certainly not." The hermit took the violin down and began to play as requested. "The poor thing wailed, "God Save the King;" and shrieked, "My Country 'Tis of Thee." and whined, "Home Sweet Home." As he lowered the violin with self-satisfied air, Ole Bull asked, "Do you think I could learn to play?" "Well, I don't know about you, it takes years, but I learned." Ole Bull took the violin and drew his bow over the strings with a master's touch. He then poured his soul into it. He played as only he could play, "God Save the King;" "My Country 'Tis of Thee;" and "The Carnival of Venice," and "Home Sweet Home," until the hills of Norway lived again before his own mind, and the streets of New York lived again before the mind of the banished politician.

But what is a violin? Nothing in itself but wood and strings but a violin in the hand of Ole Bull is the master instrument of the centuries. What am I? What are you? Nothing in ourselves -- dead in sins, full of unbelief, inclining toward the sensual--our lives one sad dismal discord! But when we yield ourselves to the Christ who died to save; when our souls lie on the shoulder of God's power; when they are fingered by the masterly hand of God; when they are swept by the touch of God's saving grace, there comes from them the music of heavenly aspiration and heavenly trust and heavenly living. "And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life" (I John 5:11-12). This life is spiritual life, and this spiritual life is the greatest need in the world.