

Chapter Thirty

Snared

Entrapped

The pilgrims continued until they came to a place where another path joined in with the straight way. Now this new alternative way seemed as straight as the road to which they had become accustomed. Because of this the pilgrims were undecided as to which way they should take, for each seemed as straight as the other. So they stood still and pondered.

And as they were wondering which way to take, a man, dressed in a light coloured robe, approached them; he then asked the pilgrims why they were standing there. They explained that they were going to the Celestial City, but did not know which of the two ways to now take.

“Follow me,” said the man, “for it is the way in which I am now going.”

So they followed him along the new way that had joined the old way, though this new path gradually veered away from the Celestial City so that they came to be facing the opposite direction. Now as time passed by, before they awakened to their guide’s deception, he led both pilgrims into a net that completely closed itself around them. As a result they became so thoroughly entangled that they did not know what to do. Then the white robe fell off the man’s back so that the captives began to understand what had happened.

After their encounter with Little-Faith and Ignorance, our pilgrims feel at ease with themselves, perhaps even cocky!

They come to a junction of two straight pathways. Since there is only one way that is truly straight, they ought to have realised that one way was a subtle counterfeit, not perfectly straight. What ought they have done at this point? Had they not been warned?

Angel of light

Who is this character? Who or what does he represent?

He recommends a false way, seeks a following, and his masquerade of righteousness, even as Satan disguises himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:13-15), covers a dark and sinister intent.

Notice that:

- He is covered with a light robe. The pilgrims are led by their senses rather than the truth of God’s word.
- He sympathetically offers to be a guide. With lips that caress the ego, his simple invitation, “Follow me,” receives a hypnotic and unquestioning response. After all, who could possibly doubt that this fine man is headed toward the Celestial City?

His ways are crooked!

The supposed straight way proves to be increasingly weaving and misleading. The pathway:

- gradually turns and twists. They lead away from the truth incrementally, that is from merely a new way of looking at the truth to an outright denial of the truth.
- veers from the Celestial City. For all his smooth talking, the Flatterer is a liar.

His ways ensnare

Suddenly:

- Christian and Hopeful are caught in a net.
- The man in white reveals his true nature.
- Christian and Hopeful awake to their plight.

Now they remember the warning of the Shepherd. They seem to have learned absolutely nothing and feel it would be presumptive to expect grace to again rescue them.

Surely they have played the fool once too often and are certain to be abandoned.

Repentance

Therefore they lay crying for some time because they did not know how to escape.

CHRISTIAN: Now I understand that I have been caught in an error. Did not the Shepherds exhort us to beware of the flatterers? Today we have found to be true that which the wise man has declared, "A man that flatters his neighbour also spreads a net for his feet."

HOPEFUL: They also gave us written instructions showing directions along the way so as to ensure our safe arrival; but we have forgotten to study them, and so have not kept ourselves from the paths of the destroyer. At this point David was much wiser than we for he said, "Concerning the deeds of men, by the word of your lips I have kept from the paths of the destroyer." So they continued to bemoan themselves while lying enmeshed in the net

Christian does not even try to escape responsibility by using the inclusive "we."

Christian confesses his error. He

- ignored the shepherds' warnings.
- ignored the counsel of the Word of God. Proverbs 29:5.

Hopeful confesses his error. Feeling hopeless, he lays no blame at the feet of his more "mature" brother. Rather, now being enlightened to his darkness, he readily owns up to his unqualified negligence. Hopeful:

- ignored the shepherds' road map, and
- was deceived by the path of the destroyer.

Deliverance

At last they noticed a Shining One coming toward them with a small whip made of thin cord in his hand. When he had drawn near to the place where they were ensnared, he asked them from where they had come. They told him that they were poor pilgrims going to Mount Zion, but had been led out of their way by a black man clothed in white. "He advised us," they said, "to follow him since he professed to be going to Mount Zion as well."

Then the Shining One with the whip responded, "This person was the Flatterer, a false apostle, who has transformed himself into an angel of light." So he tore open the net and let the men out.

Then he ordered them, "Follow me so that I may redirect you back to the way again."

So he led them back to the old straight way which they had left to follow the Flatterer.

Then he asked them, "Where did you stay last night?"

They replied, "With the Shepherds on the Delectable Mountains."

Then he asked them. "Did they give you written instructions that included a map for the way ahead?"

"Yes." But the Shining One pressed further, "When you came to a halt here, did you refer to the map for guidance?"

They answered, "No." So he asked them, "Why?"

They replied, "We forgot."

Then he asked, "Did the Shepherds exhort you to beware of the Flatterer?"

"Yes, but we did not imagine that this fine-spoken man could possibly be he."

By sovereign appointment, deliverance is provided.

Heb. 1:14: Angels are only servants – spirits sent to care for people who will inherit salvation. The Shining One's arrival is according to divine appointment at the precisely ordered time.

This messenger is obviously under orders to carry out specific duties, and he comes prepared with a whip in hand. This implies that the Celestial City continually watches out for the well-being of those pilgrims it anticipates receiving.

With quivering voices, still entangled in the Flatter's net, the pilgrims honestly declare how their present predicament arose.

The Shining One quickly identifies the pilgrims' captor as the Flatterer (Prov. 29:5; Dan. 11:32), a false apostle, who parades as an angel of light.

The pity is that Christian and Hopeful did not make good use of this information which was available to them in Christian's book and reiterated by the shepherds.

The release!

Revelation from God is always able to cut the cords of flattery that inhibit progress (Ps. 23:3). The overall operation may be painful, but the effect will be a return to useful service, and advance from stagnation.

The business-like messenger orders the pilgrims to follow him back to the narrow way. He has probably carried out such a rescue mission as this on many occasions.

Christian and Hopeful are cautiously joyful at being guided back to the way to life.

The Chastening!

By sovereign appointment, correction is administered

While the Flatterer seems to have withdrawn, the Shining One determines to deal with his detainees at the proper place, namely the way of righteousness (Prov. 12:28). It is here that he examines, and executes chastisement.

The Shining One interrogates the sorry pilgrims. As a result, they confess...

- To receiving the shepherds' counsel. They tell of being given a pastoral road map, that is the Word of God, which came highly recommended.
- To forgetting the shepherds' counsel.
They forgot it because they did not think that it was of any great importance; they thought it was for the less experienced; they felt sufficiently confident in their own intuitive knowledge.
- To being warned about the Flatterer. But they thought he would be an easily recognisable character, and not the smooth and believable gentleman they encountered (Rom. 16: 18).

The Shining One disciplines the neglectful pilgrims.

Then I saw in my dream that the Shining One commanded the pilgrims to lie down; having done this, he severely chastised them so as to teach them the good way in which they should walk; and while he was whipping them he declared, "As many as I love, these I also rebuke and discipline; therefore be zealous and repent." Having done this, he directed them to be on their way and pay particular attention to the other directions of the Shepherds. So thanking him for all of his kindness, they very softly proceeded along the right way, while singing:

Come hither, you that walk along the way; See how the pilgrims fare, that go astray!

They are caught in an entangling net, 'Cause they good counsel lightly did forget;

Tis true, they rescued were, but yet you see, They're scourged as well; let this your caution be.

The pilgrims:

- **Are whipped** while prostrate. With divine authority, the messenger commands that the pilgrims submit to chastisement; their submission at this point indicates sonship qualities. See Deut. 25:1-2; 2 Chron. 6:26-27; Heb. 12:5-11; Rev. 3:19
- **Are encouraged** to continue on their journey. Matt. 26:41
- **Accept their correction with gratitude.** What is the kindness that Christian and Hopeful thank the Shining One for? It is the kindness of concern; it is the kindness of deliverance; it is the kindness of correction; it is the kindness of counsel; it is the kindness of encouragement.
- **Proceed with contentment.**

What matters most to these pilgrims is that they are right with God and heading in the right direction. A properly disciplined child will draw close to its parents. So Christian and Hopeful are now better tempered pilgrims than before their meeting with the Flatterer.

Contentment is found in their soreness and singing.

Challenge

I have often walked foolishly into one trap or another and had to rely on someone else to free me. It is vital to understand that there is no harm in recognising my predicament and asking for help even though it may probably entail some measure of correction or discipline.

It is always in my interests to submit!

Just remember the following home truths:

1. God loves me
2. God chose me
3. God will never leave nor forsake me
4. God is speaking to me
5. I will be led by the Spirit of God and not my circumstances or emotions.

Discuss

1. What does the net represent in the Christian life? See Galatians 6:1; Proverbs 5:22 and 19:19 How do Christian and Hopeful get caught in the net?
2. Why do Christian and Hopeful follow the counsel of the flatterer? Why do they not recognise him as a villain? See 2 Corinthians 11:13, 14; Proverbs 29:5
3. How could the pilgrims have avoided their predicament?
4. What does the whip and the whipping represent in the Christian life? How do Christian and Hopeful respond?
5. Read and discuss Hebrews 12:1-13

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