

Psalm 35 — “What To Do When the Wicked Pursue & Malign You”

Our King will gain everlasting victory — be certain of it! — over HIS and OUR enemies. In the warfare of life, we must stand with Christ. Yet John Knox shows us that there is no greater posture to prepare us for such standing than humble kneeling before God in prayer (*Steve Lawson, commenting about John Knox*).

Psalm 35 is an “imprecatory psalm”. **Imprecations are prayers to God to curse the godless enemies.** The following notes should be kept in mind:

- David prays that God will fulfill His covenant promises (see Gen 12:1-3)
- David prays for justice, so that God might be shown to be righteous (Ps 35:27)
- David prays as the king and supreme judge of Israel about a matter that is not personal, but public
- It is right to pray for the overthrow of tyrants. A biblical view of the value of life depends on divine justice, judgment, and vindication of what is right.
- It is right to pray for justice on behalf of those who are oppressed
- These prayers center on GOD and the glory of God. Do this *so* God is vindicated!
- When we pray the Lord’s prayer: “Your Kingdom come...”, it’s an imprecatory prayer (he judges & then reigns)

The lesson of Psalm 35 —

PRESS harder into God!

PURSUE more the people of God!

PRAISE often the person of God!

be **PATIENT** as to let God bring vengeance!

THESIS — PSALM 35 reveals the many enemies who rise up against the Godly in 2 ways:

- I. Those who **ATTACK** you (1-10) — physical oppression
- II. Those who **ACCUSE** you (11-28) — verbal opposition

I. THERE ARE THOSE WHO ATTACK YOU (1-10)**A. Draw near to God (1-3)****B. Hear from God (3b) [*I am your salvation*]****C. Leave it with God (4-10)**

1. Be Strong (Ephesians 6:10-20)
2. Be Overcomers (Romans 12.19-21)
3. Be Courageous (1 Peter 5.8)
4. Be Frequent (Hebrews 4.15)
5. Be Patient (Deut 32.35)

II. THERE ARE THOSE WHO ACCUSE YOU (11-28)

A. Description (11-16)**B. Desperation (17)****C. Congregation (18)****D. Intercession (19-26)**

- ★2 Tim 3.12 - all who desire to live Godly WILL be persecuted
- ★John 15.19-20 - If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you
- ★Matt 5:10-12 - Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you
- ★Mark 10:29-30 - Jesus said, “Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life.”
- ★Revelation 2.10-11 - Be faithful unto death, and I will give you the crown of life.
- ★1 Thess 3.3-4 – For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass and just as you know
- ★1 Peter 4.12 - Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you
- ★Luke 6.26 - Woe to you when all men speak well of you... but I say to you, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you... bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you

What Must We Do?

1. **Patient!** - *Let God deal with it*
2. **Pray!** - *Give it all up to God*
3. **Praise!** - *Reflect & trust in God*
4. **People** of God! - *Gather with the elect often!*

HOW FIRM A FOUNDATION

Fear not, I am with thee, O be not dismayed,
 For I am thy God and will still give thee aid;
 I'll strengthen and help thee, and cause thee to stand
 Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

When through the deep waters I call thee to go,
 The rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;
 For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless,
 And sanctify to thee thy deepest distress.

When through fiery trials thy pathways shall lie,
 My grace, all sufficient, shall be thy supply;
 The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
 Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.

The soul that on Jesus has leaned for repose,
 I will not, I will not desert to its foes;
 That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
 I'll never, no never, no never forsake.

10 Things Christians Should Know About the Imprecations in Psalms (by Sam Storms)

1. What we read in these OT Psalms are not emotionally uncontrolled outbursts by otherwise sane and compassionate people. Imprecations such as those listed above are found in high poetry and are the product of reasoned meditation (not to mention divine inspiration!). They are calculated petitions, not spontaneous explosions of a bad temper. Certainly there are examples in OT history and prose narrative of actions and attitudes that are sinful and not to be emulated. But the psalms are expressions of public worship to be modeled.
2. We should remember that in Deuteronomy 27-28 the Levites pronounce imprecations against Israel if she proves unfaithful to the covenant. Israel, in accepting the law, brought herself under its sanctions. She in essence pronounced curses upon herself should she break the covenant, and God looked on their response with favor. In other words, God's people were commanded to pray for God's curses upon themselves if they forsook him! We must never think that God is any less severe on his own covenant people than he is on the unbelieving nations who are regularly given to idolatry.
3. These prayers are not expressions of personal vengeance. In fact, most imprecations are in psalms written by David, perhaps the least vengeful man in the OT (consider his dealings with Saul, Nabal, Absalom, Shimei, etc.; see especially 2 Sam. 24:12). David never asks that he be allowed to "get even" with or "pay back" his enemies. His prayer is that God would act justly in dealing with transgressors. There is a vast difference between vindication and vindictiveness. David's passion was for the triumph of divine justice, not the satisfaction of personal malice. The OT was as much opposed to seeking personal vengeance against one's personal enemies as is the NT (see Exod. 23:4-5; Lev. 19:17-18).
4. We also must remember that imprecations are nothing more than human prayers based on divine promises. One is simply asking God to do what he has already said he will do (often repeatedly throughout the Psalms themselves). For example, in Matthew 7:23 Jesus declares that on the day of judgment he will say to hypocrites, "I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." Is it wrong for us to pray that Jesus do precisely that? Is it wrong for us to build a prayer on a promise? "Oh, Lord, cause those to depart from you who do evil," appears to be a perfectly legitimate petition. (In this regard, compare Pss. 35:5 with 1:4; 58:6 with 3:7; 35:8 with 9:15; and 35:26 with 6:10.)
5. Imprecations are expressions provoked by the horror of sin. David prayed this way because of his deep sensitivity to the ugliness of evil. Perhaps the chief reason why he wasn't bothered by prayers of imprecation and we are is that he was bothered by sin and we aren't! It is frightening to think that we can stand in the presence of evil and not be moved to pray as David did.
6. The motivation behind such prayers is zeal for God's righteousness, God's honor, God's reputation, and the triumph of God's kingdom. Is our willingness to ignore blasphemy and overlook evil due to a deficiency in our love for God and his name? Could our reaction to the imprecatory psalms be traced to the fact that we love men and their favor more than we love God and his?
7. Another factor to keep in mind is that David, being king, was God's representative on earth. Thus, an attack on David was, in effect, an attack on God. David's enemies were not his private opponents but adversaries of God. David's ire is aroused because they "speak against you [God] with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain! Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?" (Psalm 139:20-21; cf. Psalm 5:10; emphasis mine).
8. The prayers of imprecation are rarely, if ever, for the destruction of a specific individual but almost always of a class or group, namely, "the wicked" or "those who oppose Thee".
9. We must keep in mind that in most instances these prayers for divine judgment come only after extended efforts on the part of the psalmist to call the enemies of God to repentance. These are not cases of a momentary resistance to God but of unrepentant, recalcitrant, incessant, hardened and haughty defiance of him. In other words, the psalmist calls for divine judgment against them so long as they persist in their rebellion. We love our enemies by praying for their repentance. But if they callously and consistently refuse, our only recourse is to pray that God's judgment be full and fair. It's important to remember that there often comes a time in human sin when

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God withdraws his merciful hand and gives over the human heart to its chosen path. Paul described this in Romans 1. Jesus envisioned a pattern of sin so persistent and calloused that he declared it unforgivable (see Matthew 12:32; see also 1 Cor. 16:22).

10. David knows that he needs spiritual protection lest he “hate” God’s enemies for personal reasons.

I RUN TO CHRIST

I run to Christ when chased by fear
And find a refuge sure.

“Believe in me,” His voice I hear;
His words and wounds secure.

I run to Christ when torn by grief
And find abundant peace.

“I too had tears,” He gently speaks;
Thus joy and sorrow meet.

I run to Christ when worn by life
And find my soul refreshed.

“Come unto Me,” He calls through strife;
Fatigue gives way to rest.

I run to Christ when vexed by hell
And find a mighty arm.

“The Devil flees,” the Scriptures tell;
He roars, but cannot harm.

I run to Christ when stalked by sin
And find a sure escape.

“Deliver me,” I cry to Him;
Temptation yields to grace.

I run to Christ when plagued by shame
And find my one defense.

“I bore God’s wrath,” He pleads my case—
My Advocate and Friend.

PSALM 35: THE PSALTER

Tune: Crown Him with Many Crowns

Contend, O Lord, with those who do contend with me;
And fight against all those who fight against me constantly.
Take up Your shield and spear; arise, come to my aid;
Stop those who chase me; Say to me, “I am your salvation.”

May those who seek my life now be disgraced and shamed.
May those who plot my ruin, Lord, be turned back and dismayed.
Like chaff before the wind, may angels drive them on;
May their path dark and slipp’ry be—God’s angel driving on.

But when I fell, they came, attacked with sland’rous glee;
Like wicked, they with malice mocked, and gnashed their teeth at me.
How long will You look on? O Lord, come rescue me!
And save my life from ravages of lions who stalk me.

Then, I will give You thanks; Your praises I will sing,
And in the congregation great, exalting praise I’ll bring.
Don’t let my foes rejoice, who hate me without cause;
Don’t let them gloat and wink their eye with malice, without cause.

Lord, in Your righteousness, don’t let them gloat o’er me;
Don’t let them think, “Aha, we won! We’ve conquered him wholly.”
May those who gloat o’er me and the distress I face,
Who lift themselves o’er me be clothed with shame and with disgrace.

May all who take delight that vindication’s mine;
May they with joy and gladness shout, and say, “The glory’s Thine!”
The Lord delights as those, His servants, are made strong.”
My tongue will sing Your righteousness and praises all day long.