

## PROVERBS 29

## BEWARE OF THE FLATTERER!

**Beware of the Flatterer! (verse 5)**

*“A man that flattereth his neighbor spreadeth a net for his feet.”*

Most wisely were John Bunyan’s pilgrims warned, in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, to “beware of the Flatterer!” Yet they forgot to look at their map of directions along the way, and so they fell into his net; and even though they were delivered, they were justly punished for their folly. The doctrine of man’s goodness, strength, or freedom; or a general Gospel, without close application; or a description of its promises and privileges, without the counter-balance of its trials and obligations – all of these show the black man clothed in white, Satan himself transformed into an angel of light, and his devilish agents disguised as ministers of righteousness. Unwary souls are misled thereby, and even unwatchful Christians sometimes fall into the net. And while they shall still thank their faithful God for their ultimate deliverance, they cannot forget His sharp and necessary chastening of their folly.

Let us guard against this net of flattery in our daily life! Too readily do the Flatterer’s words pass unchecked in the midst of the world. They are often cleverly disguised in the language of smooth courtesy, or of lively interest and affection. The net is always spread to allure an unsuspecting person into some wicked path. The enemies of Christ even spread the Flatterer’s net for His own feet. But here the Wisdom of God was infinitely above them; for every single time, He “took the wise in their own craftiness.”

Sadly, the feet of many strong persons have been entangled in the Flatterer’s net. Indeed, seldom has the frailty of the man or woman of God been more painfully exposed! David honored his God in the endurance of Shimei’s curses, but Ziba’s smooth and deceitful words drew him into an act of gross injustice. Usually, some lack of integrity has pre-conditioned the mind for this poison. David was already struggling to discover a plea for leniency toward his son who was guilty of murder, when the woman of Tekoah influenced him with her flattering lips. But how bitterly did he reap the fruit of thus entering into the net that was spread for his feet! Remember also how it was willful infatuation – by listening to the flattery of his lying false prophets – that fully prepared Ahab for his own ruin.

Is someone loading us with excessive commendation? It is the Flatterer’s net! “Ponder the path of thy feet!” Especially fearful is this snare to those whose position or influence incline them to live in order to please men rather than the Lord. Too often, for example, this net is spread for the feet of the minister of Christ – sometimes even by sincere Christians who mean very well! But he is a mere man, as we are; he is beset with temptations which are perhaps even greater than those that are common to ordinary people. His heart, like our own, is fully susceptible of self-exalting imaginations. And for him to know that he has a rep-





utation for holiness, that he is a man of influence, that his character is looked up to, and that his opinion is valued – this is indeed a “fiery trial!” Far better would it be that our Christian fellowship with each other should be shaped by the wise resolution to refrain from “flattering titles”; for they are hurtful to the person to whom they are given, and they are also very provoking to the Lord.

**“The Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!” (verse 16)**

*“When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increaseth: but the righteous shall see their fall.”*

The increase of transgression is obviously proportionate to the increase of transgressors. Nor is it merely a numerical increase, but also a growth in the power and daring of sin. The people who began to multiply upon the face of the pre-Flood earth were giants – both in physical size and also in wickedness – until “the striving of the Spirit of God” could endure them no longer. The same was the case with the Babel-builders, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. A group of rebellious sinners brought together in unison emboldens them in their sins. Each particle of the group is corrupt, and so the group itself ferments with evil.

If it were not for the prospect of faith, the Christian eye could not bear such a sight! “But,” says the wise man, “the righteous shall see their fall.” Noah saw the destruction of the world that existed before the Flood; Abraham witnessed the ruin of the cities that were burned up with fire and brimstone; and the children of Israel “saw the Egyptians” who had been pursuing them, lying “dead upon the seashore.” “Let not the righteous be discouraged,” said good Bishop Patrick; “for the wickeder men are, the shorter is their reign.” Being conscious of his inability to stem the overflowing torrent of iniquity, the faithful minister would sink into despair – except for the assured confidence that he is on the conquering side; and that his cause, as the cause of his Lord, *shall* eventually prevail! Although sin now seems to triumph, and Satan boasts of his victories; yet “the kingdoms of this world,” and all their vast population, shall “become the kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever and ever!” This is indeed the supporting joy of our faith – to realize the glory of this day, when the righteous shall see the fall of the now-triumphing wicked. In that day, one universal shout shall swell throughout the earth: “Alleluia! Salvation, and glory, and honor, and power unto the Lord our God; for true and righteous are his judgments. Alleluia; for the Lord God Omnipotent reigneth!”

*Lord, we repent of times when we have not heeded the wise warning to beware of the Flatterer, and so have been taken in his net. Preserve us from becoming guilty of this sin ourselves, by giving “flattering titles” to our fellow human beings. Amen.*