

GRACE GAZETTE

Volume II

Issue 34

Published occasionally for Zion's mourners

Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.

Hebrews 12:12-13

HABITUAL CHRISTIANITY

Behold, all ye that kindle a fire, that compass yourselves about with sparks: walk in the light of your fire, and in the sparks that ye have kindled. This shall ye have of mine hand; ye shall lie down in sorrow. Isaiah 50:11

One of the commandments that the LORD gave to HIS apostles was to teach men to be the disciples of JESUS CHRIST. (see Matt.28:19-20) Paul admonished Timothy to be a teacher of doctrine and godly practice. (see I Tim. 4:1-16) As the saints of GOD we are charged with exhorting and building up one another that we might be strong in the faith, steadfast in our walk, and not tossed about with every wind of doctrine. (see Jude 17-25).

As a believer develops and matures in his walk with the LORD it is necessary that he develop good habits (see Eph.6:10-18; Gal.5:16; Heb.10:23-25) and avoid harmful ones (see Rom.16:17; I Cor.7:2; Titus 3:9). Obviously a man will not progress beyond his present mindset if he continues to go in the same paths he has always gone in and fellowships with the darkness of this world as he has always done. *"Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you"* (2 Cor 6:17).

But as helpful as developing good habits may be there is a grave error which many fall into. Some think that by walking in certain traditions, customs, or patterns of devotion and morality; one may become a child of GOD. There is a natural tendency of the flesh to cling to those things which we are most comfortable with. (Try taking away a three year old's blanket or a fifty year old's favorite chair). In homes where hunting is a big pastime you most often see great interest in hunting by the whole family. The same is true of others who grow accustomed to an avid interest in sports, automobiles, motorcycles, etc. It is not therefore considered unusual to see young men and women who grow up in a church atmosphere develop an affinity for this lifestyle. Now we certainly would prefer that a young man or woman spend their time in church than we would to see them destroying their lives with the excesses of the flesh. But we are also sadly aware that many young people (as well as old ones too) attend church out of habit rather than desire.

As parents we are admonished to bring our children up in the nurture and admonition of the LORD (see Eph.6:4). We are taught to train them up in the way they should go. Sadly the sins of the fathers are truly visited upon the children when we demonstrate "habitual" service to the LORD rather than "delightful" service. Many parents (who are Christians, at least in name) teach their children to ask a blessing on their food by having them memorize a standard little prayer. The same concept of prayer carries over into adulthood with many as they adopt the "phraseology" of others as they pray. I am somewhat amused as I go into different churches at the little pet expressions that people use in prayer that they have copied from hearing someone else's prayer. I grew up in a church where, during prayer, I knew what someone would say next because it was the expected thing to say. What if we conversed with one another the same way? It would be a pretty boring conversation to say the least. Our prayers must not be born out of habit but out of the longing of our heart to commune with HIM who hears us when we call.=====

Many Christians (so called) develop a whole vocabulary of words to use in religious conversation that is foreign to them in their daily life. Their manner of speech has become a habit which is entirely different on Sunday than it is on Friday night. Different denominations have their own little catch phrases and expressions that they use which are unique to their traditions. So habit becomes the driving force behind many ideas and doctrines which otherwise will not stand the scrutiny of Scripture. All denominations (without exception) maintain unscriptural practices which are followed strictly out of habit and tradition and perpetuated by willing clergymen.

Good habits are useful to the true children of GOD but will develop into stumbling blocks and rocks of offence when they become the motivation for our service and devotion to the LORD rather than our helpmeet in that endeavor. There is nothing worse than substituting duty for joy or obligation for pleasure in the service of our KING. *"Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver."* (2 Cor 9:7) This passage is speaking directly about giving money to the LORD but it has application in every endeavor which we undertake in service to HIM. What is the purpose of serving the LORD out of habit and duty if we take no delight in it? The religious man would argue that habitual devotion is an acceptable substitute for true worship yet the LORD denied that it is so in HIS discourse with the women at the well in Samaria. *"GOD is a SPIRIT: and they that worship HIM must worship HIM in spirit and in truth."* (John 4:24)

Brethren, let us develop the habit of prayer but let us not allow prayer to become merely a habit. Prayer without ardor, zeal, and desire is like a fire with no flame. May we develop the habit of a systematic study of HIS word, but oh that we might be delivered from the study of HIS word which is not bathed in prayer and not fed upon as manna to a hungry soul. Study without devotion is like an oasis with no water. Let us gain a habit of assembling with the brethren each time we have the opportunity, but dear saints of GOD may our delight be in the fellowship of the brethren and not in the satisfying of some pang of religious conscience. Church attendance without joy, worship, and the fellowship of the saints is like a cloud with no rain or a rose with no fragrance. May it never be said of us; *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me."* (Matt 15:8)

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