

# GRACE GAZETTE

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*Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed.*

*Hebrews 12:12-13*

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## THE FLATTERY OF THE WICKED

*For he flattereth himself in his own eyes, until his iniquity be found to be hateful. Psalm 36:2*

Solomon tells us, "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren." (Pro 6:16-19) The seventh form of wickedness which he mentions (and I believe accentuates, though not minimizing the other six) is that of designing division among the saints of GOD.

For in verse 14, just preceding these "seven deadly sins", (as they are sometimes called), he particularly points him who "soweth discord" and the sudden calamity that is ordained to follow upon those who delight therein. (see v.15).

Prior to Paul's description of the "fruit of the SPIRIT", he sets forth the "works of the flesh" which are manifest in the natural man. "Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." (Gal 5:19-21)

So it is well that we take heed to the similarities of his description with that of Solomon in regards to "sowers of discord" and "strife, seditions, (and) heresies." When we read the word, "heresies" we most often think of it as a description of some form of unsound or contrary doctrine which is in contrast to an orthodox line of thought. It is true that such deviations from the "faith once delivered to the saints", is often the cause of "heresy", but the actual word which is translated as "heresy or heresies" actually literally means "disunion, or sectarianism".

Paul admonished the Corinthians over this very matter. "For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions (i.e.; schisms) among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies (i.e.; disunion) among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you." (1Cor 11:18-19) Much of his writing to the Corinthian church was to correct this spirit of sectarianism that existed in their midst over baptisms, personalities, and social status. "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment." (1Cor 1:10)

It is interesting that he speaks of the necessity of such divisiveness ("there must be also heresies") in order to show a contrast between that which is of the SPIRIT of GOD and that which is of the flesh. He is not approving of such but rather, pointing out the wickedness of such conduct and the fact that the wheat and the tares must grow together until the harvest.

GOD's people are exhorted to love one another, forbearing one another and each esteeming the other better than themselves. It is impossible that division and strife can exist when such is the manner in which the brethren comport themselves. Such schism arises when men think they

are something when they are nothing and consider that they know something when in reality none knows anything as they ought to know. *"Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."* (Prov 13:10) *"He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife:"* (Prov 28:25)

It is a sad observation to make, but many times, those who should be leading by example, are often the very ones who, while loving to have the preeminence (as Diotrephes), seek out a following and fall prey to the prophetic words of Paul to the Ephesian elders. *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."* (Acts 20:29-30) Such things are an abomination, but alas are quite common.

The Psalmist speaks of him that *"flattereth himself"*. The same Hebrew word which is here translated as *"flattereth"* is most often (actually about two thirds of the sixty five times that the word is found in the OT) translated as "divide and/or divided". So we can see a connection between that which is called flattery and the division which occurs as men rebel against the way of GOD and ultimately separate themselves from one another as brethren.

Deceivers often use "flattery" to gain a foothold in the minds of the deceived, even as the serpent used "flattery" to beguile the woman in the Garden. He stroked her ego in setting forth the notion that she could outsmart GOD and gain that which was forbidden. *"The words of his mouth were smoother (same Hebrew word) than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords."* (Psa 55:21) *"A man that flattereth his neighbour spreadeth a net for his feet."* (Pro 29:5) So too, do the prophets of free will; flatter the minds of their hearers and give them the notion that they are the masters of their fate and that they can choose to follow the way of GOD whenever they please. Thus, the net of self-righteousness is spread before them and they gladly are swallowed up in its clutches.

Yet all deception does not begin from outward sources, which is the specific case that the Psalmist is addressing in 36:2. In fact apart from being susceptible to deceit, a man cannot be deceived. Many were the nets spread by deceivers before the face of the LORD JESUS CHRIST, yet HE withstood them all, even the onslaughts of the master deceiver, the father of lies, which is Satan himself. Satan "flattered" HIM by recognizing HIS station as the RECEIVER of all the promises of GOD. Yet Satan found "no place" within HIM, wherein to ply his craft of deceit and destruction. *"The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."* (John 14:30)

So that "deceiver" which causes the sons of GOD the greatest trouble is not to be found wandering around the countryside, but rather dwelling within this sinful heart of flesh which is prone to its own lies and feeds upon its own willingness to be deceived by those who bring a message which exalts that same sinful flesh. Carnal religion is the greatest net which is spread before their face. *"Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face. For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulchre; they flatter with their tongue."* (Psa 5:8-9)

The way of the natural man is described most clearly here by the Psalmist. He will flatter himself with his own thoughts of self-esteem and the value of his own intellect, even "dividing" himself from clearly revealed truth as Paul describes: *"Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools"* (Rom 1:21-22)

The Psalmist goes on to set forth the result of his "flattery" of himself, *"until his iniquity be found to be hateful."* This same thought is repeated by Paul when he says, *"And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient."* (Rom 1:28) No remedy for this condition exists in men.

Thus, the backdrop is set for Paul's declaration to the Corinthians. *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."* (1Cor 2:1-2) No "flattering" words need ever be spoken in the declaration of the absolute perfections of CHRIST as the SAVIOR of sinners. Is not this the unity of the saints? mam