



I BESEECH you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. ² And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. ³ For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. ⁴ For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: ⁵ So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. ⁶ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; ⁷ Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching; ⁸ Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness. (Romans 12:1-8)

Our lives are filled with spiritual ruts just as the wagon ruts are made by repetitious passage over a dirt road. The ruts on the road are not intentionally caused, and require no conscious effort to make. It is as a stream of water crossing over a stone surface for centuries that will eventually wear a deep river bed, or even a canyon, into that stone surface (much as the Grand Canyon).

There are chiefly three fundamental categories of habits – good, bad, and indifferent. An extreme form of a bad habit would be tobacco smoking. The habit is enhanced by chemical products in the tobacco. The devil always adds some enhancement to a bad habit in order to perpetuate that habit.

I will provide an example of an indifferent habit learned in early childhood. It is not bad, nor does it offer any benefit of goodness. When I was four or five years old, my sweet grandmother (Granny Mae) used to take me shopping into the city every Saturday morning with a promise to buy me a ‘play pretty.’ I was a rambunctious young fellow and my grandmother told me something to occupy my mind on something other than running out into the streets. She told me that I must be very careful not to step on the cracks in the side walk for that would mean I would be breaking my grandmother’s back, or stepping on her grave. So, since I loved my grandmother very much, I took great pains

to avoid stepping on the seams in the concrete sidewalk. That formed a habit that has occupied my mind with every walk along city sidewalks today. I still find myself trying to avoid 'breaking my grandmother's back' or 'stepping on her grave.'

An example of a good habit is the etiquette of saying 'thank you' when granted any kindness by others. In my day, all youngsters were taught courtesy and etiquette in elementary school. Now it seems just the opposite is taught.

We have all heard the term, 'habitual sinner.' That is a very excellent term to identify those whose decadent and depraved lives are continually bound by sinful habits to which they have grown callous even to the awareness of their own sinful ways. *Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; **having their conscience seared with a hot iron**;* (1 Timothy 4:1-2)

But we do not hear the righteous referred to with the same sense. Sinful habits are aided by a gravity that makes going down the Broad and Downward way seem preferable to the uphill climb on the Narrow Way that leads up to God. An evil habit requires no effort aforethought – it is simply the fleshly response to some carnal stimulus. But a righteous habit DOES require thought and action on the part of the respondent. The righteous must go against their natural inclinations and act upon the sinews of faith and loyalty of the Truth, the Way, and the Life. That is not natural – it is supernatural.

I quote here an old doctor of theology, Edwarde Whately: *It is important to keep in mind that – as is evident from what is seen daily about us – habits are formed, not at one stroke, but gradually and insensibly; so that, unless vigilant care be employed, a great change may come over the character without our being conscious of any. For, as Dr. Ben Johnson has well expressed it, 'The diminutive chains of habit are seldom heavy enough to be felt, till they are too strong to be broken.'*

Of course, living the Christian life of moral conduct and fervent love may also be termed a habit, but it is more than that – it is a divine sanctification of one's life in Christ. As we honor our Lord in all that we do daily, it becomes less likely, by and by, that we can be tempted away to the wilderness of sin and ruin. It is not that temptation does not occur, but that we have grown stronger day by day in living out our faith in works and grace to resist it.

There is an old Chinese tale of a young married lady who hated her mother-in-law. Her mother-in-law was overly demanding, critical of every move of the girl, and never showed any affection whatsoever, no matter how persistent the girl was in doing all her bidding. She went to an old hermit to decry her predicament. The old hermit, full of wisdom, told her he had just the solution. He told the girl to return the next day and he would have a means produced to alleviate her misery. Next day, at first light, the young woman appeared at the door of the hermit. He bade her have a cup of tea while he fetched the article that was intended to make her life easier. Soon, he came from the back of his parlor with an ingenious mask, in an almost exact appearance as her face, that the girl was to wear. It was constructed in such a manner as to force the girl to smile always. He told her to put the mask on and never remove it. The girl did as the old hermit told her. Some three months later, the young woman returned. She removed the mask and returned it to the hermit. "I need the mask no more, dear sir," she said. "When I wore the smiling mask, my mother-in-law changed her treatment of me. It even became easy for me to love her and to respond in the same spirit as the smile I wore. I now love my mother-in-law, and she loves me."

The habit of smiling and being kind to others is a dimension of sanctifying grace imparted by God. Does the world not need just common courtesy and decency that for

centuries has characterized the graces of God in Christ and His followers? As faith has waned more and more, the hearts of common society has grown cold and devoid of any measure of mercy and kindness. We hear daily of the murder of the most innocent life on the planet in the abortion of innocent babies who have not glimpsed their first sunrise. Children are taught in godless education indoctrination classes that there is no such thing as a difference in boys and girls – that we can be whatever our wicked imaginations are inclined to believe. Every perversion takes on the force of law and dignity.

For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: That they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness. (2 Thessalonians 2:7-12)

Societies today, around the world, are falling victim to a great delusion. The more evil the imagination, the greater the depravity demonstrated. Perversions of every imaginable stripe are emerging. It has become a trait of formerly decent and moral societies to habitually accept every extreme evil that is professed by government and their allies in the public media.

The forces of the delusionally wicked are rapidly proliferating, but make no mistake: God has His REMNANT in waiting! The time will come when these will be so few as to constitute a small camp enclave which is threatened by the assembled armies of the whole world. *And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, And shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle: the number of whom is as the sand of the sea. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city: and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. (Revelation 20:7-10)*

I hope I answer muster on that last roll call! How about you, friend?