
BEWARE OF THE FLATTERER

THE PILGRIMS received good parting advice from the shepherds named Knowledge, Experience, Watchful and Sincere. High on the list of cautions is the warning, "Beware of the Flatterer." Again, we find the pilgrims out of the way, not having heeded the advice given to them. They conferred with a man who appeared to be going to the City but whose path "by degrees turned, and turned them so far from the city ... that in a little time their faces were turned away from it."

Flattery in its subtle shades of deceit works incrementally by degrees and in small bites. Flattery is praise given to excess and is something which we all enjoy. All too frequently we love to hear it heaped on ourselves, and we love to lavish it on others. Religious praise can be even more deceitful because it comes cloaked in a garment of self-righteousness.

The flattery that comes from others is not only designed to remove the pilgrim from the Way, but it also makes a liar out of the one speaking. The Psalmist cried out to God, "Make thy way straight before my face. For there is no faithfulness in their mouth ... they flatter with their tongue" (Psalm 5:8-9). The writer of Proverbs also adds, "A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet"

(Proverbs 29:5, NKJV).

Flattery comes not only from others, but also from within ourselves, displaying the insidious nature of the thing we are dealing with. Self-esteem, which has become the new doctrine of the church, is not much different from self-flattery. To think of ourselves beyond a true estimate is easy to do. We flatter ourselves to others when we announce how good we are or when we center on how gifted and valuable we are to the church. Paradoxically, in circles where humility is rightly valued and praised, it can become fashionable to exaggerate one's own insignificance and uselessness to gain the approval of others. Such flattery may be likened unto the false spirituality of the hypocrites who "disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others" (Matthew 6:16).

To the issue of self-appraisal Paul, in his letter to the Romans, says, "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" (12:3). And in his letter to the church in Galatia, he cautions, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (6:3).
