

## Robert Knopwood's Sermon 'The Treacherous Nature of Flattery' RS13

Key –

Xt = Christ

Xtian = Christian

Xtianity = Christianity

### The Treacherous Nature of Flattery

14 Sept 1828

C Plains [Stokells?]

#### 29 Chapt Proverbs 5 Verse

A man that flattereth his neighbour, spreadeth a net for his feet.

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The weakness of the human heart exposes it to innumerable dangers. Constant attention is necessary to preserve it secure, because it is often attackd [sic] on the most unsuspecting side. If our minds were as pure, and our hearts as firm, as the perfections our nature requires, we should not be reduced to the sad necessity of dreading not only the errors and follies of mankind, but their truth, when it is agreeable and flattering. But the conceit and Vanity, which all men have in some degree, renders truth itself often dangerous.

It is the prerogative of God alone to receive praise without danger. Thou God art praised and to thee shall the vow be performed. He hears, and is pleased to heed, the endless hym's [sic] of his angels. He hears the Voice of Praise assending [sic] from all nature: the infinite variety of beings celebrate him, according to their different Powers, as the great, the merciful God, and the only object of supreme love, he receives those truths without prejudice to his holiness, because being in himself essentially holy and pure, these attributes will always coincide. It is far otherwise with us: unstable ourselves as water, our very virtues partake of this instability; whence ariseth the necessity, if we judge wisely, of our suspecting every thing that flatters us, as, according to the custom of the world, which we know but too well, there is nothing in general more seductive and deceitful, and of all delusions, there is none more shameful in the eyes of men nor more pernicious in the sight of God, than that which, by the suggestions of self love, makes us take falshood [sic] for truth, and think of ourselves more highly, than we ought to think.

The words of the Prophet, addressed to the Jews, may be universally applied. My People, they who call you blessed deceive you. They who effect to praise, to applaud, to call you happy and perfect, these impose upon you, and abuse your credulity. In fact what are applauses in the common style of the world? Obliging falshoods, officious exagerations [sic], extravagant signs of apparent esteem proceeding neither from reason, nor from the heart; often disguised insinuations, covered with a veil of sincerity, plausible and honorable [sic] terms, but signifying nothing, the offspring of vanity, and the deception of self love. People tell us, what we ought to be, rather than what we are, and we by a pitiable blindness of running into the snare which is spread for us, believing ourselves to be indeed what adulation represents us. Flattering, portraits, are made of our persons; they are made pleasing,

and we believe them natural, vast applause are given of our talents, which are only compliments, and figures, but we fail not to take them them literally: praises are bestowed even on our Vices, and Passions, and we do not hesitate to count them for virtues. — Some learned men have very plausibly ascribed the origin of those idolatrous superstitions that prevail so long in the world to this abuse of which I speak. to that inclination which men have of believing what is advantageous, however incredible it may really be. Certain men were told they were Gods, and by often hearing this told them, they became accustomed to be hounoured [sic] and treated as Gods. Those who first held that language to them knew very well, that it was false: yet from a spirit of flattery, they performed every action, that they would otherwise have done from a spirit of sincerity, had they been convinced that what they spoke were true.

We dare not say, that this error is entirely destroyed even by Xtianity: vestages [sic] of it remain every where, and a species of Idolatry is established by the Custon [sic] of the World. We tell the Rich and the great no more that they are Gods, but we tell them, that they are not as other men are: that they want those weaknesses which others have, and possess those qualities which others want, we separate them so far from the rest of mankind, that, forgetting what they are they think themselves Gods, not considering that their admirers are interested persons, determined to please them. Nor may we confine ourselves to the great and Powerful ones of the world to justify this observation. The idolatry I speak of reigns equally in the lower conditions, and produceth there proportioned effects. Thus a false or a foolish friend by habitual compliances, becomes idolatrous of his friend, hiding from him the most salutary of all views, which is, the View of himself, and leading his mind into as many errors as he says to him soft and agreeable things. What are properly speaking, those public orations, those falshoods ~~and~~ flattery, and colours of eloquence, triumph with impunity over truth? What are those Public addresses, where by the caprice of the author the most obscure merits are exalted to the most shining: where the most indifferent Virtue is considered as the most eminent: where there is no courtier, who is not worthy of Governing the state, no Churchman who does not deserve the mitre? What are these, but a mercinary [sic] Sacrifice of excessive praises to the infatuation of men. We know well, that truth is the last thing we need need look for in those performances; and yet by the corruption of self love, which can prevail over all; we easily imagine them to be partly true. —

The contradiction is, that in the midst of all this, those men so vain, and so passionate for Glory, never cease to protest, that the thing they abhor most, is to be deceived: In the mean time, they wishd [sic] to be praised, flattered, and admired. as if flattery adulation could possibly be separated. They love not deceit, but they love applause, which in its very nature is disceatful [sic: whence it is evident however strange it may seem, that mankind reckon it a high pleasure to be deceived by one another, and are mutually thankful for this extraordinary favour. —

What resolutions then, can we take to avoid these errors? We must resolve to distrust even truth; when it seems to flatter us: because there is no appearance of truth which approacheth so near to falshood [sic], nor is so difficult to be distinguished from falshood [falsehood]; and consequently, there is none so much exposed to dangers of falshood. To be the dupe of false applause we know, is sufficient to make a man despised of all the world, and the most ridiculous Character on earth is he who is puffed [sic] up with the persuason [sic] of imaginary worth. If however we had nothing but the world to fear, perhaps we might bring ourselves, by our very pride and vanity to disregard the operations. But how shall we answer to God, when he shall reproach us for seeking flattery, and encouraging deceit, for listening to the Voice of the Charmer, and living in perpetual error, shall we like Adam, throw the blame upon others, and say that men have beguiled us? But will not God, the severe though Equitable Judge, discover that we have only been beguiled by our own vanity. Better were it for us never to hear such truths. Better were they buried in obscurity, if they render us

haughty towards our Brethren, and forgetful of our God: How many have been poisoned by the conceit of their own wealth.

Jesus Xt himself, who according to the Scripture was the firm and immovable rock to whom the praises of the Universe were due: as the attribute of his of his supreme perfections: yet while on Earth, would not suffer those truths which made for his honour and Glory. He wrought wonders. He cured the blind and Deaf, he raised the dead; yet when the People, begged [sic] to celebrate his Name for this; and to Cry, that he was the Prophet of God, he enjoined [sic] them Silence, and Seemed extremely impatient of applause. Even to the Demons did he extend this modesty, and when those Spirits, forced by his omnipotent word left the bodies they had passed, exclaimed that he was the Xt, he rebuked them, and Suffered them not to proceed. Instead of receiving the homage which was offered to his Power. He used his power to forbid, and reject it. Was there any danger for him in being praised? Doubtless there was none; but there might have been for us; and because he came to be our pattern in all things, to supply the weakness of our nature, by the sanctity of his Example he shunned worldly praise, that we might be instructed to dread those; who by flattering deceive and destroy us; for perfection being a work of constancy and, difficulty, whose principal exercise consists in advancing, we must every day labour with care: and if we could intermit this toil with honour, and safety, we would certainly do it with joy. But to this, the, immoderate praise of Men infallibly leads us, for it inables [sic] us believe ourselves to be far advanced, and endangers an immediate recoil. St Paul confirmed as he was in grace, writes thus to the Philippians; Brethren, I count not myself to have attained perfection. But this I do: forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things, which are before. I press towards the mark for the Prize of the high calling. We observe a conduct very different, and very opposite to this of the Apostle. We regard with peculiar satisfaction the little good we have already done, and almost entirely forget the great things, which remain for us yet to do. —

To avoid so fatal a blindness, let us fix this great Maxim in our minds. That a flatterer is worse than a declared enemy, and that even truth must be distrusted [sic] or at least not received with Eagerness when it flatters us. Let us forget our good works. God is Just, and will remember them, but let our Sins be ever in our Sight. The contemplation of our own merit may be pleasing, but it is dangerous. it tends to overweaning [sic] pride, good deeds Sanctify us, and wicked deeds corrupt us and nothing is so proper to sanctify us, as the remembrance of our Sins; as if God, by a particular providence, had inclined to give this consolation to the Sinner, that the severe remembrance of his Sin may be made its remedy. While the remembrance of his good deeds, is a perpetual temptation to the just. But even this temptation serves a great end, as it obliges us to continual watchfulness and constancy. to dread the Tongue of the flatterer, to distrust our own claim, and to defend alone upon the God of Eternal Merit. which that all here present may do God of his infinite mercy grant through Jesus Xt our Lord --- -----Amen-----

Transcribed by Eliza Fox 5/11/19