

## **Paper Gods**

‘During a busy Christmas shopping season a little boy was standing in the middle of the aisle of one of the large department stores, crying, “I want my mommy!” As people would go by they would say, “There, there, little boy. Your momma will find you”. And a number of them had given him pocket change to help assuage his tears. But he kept sobbing, with tears running down his cheeks. Finally someone from the department store came along and said, “I know where your mommy is, son”. And the little boy looked up and responded, “So do I, just keep quiet”.’

Apparently that little boy was getting an early start as a professional panhandler! His take was in direct proportion to his acting “skill” impersonating a terrified youngster. Appearances can certainly be deceiving. He was also lying through his teeth! Hopefully that boy would change his ways as he grew up. But unless he met the Savior of our souls, such a change would be fairly unlikely. If anything, he might probably further hone his deceptive “skills” and perhaps grow up to become one of these people we sometimes hear about who live double or even triple lives. Married to two spouses, having children with each, two careers, living two entirely separate lives. Or in the rare case of the triple, three lives, careers, families, etc. Pathologically, these people probably

see themselves as being completely honest in each one of their lives, while in reality, they're lying about everything all the time. How can they keep everything straight? And yet many of these people successfully pull off these complicated and elaborate con jobs for decades. Some are never found out until they die!

But such people are among us. Most not such highly skilled professional deceivers, but Lord Jesus warned us that even among us saved people, there will be counterfeits. In His parable, He called them "tares", or "weeds". They look just like the wheat, us, until it's time for the harvest when their true natures are revealed. And so it is with us. There are people all around us who claim to be Christians, or our friends, and for a while they might appear to be genuine. But some time, some where, in some circumstance, we will catch a glimpse of who they really are, of whose they really belong to. Particularly so if we ourselves keep faithful and always seeking the Lord, directly through His Word, with our trusted church brothers and sisters, not looking to other human "friends" or teachers, who may come round us and try to ever so gradually lead us astray with slightly more appealing messages and interpretations of both doctrine and current events.

When in doubt, we should look closely, deeply, at what these people do and think. Upon close inspection, it should become obvious when the appearance doesn't match reality. During World War II, both the Allies and the Axis used deception in attempts to confuse their enemies. The British created a whole in-

vasion army of tanks and vehicles made of inflatables that lay in wait near a Dover beach for an invasion of Nazi-held Belgium. The German reconnaissance planes saw them and thought they were real. Hitler accordingly prepared his forces for an assault on Belgium that never came, leaving the beaches of Normandy sparsely defended against the real D-Day invasion. The Imperial Japanese built an entire armada of fighter aircraft out of papier-mâché ready to take off to defend Osaka and environs, but they could never get off the ground. Our human propensity to lie and deceive stems from our deal with the devil made in the Garden of Eden when Eve and then Adam believed his lies over the truthful promises of Father God. So in some ways, the devil has become humanity's "buddy". In a truly diabolical way!

So even when the Gospel is preached, and believers see the light and truth of Christ, come together to grow, make disciples and be fruitful, the devil comes in when we're not paying attention, and sows into us, the Body of Christ, imposter weeds who steal our nourishment, stunt our growth, distract us from seeking the truth and life from God, and greatly inhibit our disciple-making. But, as Lord Jesus assures us, this regrettable state is only temporary. For at the end of the age, the Lord will dispatch an army of angel specialists who will skillfully separate the righteous from the unrighteous, and we each will go where we deserve.

We already know the ending of the story. It's a truly happy ending! But in the meantime, we're often so distracted by all the

appalling violence and depravity the media loves to pipe into our homes and cars and phones, that it's easy to despair. With the current violent protests going on in various places, it can seem incomprehensible to us why all these mostly young people are so literally out of their minds. Actually, they're acting as most any human will who has divorced themselves from God and the truth of all things that is found only in Him. When God is rejected, they swallow, hook, line and sinker, the lies of the devil, again, repeating the folly of Eve and Adam, and consigning themselves to untold misery and ultimate death. Unless they turn around. But, as the devil in Garden lured Eve with the thought that she and Adam could become "like God", gaining secret knowledge that only God would know, they would ultimately become gods themselves.

And isn't that exactly what many young people these days desire? Too many of them have been raised in spiritual vacuums. Meaning, they've not been taught about the God Who both created them in their mother's womb, and Who loves them and wants to hold their hands and guide them through the blessing that is this life. They don't know Who He is, nor who they are. They've never been allowed to read His Word. Instead, their minds have been poisoned against both Him, His Word and His people. Barred from knowing that God is love, let alone experiencing it, thus never knowing true love and compassion, they naturally then see us, God's people, as enemies of all they think is good and right. And thus they see us as racists, haters, deserving hate.

For we stand in their way. We're holding them back from achieving their godhood. So the more they throw off any and all rules, laws and institutional and cultural authorities that restrict them in any way, the more they feel themselves attaining their true power and "divinity". Since they're actually gods themselves, whatever they desire to do is all right and good. If they feel like slugging out a 90-year-old woman minding her own business on the street, well, it's their prerogative because they are gods. But like those paper airplanes, they are all only paper gods! "On paper", they can declare they're gods. Tear up the paper and their actual humanity is revealed. Truly, as Lord Jesus prayed on the cross in Luke 23:34, "Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing". Protomartyr Stephen, in Acts 7:59, similarly prayed with his dying breath as the hail of stones thudded against his crumbling, bleeding body, "Lord, don't charge them with this sin!"

Stephen's immense faith and love for those killing him at the very end is practically incomprehensible. If it'd been me, I'd probably call on God to strike them all with a bolt of lightning, burning them to a blackened, smoky crisp! But couldn't Father God then charge me with as great a hate as they had for me? What would you do? What if you were one of these people in a department store, in an airport baggage claim, walking down a street, that antifa and so-called black lives matter activists decide looks "funny" and then fall upon you in a hail of fists and kicks? Would you pray for them? Pray for their forgiveness? Turn the other cheek?

Would you reasonably try to defend yourself? Or, would you try to turn the attack back on them? Would you try to beat the living daylights out of them? Even if they undoubtedly deserved it? Would you treat them with the love of Christ, or the hate of satan?

Hopefully none of us are ever in such situations, as the examples I've mentioned have all happened in the last few weeks across the country. The attacks are frenzied, the activists like crazed wild animals with rabies. What an adrenaline rush they must feel at the moment as they release their pent-up emotions into hate-fueled physical and verbal violence. But even if we only see these events on social media, do we pray for them? We may want to retaliate in kind, but Paul assures us in Romans 8 that doing so is exactly what our "sinful nature urges us to do" (verse 12). On the contrary, we're to "put to death the deeds of your sinful nature" (verse 13). By ourselves, we can't. But with Holy Spirit's constant help and presence, victory over the sinful human nature is ours. For "Holy Spirit helps us in our weakness" (verse 26). In fact, He even prays for us, through us. "Holy Spirit prays for us with groanings that cannot be expressed in words" (same verse). "The Spirit pleads for us believers in harmony with God's Own will" (verse 27). What could be better than that? Even we ourselves don't know what's best for us. But our Heavenly Daddy, Abba, Father, knows best. And our constant companion, prays exactly that. Do we need any more assurance than that? He gives us victory after victory, now, and the final victory for all time!

