



EXCERPT



Necessary Christianity
What Jesus Shows We Must Be and Do

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For followers of Jesus, certain things are not optional, but necessary. Bishop Claude Alexander unpacks the Gospels' statements of what Jesus said he *must* do. Contrary to the life of the optional, accidental, and haphazard, the believer is called to live with a sense of divine necessity—no maybes about it.

Called to Realize the “Mustness” of Life with God

There's something about birthdays that end in five or zero that causes us to be more definitive about life. At one of my own recent significant milestones, my life came into the sharpest focus I'd ever experienced. It became clear that I possibly had more years behind me than ahead of me. With that came the liberating realization that I was as grown as anybody else. The only difference between me and someone older was that he or she may have fewer years left than I did. I knew what I would tolerate and what I wouldn't, what I could stand and what I couldn't, and I didn't have to feel bad about it. It became clear to me for whom I existed and for what I existed and the direction toward which I was called. Whoever and whatever couldn't deal with that was not my problem. I was comfortable with who God had called me to be and what God had called me to do.

Maturity shouldn't be equated with age, because age is not a sign of maturity. However, maturity in life brings clarity, certainty, and definition. This is also the case with Christian maturity. Maturity in Christ should result in greater clarity, certainty, and definition. Maturity is about growth, and growth in Christ should produce a clearer understanding of Christ, his claims on our life, and the direction in which he is leading us. It should create a greater certainty about who he is, who we are in him, what we can depend on and expect from him, and the reality of what he has promised and revealed. We should possess a greater definitiveness concerning the life we have with him: its nature, its requirements, its aims and benefits. The more mature we are in Christ, the clearer we should be about him and all aspects of our life with him.

One of the things that becomes increasingly clear to me is that the life to which the Christian is called is a life of necessity. God calls the Christian to live with a sense of the necessary, the obliged, and the required. The person who lives under the lordship of Jesus Christ is the one who seeks to live within the will of God and under the voice of God. We show maturity in this life when we view the lines God draws and the directions God gives as essential, imperative, indispensable, and requisite.

However, this view of life is a challenge to the immature Christian. The immature Christian views life in God and with God the way the world views life—from the standpoint of options. In other words, God's claim on our life is one of the many options we can choose. To the secular humanist and the immature Christian, much of life is random, accidental, and haphazard. The will and way of God are seen as peripheral, not essential. The world says we can negotiate with God. We can strike a compromise with God. We can delay and even deny the call and claims of God on us and for us. The dictates of God are a matter of what we might do and not what we must do. They are possibilities, not necessities.

The immature Christian, like the world, operates from “mightness” as it relates to God, God's will, and God's way. On the contrary, the mature Christian comes to understand that life in God and with God is less about what we could do and more about what we must do. Freedom in Christ does not make God's desire of us and for us optional. Freedom in Christ disentangles us so we are able to respond to that which is necessary for us from God and in God.



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Bishop Claude R. Alexander Jr. is senior pastor of The Park Church in Charlotte, North Carolina. He serves on the board of Christianity Today, Mission America Coalition, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, and Movement.org. He is the chair of Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's board of trustees and a past president of the Hampton University Ministers' Conference.

God is calling for Christians to grow up in him and realize that he calls us to a life of the necessary. He calls us to realize the “mustness” of our life with him.

As we read about the life of Jesus, we get a sense of “mustness.” Throughout the Gospels we hear Jesus say, “I must.” We read of Jesus, “He must.” We hear Jesus tell his disciples or his audience, “You must.” Kingdom living—living under the rule and reign of God—is living with a sense of “must,” not “might,” in relation to God. Often we focus on the “I am” statements of Jesus; seldom do we focus on the “I must” statements. I believe that if we focus on the “I must” statements, we will come to understand necessary Christianity.

—Taken from the introduction, “A Life of the Necessary”



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