

Dealing with Flattery

An article in the October, 2016, *AARP Bulletin* revealed the efforts of casinos to urge senior citizens to gamble. How do they do that? One tactic in particular: “Casino hosts often lavish personal attention on high-rolling older charges, asking about their health, reminding them to take their medicine and eating meals with them ... For older people, the host becomes their friend, giving them attention they may not be getting from their children or friends” (20). Melynda Litchfield, who lost her life savings by compulsive gambling, says, “They gave me so much personal attention and TLC that you get the false impression these people – who are milking away all of your money – actually care about you” (ibid). That’s a pretty good working definition of flattery.

The Flatterer

Flattery is more than an insincere compliment. It is the attempt to take advantage of someone by lying to gain their confidence. For example, Proverbs refers to the “*seductress who flatters with her words*” (2:16; 7:5). “*With her enticing speech she caused him to yield, with her flattering lips she seduced him*” (7:21). The flatterer’s only interest in their target is to use them as leverage for selfish gain.

Sadly, there are some in local churches who act this way. Paul says of those who cause divisions, “*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*” (Romans 16:18). Thayer defines *eulogia* in this context as “language artfully adapted to captivate the hearer.” Those intent on stirring up strife inevitably try to sway others to their side in order to build an influential base. The sweet talk used to woo the naïve often turns vicious when addressing their opponents.

The Flattered

Who among us has not been taken in by a flatterer? Perhaps we were talked into buying something we didn’t need by a smooth-talking salesman. Or maybe we were persuaded to do something ill-advised by a flattering friend. What makes us vulnerable to flattery?

In a word, **pride**. Flattery is an appeal to the pleasure of hearing good things spoken about one-self. And in the euphoria of praise we easily conclude that someone so astute as to recognize our superior qualities can’t be all bad! This can be something as inane as complementing our appearance. No doubt the seductress mentioned above preyed on her male victims by appeals to vanity (which she uses with the next dupe, and the next, and the next ...). Or we might be told how great we are as parents, or how lovely our home is, or how wisely we handled a business deal, or ...

So how do we combat this particular brand of lying?

1) Don’t flatter. Don’t inflate praise to gain an advantage. That advantage may appear small: defusing an awkward situation or appeasing a critic. Stick with the truth. Praise others, but mean it.

2) Don’t be a sucker. Insecurity leads to vulnerability. Make God’s approval your first priority. We all want to be liked and acknowledged for our good qualities. But don’t be so taken with yourself that the flatterer can manipulate you via insincere praise.

3) Be honest. Is someone going overboard in their praise? Are they giving undeserved compliments? Do they mean it? Or are you in a situation where the other will benefit from your good will? In congregational strife there is always the ringleader or instigator, and there is the supporting cast. Don’t be in either category.

- by Jim Jonas

Drifting Away From the Truth

The Hebrews writer declared, “Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them” (ASV – Hebrews 2:1). It is interesting to note that the writer speaks of “drifting” away. The idea of drifting suggests a gradual departure over time. Apostasy usually starts with what many see as a “little” thing that really doesn’t seem to be

any “big deal.” Then another step is taken, and another, until ones position doesn’t even resemble where he originally started.

Not only have those who do this departed from the truth, but they are ready to oppose teachers of truth who seek their return to truth. When Amos was sent to speak against the idolatry of Israel Amaziah, a priest of Bethel and friend of king Jeroboam, told Amos, “But prophesy not again any more at Bethel: for it is the king’s chapel, and it is the king’s court.” (Amos 7:13). Rather than heed the truth spoken by Amos he attacked Amos. Such happens today and reminds me of a quote by George Orwell. He said, “The further a society drifts from truth the more it will hate those who speak it.”

- by James Hahn

We Could Do It!

You have, no doubt, seen those mathematical calculations about how long it would take to convert the whole world to Christianity if every Christian would convert just one other person each year. The analysis goes something like this: If you begin with just one true believer, and he makes one convert in a year -- at the end of the first year there would be two Christians in the world. If both of these convert another person in the next year, after two years there would be four Christians, and so on. Charted out, it would look like this:

Year	# of Christians
1	2
2	4
3	8
4	16
5	32
6	64
7	128
8	256
9	512
10	1,024
11	2,048
12	4,096
13	8,192
14	16,384
15	32,768
16	65,536
17	131,072
18	262,144
19	524,288
20	1,048,576
21	2,097,152
22	4,194,304
23	8,388,608
24	16,777,216
25	33,554,432
26	67,108,864
27	134,217,728
28	268,435,456
29	536,870,912
	(surpassing total U.S. pop.)
30	1,073,741,824
31	2,147,483,648
32	4,294,967,296
33	8,589,934,592

(surpassing total world pop.)

In less than 33 years the whole world could be reached – and that's if we started with only one Christian! But, the slow years are already covered -- we have way more than just one Christian. For instance, if there are already one million true believers, we could reach the world in less than 13 years. We're not saying it would be easy, or that all could/would be converted, but the numbers tell a tale! Let's get busy!!

- by Greg Gwin