

Flattery

by Wayne Goff

Flattery is defined in Oxford's American Dictionary as "excessive and insincere praise, especially that given to further one's own interests." The definition alone shows us what is wrong with flattery. "Flattery" appears in the NKJV of the Bible twice (Job 17:5; Dan. 11:32). "Flatter" appears three times more (Job 32:21-22; Ps. 5:9). All the other forms of the word appear sixteen times more (Ps. 12:2-3; 36:2; 78:36; Prov. 2:16; 6:24; 7:5, 21; 20:19; 26:28; 28:23; 29:5; Ezek. 12:24; Rom. 16:18; 1 Thess. 2:5; Jude 16). Never does the concept appear in a good sense in the Bible. Never! Thus, the first lesson you and I should learn, as Christians, is to not be guilty of the practice of flattery! Please take the time to read over the references given in this article. You will be surprised to see what the Bible says about the subject.

In the book of Psalms, David opposes his enemies on the basis of their great wickedness. In Psalm 5:9 he writes: "For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is destruction; their throat is an open tomb; they flatter with their tongue." See also Psalm 12:2-3, Psalm 36:1-2, and Psalm 78:36.

King Solomon speaks of the flattery of a harlot as she seduces a young man, Prov. 2:16; 6:24; 7:5, 21. In Proverbs 20:19 he warns "He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets; therefore do not associate with one who flatters with his lips." Solomon also says that flattery works ruin (Prov. 26:28), and spreads a net for his neighbor (Prov. 29:5).

In the New Testament, Romans 16:18 warns against the flattery of the false teacher: "For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." Jude 16 says that those who use flatter do so to gain an advantage over you. Paul absolutely denied ever using flattery as a tool in his preaching of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:5).

In summary, it would be fair to say that the problem with flattery is that it is a kind of lie. The one speaking flattering words is doing so to catch you off guard so that he can take advantage of you. Religious false teachers will cost you your soul if you listen to their flattery! God and His righteous people do not believe in flattering words, nor trust those who so use them. Beware!

Unfortunately, when I think of flattery, I think of the politician. He goes around slapping everyone on the back, pretending that he is everyone's best friend, and that he has your interests chiefly in his heart. But once he is elected, then you never see him again . . . until the next election. That would well sum up what the Bible condemns in the realm of flattery. Yes, I am aware that there are some honest politicians, so don't assume the worst about every politician. But it is very difficult to be a politician and be honest!

Finally, we are not opposed to speaking positive words of encouragement and support to brethren. Praising others for their good deeds, good character, and good words is not the same thing as flattery. Romans 13:7 says to render honor to whom it is due. Paul praised the Corinthians for being faithful Christians, 1 Cor. 11:2. God gives praise to those who do good, 1 Pet. 1:7. Proverbs 27:21 says that a man is valued by what others say of him. So be sure to make a distinction between flattery and honest praise.

Sins of the tongue can be some of the most deceitful things. They are easy to do and difficult to discern. So be sure that you are not guilty of the sin of flattery while at the same time using the words of your mouth to encourage and uplift your brethren.

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