

I would like to begin this morning with a confession... actually... it's a little dirty secret. ... Preachers... just like everyone else... can be very susceptible to - - - flattery. ... It is... delightful... thrilling... a professional exhilaration...

This past Thursday evening... a friend of mine from Vancouver, Canada contacted me on Skype. As Ross and I talked... he mentioned that he had been listening to several messages of mine over the internet. ... He paid me some very nice compliments... that under different circumstances might seem like flattery. So... I gave him the kind of response any self-respecting pastor would give to flattery: "*What you say is very kind... and of course - untrue. ... But tell me more about your thoughts...*"

Perhaps we all like flattery – too much. Flattery has been rightly called the “bread of fools”... and somehow... there is an insatiable appetite within many people who crave it. ... Someone has said, "*Flattery is the art of telling a person exactly what he thinks of himself.*" ... People like flattery. Sometimes they fish for flattery. ... Benjamin Disraeli is quoted as saying, "*Talk to a man about himself and he will listen for hours.*" ... (Stop and consider) - Flattery is the reverse mirror-image of gossip. ... Gossip... of course... involves saying - behind a person's back - what you would never say to his face. ... Flattery... on the other hand... is saying to a person's face what you would never say behind his back.

If we truly care about a person... we will encourage them - **not** with flattery - but with honesty and integrity. ... There is nothing wrong in praising a person that has done something good... or who has demonstrated excellent character... as long as there is no scheming involved.

Genuine praise has no ulterior motive. ... Therein lies the difference. This is how you distinguish between flattery and genuine praise. ... Flattery uses what looks like praise – in order to gain something in return... usually from the person that is being flattered... there is manipulation involved with flattery. It has ulterior motives. ... Genuine praise seeks nothing in return.

Obviously flattery can have dire consequences to the person whose head swells from hearing it about themselves. ... If a person succumbs to flattery... he is easily blinded to the reality of his circumstances... because he will not think clearly. ... He becomes caught in the net of his own pride... ego... and a false sense of self-confidence.

But also the person who does the flattering... can get caught in the trap of his own words.

Proverbs 29:5 (ESV)

A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

People that flatter may claim to know or say things that are not true... and those things can come back to haunt them. ... They may even make promises they cannot keep... in order to gain the favors of those they are trying to impress. ... As you can see... both groups have a net spread for them.

In today's study through the Gospel of Luke... we come to a passage where we see how Christ handled flattery. He saw it for what it was... and He dealt with it appropriately... Then He taught a truth... which... if we are carefully enough to apply in full to our own lives... we would never feel the need to flatter someone else... or to have someone flatter us!

Luke 20:19-20

The religious leaders are furious with the Lord. ... As we saw in last week's passage... Jesus told the parable of the vineyard... where Israel is a vineyard that God planted... and the leaders of Israel were left to take care of it. Eventually God sent His servants... (various prophets)... who were abused and sent back... until finally the Owner sent His Son. The evil caretakers killed the Son so they could inherit the vineyard for themselves.

The religious leaders who were listening to Jesus tell this story... clearly understood... what Jesus meant by it... and they were furious. ... Also remember... that days earlier... Jesus had come in and destroyed the High Priest's money-making scheme of buying and selling inside the Temple... for his own personal gain. He overturned the money-changers tables and drove out all who were selling animals to be sacrificed – from which the High Priest was taking a significant cut from their profits...

So these Jewish leaders... who were being confronted for their evil in the past few days... by Jesus' actions and teaching... were ready to take action against Christ. ... They watched Him and sent forth spies in order to entrap Him or find something that would incriminate Him. ... Their eyes were peeled for any mistake Jesus might make.

Who were these people out to destroy Jesus? ... Mark tells us in Mark 12:13 that they were the Pharisees and the Herodians. ... You cannot find two groups... that are more further away from each other than these two groups. They were at opposite ends of the philosophical spectrum. ...

Even more so that the Republicans and democrats in today's political environment.

The Pharisees **hated** the Romans. They resisted them... and wanted them out of the nation. ...They were concerned about the purity of Judaism... But the Herodians welcomed the Romans... they accommodated the Romans... hoping to be appointed to advantageous positions. ... They saw befriending the Romans as a means for getting something for themselves. ... So they basically acted as "Roman errand boys." These men supported King Herod and his evil regime.

The Pharisees were the conservatives or right wingers while the Herodians were the liberals or left wingers.

What united them was their hatred for Jesus. The Pharisees opposed the Lord because their religious goals were upset by Christ. ... This really shows... how two opposite powers... can bind people together. Hatred served these two divergent groups... as a diabolical **superglue**... They were cemented together by their mutual hatred for Jesus. The Pharisees hated Him because He was disrupting their *religious* agenda... the Herodians... because He threatened their *political* arrangements. ... They both wanted him dead.

These natural enemies pumped their common venom back and forth in murderous solidarity. Jesus was a formidable opponent, they agreed. Look how he had just turned their questioning of his authority back on them with his counter-question about the origin of John's baptism... a question that reduced them to helpless silence ([Luke 20:1-8](#)). ... Then He vilified them

with the Parable of the Wicked Vineyard Keepers ([Luke 20:9-16](#))... and finally Jesus assaulted them... with his brilliant applications of Old Testament Scriptures.

Yet... formidable as Jesus was... there had to be a way to defeat Him. Approach after approach was suggested and tossed around. ... And then they found... what I'm sure they thought was the perfect ploy to bring His defeat... And just to make sure it would work... they thought they would set the stage for Jesus' downfall – by using flattery.

Luke 20:21

In their attempt to trap Jesus with His words... these men try to use flattery. These men tell the Lord that they know He speaks and teaches what is right... He is not partial or influenced by what others think... and He teaches the truth of the way of Lord. ... Their assessment certainly was correct... but they were saying these things to set a trap for Jesus. ... Their scheme was to use flattery to shackle Him.

I am going to pull over here... and address this issue of "flattery" for a moment. ... We are warned and cautioned repeatedly in the Bible... about the dangers and destructiveness of flattery. Flattery is linked with evil men or wrong behavior. ... All through Scripture we are warned of its danger and destructiveness. Here are just three...

Psalm 5:9 (ESV)

For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.

Psalm 12:3 (ESV)

May the LORD cut off all flattering lips, the tongue that makes great boasts,

Proverbs 29:5 (ESV)

A man who flatters his neighbor spreads a net for his feet.

What does the flatterer do? ... The person who flatters... smooths over things that should be brought to one's attention. ... His words are gratifying instead of notifying... clarifying... edifying... or terrifying. ... He scatters or confuses the reality of a situation... by telling you that you are better... smarter... stronger... wiser... or prettier than others... when that may not be true at all. ... The truth is hidden and praise is given... when it is not deserved... or when there is an ulterior motive. Why?

The flatterer is not giving... he is wanting to gain something... many times to your own detriment. ... It could be power... position... prestige... popularity... wealth... or even sexual favors. ... A salesman may flatter a customer to make a sale. ... An employee may flatter a boss to get his way or to get a raise.

But Scripture says that the person who flatters... spreads a trap for his feet.

The great hymn writer of the 1800's... Fanny Crosby... told this story about herself...

"Before 1840 my friends had nearly spoiled me with their praises. At least I began to feel my own importance as a poet a little too much. So the superintendent, Mr. Jones, thought something ought to be done to curb such rising vanity. One morning after breakfast I was summoned to the office.

It was an impressive occasion, and I remember what Mr. Jones said almost word for word, "*Fanny, I am sorry you have allowed yourself to be carried away by what others have said about your verses. True, you have written a number of poems of real merit; but how far do they fall short of the standard that you might attain. Shun a flatterer, Fanny, as you would a viper; for no true friend would deceive you with words of flattery. Remember that whatever talent you possess belongs wholly to God. You ought to give Him the credit for all that you do.*"

Then the dear man said to me, "*Fanny, have I wounded your feelings?*" Something within me bore witness that Mr. Jones spoke the truth. So I answered, "*No, sir. On the contrary, you have talked to me like a father, and I thank you very much for it.*" In years afterward I gradually came to realize that his advice was worth more than the price of rubies.

Wow! ... This is the attitude we should have too. Our desire should be to seek the approval of the Lord Jesus Christ above everything else. If we will do this, we will be able to shield ourselves against the snares of flattery.

The religious leaders in Luke chapter 20 flatter Jesus because they are setting a trap for Him. ... Basically they say, "Since you are so honest, upright, and truthful Jesus, tell us the answer to our question." They believed that the question they would ask Jesus would ensnare Him. I believe they thought, "We've got Him now!" Notice the question in verse 22...

Luke 20:22

The Jewish leaders picked a "hot button" issue to try to ensnare Jesus. The question was meant to hang Jesus over the dual horns of a dilemma... so He would impale Himself on one or the other. ... The tax issue was explosive around Jerusalem at that time. ... When Jesus was a little boy... Roman taxation had been the cause of a serious revolt against Rome. That revolt spawned the Zealot movement of Jews. This same movement would 40 years later inspire another revolt that angered Rome so much... that they completely destroyed Jerusalem in 70 A.D. ... This is what Christ saw and wept over a few days earlier... as he approached Jerusalem

In response to their question... If Jesus answered "*No, it is not right to pay taxes to Caesar*" ... He would be impaled on the horn of *arrest*. The Herodians would sprint to Pilate with the news... and Christ would be arrested as an insurrectionist... and very quickly executed. ... Rome tolerated diversity in religion... but used cold steel to deal with political problems. ... But if Jesus answered, "*Yes, it is right to pay taxes to Caesar*"... He would be impaled on the horn of *alienation* from his people. The Pharisees would gleefully spread the message that Jesus had a collaboration going on with Rome... and the people would abandon Him in disgust. Jesus would be viewed as a traitor to their religion and to the nation. There is no way their Messiah would pay tribute to a Gentile king.

It was a brilliant plan. It looked fail-safe! And they must have been confident that they finally had Him! ... *Jesus, let's see you get out of this*

one! ... And so... His antagonists waited with bated breath — the Pharisees hoping for a “yes” they could herald to the nation... and the Herodians equally eager for a “no”... that could be taken to the Romans. How delicious the prospect. ...How joyous their hatred!

Luke 20:23-24

These people presumed to trick Jesus. ... Boy... were they ever in for a surprise. ...Jesus perceived... detected their craftiness or cunning plan.

People believe they can trick Jesus today... or that He is unaware of what is going on in their lives. ... But let me assure you... the Lord knows everything about us.

1. He knows our thoughts

Jeremiah 17:10 (ESV)

“I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.”

2. He knows our deeds

Proverbs 15:3 (ESV)

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.

Psalms 139:3 (ESV)

You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

3. He knows what we say.

Psalms 139:4 (ESV)

Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

It always amazes me how people sometimes think that they can somehow fool God... by behaving in ways that look “Christian” in order to get something in return. People pretend to be more spiritual than they really are... in hopes that God will be more responsive to them in prayer. *“Maybe I can trick Jesus into giving me a better financial picture... if I go to church more regularly... Maybe I can get something from Him... if I use the right words...”*

Jesus always sees through it. And He saw right through what these religious leaders were trying to do...

"He saw through their duplicity and said to them, 'Show me a denarius.'" The denarius was a small silver coin... one side bore the head of Caesar and the abbreviated inscription TI. CAESAR DIVI AVG. F. AVGVSTVS ("Tiberius Caesar, son of the divine Augustus, Augustus"). The denarius was the amount that had to be paid into the Roman fiscus (treasury) by all adult men and women just for the privilege of existing. It could only be paid with that coin bearing Caesar's image and inscription.

As Jesus asked for the coin... a hush must have fallen over the crowd. To an upright Jew... the image of Caesar on a coin was an abomination. ...The inscription "divine Augustus" was a violation of the Second Commandment against graven images. The coin was obvious blasphemy. And there is a little humor taking place here... Jesus' asking that *they* show the coin... implied that His “not-so upright detractors”... were carrying such a coin. ...The scene became very quiet indeed. ... And somebody produced the coin.

His counter-question broke the silence: "Whose portrait and inscription are on it?" ... "Caesar's" ... came the grudging reply. ... No doubt they had hoped to avoid using that name.

Luke 20:25

The coin **belonged** to Caesar because it bore his image... and we are God's because we bear his image!¹

It is right to pay taxes... even to such a blasphemous and evil empire as Rome... and to support the Lord's work, too. ... Jesus' answer indicates that the payment of taxes to the government... did not mean they had to submit to the emperor's claim to be God. ... He had no claim to their souls at all. ...The tax needed to be paid... as long as Rome held sway over Judea... but God had the rights on eternity and on their lives.

Jesus assumes the validity of the secular state and its demands... even when it is controlled by a man who thinks he is God. A poorly run state is better than no state at all. Not only is the state valid, but it also makes legitimate claims on our behavior. In Romans 13... Paul expands on Jesus' words... saying, "*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.*"

There are, of course, limits upon the authority of the state. There are also at least three situations in which a Christian **must** resist authority.

He or she must resist when asked to violate a command of God. The perfect example of this is found in Acts 4-5, when the authorities arrested

the disciples for preaching, summoned them before the Sanhedrin, and ordered them not to teach in the name of Jesus. ... Of course, the disciples went right back to it and were arrested again. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,' he [the high priest] said. 'Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.' Peter and the other apostles replied: 'We must obey God rather than men!'" (Acts 5:28, 29). ... Our call to preach the gospel transcends the restrictions of government. The disciples went out and took up preaching where they had left off.

Christians must never violate a command of God, regardless of what the state says. This responsibility may take on very personal significance in the opening decades of what may be a hostile twenty-first century.

The government has limits. ... What are they...? When are we to ignore the demands of government...? I would propose to you that there are three situations.

1. When the Christian is asked to violate a command of God. As our example in Acts shows us - "We must obey God rather than men."
2. If we are asked to do something that is immoral or criminal.
3. We should not violate our conscience to accommodate government mandates which say we must accept abortion... homosexuality... or the teachings of false religions... and not speak out against them.

Luke 20:26

The listeners and those who attempted to trap Jesus were left dumb-founded. They could not refute what the Lord said. ... They were astonished and silenced. ... The tables had been turned and they did not know what hit them.

But Christ's words suggest two questions for us.

1) Whose image do we bear? ... The answer is evident: we bear the image of God.

2) Have we given "to God what is God's"?

If we think God just wants our money... we are wrong. ... If we think it is our time and talents He asks for... again... we are wrong. ... If we think it is the sacrifice of whatever is the nearest and dearest to us... we are wrong.

He wants us!

We must give God what is God's. We must give him our lives.

He will not settle for less than all. And if we resist Him, we will not rest in this life.

[In an article for *Decision* magazine], Samuel Kamaleson illustrates [the difficulty of total submission] through a Christian folk story from South India. There are several versions of it, but here it opens with a young boy who loved to play marbles. He regularly walked through his neighborhood with a pocketful of his best marbles, hoping to find opponents to play against. One marble in particular, his special blue marble, had won him many matches.

During one walk he encountered a young girl who was eating a bag of chocolate candy. Though the boy's first love was marbles, he had a weakness for chocolates. As he stood there interacting with the young girl, his salivary glands and the rumbling in his stomach became uncontrollable, and he thought to himself, *I have got to get my hands on those chocolates.*

Concocting a plan, he asked the girl, "How about I give you all these marbles for those chocolates?" She replied, "Sounds fair to me."

He put his hand in his pocket, searching for the distinguishing cracks on the surface of the blue marble. Once he identified the blue marble with his finger tip, he carefully pushed it to the bottom of his pocket and pulled out all the other marbles.

As he handed the marbles to the girl in exchange for the chocolate, the boy thought his plan was a success and turned to walk away. As he began to eat the candy, he suddenly turned to the girl and asked, "Hey, did you give me *all* the chocolates?"

Our fallen nature persuades us to posture ourselves in the same deceptive and defiant attitude as the boy in this story. We want everything the kingdom of God has to offer. We want to have a secure sense of God's presence, we want all our prayers to be answered, we want to "feel close" to Jesus, we want to flourish in the riches of God's glory—we want it all. But we are unwilling to give up everything for it. Many times there is a "blue marble" in our lives that we seem unwilling to offer to the control of Christ. Until we can fully submit ourselves to God's will, our participation in God's kingdom will be limited.