Chapter Eighteen

The Flatterer and the Enchanted Ground

The pilgrims traveled on, and Ignorance followed. They came to a fork in the road, which appeared to be as straight as the one they were on. So they did not know which of the two to take. Therefore, they stood still to consider what to do. As they were thinking about it, a man who was wearing a very light robe came to them and asked, “Why are you standing here?” They answered, “We are going to the Celestial City but do not know which of these two roads to take.” “Follow me!” said the man. “That is where I am going.” So they followed him down the road that intersected the one they were on. Gradually the road curved and turned them away from the City. In a short time, they were actually going in the opposite direction. Yet they still followed him. But before long, and before they were aware of it, he led them both into a net. They were both so entangled that they did not know what to do. Then the white robe fell off the man’s back, and they saw where they were. Therefore, they were upset for quite a while, because they could not free themselves.

Chr. “Now I see that I made a mistake. Didn’t the shepherds tell us to beware of the flatterers? Today, we have found out the truth of the wise man’s saying: “Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet.”

Hope. “They also gave us a map for our trip, so we could be sure about the way to go. But we forgot to look at it and have not kept ourselves from the paths of those who are violent. Here David was wiser than we are. For he said, ‘As for the deeds of men - by the word of your lips I have kept myself from the ways of the violent.’"

So they lay in the net, regretting their choice. At last, they saw a Shining One coming towards them. He had a whip made of small cords in his hand.

When he had come to the place where they were, he asked them, “Where have you come from? What are you doing here?” They told him, “We are poor pilgrims going to Zion. We were led out of the way by a man clothed in white. He enticed us to follow him and told us he was going there too. Then the one with the whip said, “It is Flatterer, a false apostle, who has transformed himself into an angel of light.” So he cut the net and let the men out. Then he said to them,

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1 Proverbs 29:5.
2 Psalm 17:4.
3 “Whoever flatters his neighbor is spreading a net for his feet” (Prov. 29:5).

“With flattery he will corrupt those who have violated the covenant, but the people who know their God will firmly resist him” (Dan. 11:32).

“For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light” (II Cor. 11:13-14).
“Follow me so I can put you back on the right path again.” Then he led them back to the way which they had left to follow the Flatterer. He asked them, “Where did you sleep last night?” They said, “With the shepherds on the Delectable Mountains.” Then he asked them, “Did they not give you directions for your journey?” They answered, “Yes.” “But did you,” he said, “take your note and read it when you were standing there trying to decide which way to go?” They answered, “No.” He asked them why. They told him they forgot. He then asked, “Did the shepherds warn you to beware of the Flatterer?” They answered, “Yes; but we could have never imagined that this man who spoke so well was he.”4

Then I saw in my dream that he commanded them to lie down.5 Then he chastised them to teach them to walk only in the good way.6 As he chastised them, he said, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.”7 Having done this, he invited them to go on their way and to pay attention to the other directions the shepherds had given them. So they thanked him for all his kindness and went peacefully along the right way, singing:

Come hither, you that walk along the way;
See how the Pilgrims fare, that go astray!
They caught are in an entangling Net,
’Cause they good Counsel lightly did forget:
’Tis true, they rescu’d were, but yet you see
They’re scourg’d to boot: Let this your caution be.

After a while, they saw someone far away coming quietly and alone to meet them. Christian said to his friend, “There is a man with his back towards Zion. He is coming to meet us.”

Hope. “I see him. Let us be careful lest he prove to be a flatterer also.”

So he came closer and closer until he was finally with them. His name was Atheist, and he asked them where they were going.

Chr. “We are going to Mount Zion.”

Then Atheist broke out in laughter.

Chr. “Why are you laughing?”

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4 “For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people” (Rom. 16:18).

5 “If the guilty man deserves to be beaten, the judge shall make him lie down and have him flogged in his presence with the number of lashes his crime deserves...(Deut. 25:2).”

6 “When the heavens are shut up and there is no rain because your people have sinned against you, and when they pray toward this place and confess your name and turn from their sin because you have afflicted them, then hear from heaven and forgive the sin of your servants, your people Israel. Teach them the right way to live, and send rain on the land you gave your people for an inheritance” (II Chron. 6:26-27).

7 Revelation 3:19.
Atheist. “I am laughing because you are such ignorant people. You have undertaken a very difficult journey and will likely have nothing to show for your efforts except the travel itself.”

Chr. “Why not? Do you think we will not be received there?”

Atheist. “Received! There is no such place in the world - you have only dreamed about it.”

Chr. “But there is such a place in the world to come.”

Atheist. “When I was at home in my own country, I heard the same things that you are now affirming. And having listened to what others said, I began travelling to investigate the matter for myself. I have been looking for this city for twenty years but have found no more of it than I did on the first day that I began my journey.8

Chr. “We have both heard and believe that there is such a place.”

Atheist. “If I had not believed the same thing when I was at home, I would not have come this far to seek it. But I have not found anything. And yet I should have, had there been such a place to be found - because I have gone farther than you have. So I am going back and will enjoy those things that I had discarded when I had hope in that which I now see does not exist.”

Chr. Then Christian said to Hopeful, “Is what this man is saying true?”

Hope. “Be alert! He is one of the flatterers. Remember what it cost us last time when we listened to this kind of fellow. What! No Mount Zion! Didn’t we see the gate of the City from the Delectable Mountains? Also, are we not supposed to walk by faith? Let’s continue to go on, lest the man with the whip come to us again. You should have been the one to teach me that lesson. But I will remind you: ‘Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.’ 9 Stop listening to him, my brother, and let us believe so that we may be saved.”

Chr. “My brother, I did not ask the question because I doubted the truth of our belief. Rather, I did it to see what you would say and to find out what was really in your heart. As for this man, I know he is blinded by the god of this world. Let’s go on, knowing that we believe in the truth, and ‘no lie comes from the truth.’ ”10

Hope. “Now I rejoice in the hope of the glory of God!”

8 “He will die in the place where they have led him captive; he will not see this land again” (Jer. 22:12).

“A fool’s work wearies him; he does not know the way to town” (Eccl. 10:15).

9 Prov. 19:27.

“But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved” (Heb. 10:39).

10 “I do not write to you because you do not know the truth, but because you do know it and because no lie comes from the truth” (I Jn. 2:21).
So they left the man. And he continued on his journey, laughing as he went.

Then I saw in my dream that they traveled until they came into a certain country where the air tended to make strangers drowsy. Here Hopeful began to get very sleepy. So he said to Christian, “I am so sleepy that I can hardly keep my eyes open. Let’s lie down and take a short nap.”

**Chr.** “By no means! We may never wake up.”

**Hope.** “My brother, sleep is sweet for the man who works. We will be refreshed if we take a nap.”

**Chr.** “Don’t you remember that one of the shepherds warned us about the Enchanted Ground? What he meant was that we should be careful not to go to sleep. ‘So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self-controlled.’

**Hope.** “I acknowledge that I am wrong. If I had been here alone, I would have run the risk of dying. I see it is true that the wise man said, ‘Two are better than one.’ I have received mercy by your being with me. You will receive a good reward for your labor.”

**Chr.** “To prevent us from getting drowsy in this place, let’s get a good conversation going.”

**Hope.** “I would love to.”

**Chr.** “Where should we begin?”

**Hope.** “Where God began with us. But you start, please.”

**Chr.** “I will sing this song first:

> When saints do sleepy grow, let them come hither,  
> And hear how these two pilgrims talk together:  
> Yea, let them learn of them, in any wise,  
> Thus to keep ope their drowsy, slumb’ring eyes.  
> Saint’s fellowship, if it be manag’d well,  
> Keeps them awake, and that in spite of hell.

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11 I Thess. 5:6.

12 “Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work” (Eccl. 4:9).
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