

PSALM 36

1 The transgression of the wicked saith within my heart, that there is no fear of God before his eyes.

This is another Psalm of David; there is some overlap with earlier Davidic Psalms; my goal today is to focus on some unique aspects found in this Psalm not previously discussed.

This unique phrase “the transgression of the wicked saith within my heart” suggests that such transgression is represented as a person speaking within David’s heart. David sees that transgression, either a specific event or general misbehavior, contemplates it within and concludes there is no fear of God before their eyes. *When I consider the great and manifold transgressions of ungodly men, I conclude within myself that they have cast off all fear, and sense, and serious belief of the Divine Majesty. (Treasury of David). Within my heart - Hebrew: "in the midst of my heart." Evidently this means in my judgment; in my apprehension; or, as we should say, "So it seems or appears to me." My heart, or my judgment, puts this construction on their conduct, and can put no other on it. (Barnes).*

No fear of God before his eyes; there is no reverential affection but enmity. Impiety and irreverence rules the day; this sinner has cast off all fear and serious belief of the Divine Majesty. (See previous sermon on the fear of God).

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

The word translated “flattereth” here means “to be smooth”; don’t rock any boats. Keep this real bland. **He that rebuketh a man afterwards shall find more favour than he that flattereth with the tongue. (Proverbs 28:23). For there is no faithfulness in their mouth; their inward part is very wickedness; their throat is an open sepulcher; they flatter with their tongue. (Psalm 5:9). Here the meaning is, that he commends himself to himself; he overestimates himself; he ascribes to himself qualities which he does not possess. (Barnes).**

This state of self-flattery continues, sometimes for many years when judgment is not speedily executed, until his sin finds him out. **But if ye will not do so, behold, ye have sinned against the Lord: and be sure your sin will find you**

out. (Numbers 32:23). God finds and reveals this iniquity. **God hath found out the iniquity of thy servants** (Genesis 44:16), Judah admitted to Joseph concerning the iniquity of selling Joseph into slavery. *[W]hich God may be said to do, when he charges the guilt of sin upon the conscience, and punishes for it; and exposes both the sinner and his sins to the world; thereby testifying his hatred of him and his sins; and which should have been hateful to him, as they are to all good men.* (Gill).

³The words of his mouth are iniquity and deceit: he hath left off to be wise, and to do good.

Here the description of the ungodly passes on to words and deeds.

As to the former, this generation is awash in a tsunami of words; social media, X, Facebook, Tiktok, etc. Spend a few moments in the sandstorm of words and you quickly grasp what we deal with in this verse. Mouths are full of cursing, bitterness, rage, filthy and unchaste words, lying, deceit and flattery – in a word, corrupt communication.

As to the latter, there was a time when some shadows or degrees of wisdom and goodness existed, but no more. We witness a change in behavior. A strong example of this is found in 1 Samuel Chapter 18, where Saul left off wisely being an ally of David to this: **Saul became David's enemy continually.** (1 Samuel 18:29).

⁴He deviseth mischief upon his bed; he setteth himself in a way that is not good; he abhorreth not evil.

Concluding for the moment this description of the ungodly we have a holistic, 24/7 view. *That is, when he lies down; when he is wakeful at night; he plots some scheme of iniquity - some vain, wicked enterprise.* (Barnes). King Solomon gives this account when describing the path of the wicked: **For they sleep not, except they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away, unless they cause some to fall.** (Proverbs 4:16). The picture is of one that constantly and unwearyingly prefers mischief before his own rest. He sets himself to that end; that is, with resolution and persistence.

⁵Thy mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.

Up to this point in this Psalm, we have been dealing with the wicked man. Now, in a change, the Psalm begins consideration of the character of God in contrast with evil, deceitful and dark-hearted man.

To that end, we first are presented with that wonderful thing known as the mercy of God. Psalm 136 contains 26 verses, each of which ends with this pronouncement: **for his mercy endureth for ever**. Is there another place in the Bible where such an emphasis is made on one divine concept?

The Lord's mercy is worthy of great consideration, and here we learn that such mercy is unlimited and as far-reaching as the universe itself! God's mercy being in the heavens informs us that it is boundless, infinite and mostly incomprehensible. God's mercy is very exalted, to the very heavens, which is the highest object of which man can conceive.

Man's mercy, on the other hand, is whimsical, unreliable and of little value at its best.

This verse then addresses God's faithfulness, which reaches to the clouds. *The thing that is eternal, even the faithfulness of God, dwells amid, and shows itself through, the things that are temporal, the flying clouds of change.* (Treasury of David). Also inherent in this language is that the faithfulness of God is far above our reach, greater and higher than we can apprehend it to be.

This faithfulness is part of the very essence of God. **If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.** (2 Timothy 2:13). As the old hymn assures us: *Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father; there is no shadow of turning with thee; thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not; as thou hast been, thou forever will be.*

⁶Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast.

Continuing with descriptions of various God's attributes, we are presented here with beautiful and majestic language.

Righteousness: God's righteousness is like great mountains; connecting this noble aspect of the Godhead with mountains conveys the idea of strength and greatness, as being especially the work of the Almighty. Do you not know who created the mountains of this world? By utilizing this attractive analogy, we must see that the righteousness of God is steadfast and unmovable, eminent and conspicuous to all men (it's hard to miss a mountain), and very high and out of our reach for the most part.

Judgments: The judgments, decisions and justice of God are compared to the great deep. The uttermost depths of this earth's mighty oceans are scary, curious,

mysterious and often unreachable places. Any intelligent human being is petrified the moment he or she gets more than a few meters off the shore. Crazy people with all kinds of state-of-the-art equipment can venture in further, but not for long and not without great risk. Awesome power and unsearchable ways well describes the justice of God. **O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!** (Romans 11:33).

The word rendered "deep" here means properly wave, billow, surge; then, a mass of waters, a flood, a deep; and the phrase "great deep" would properly refer to the ocean, its "depth" being one of the most remarkable things in regard to it. The "idea" here is, that as we cannot fathom the ocean or penetrate to its bottom, so it is with the judgments of God. They are beyond our comprehension, and after all our efforts to understand them, we are constrained, as in measuring the depths of the ocean, to confess that we cannot reach to the bottom of them. (Barnes).

⁷How excellent is thy loving kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

The word translated “loving kindness” here is the same word translated “mercy” in verse 5 above. The sense here is, though all of God’s attributes are excellent and glorious (which cannot be denied), his mercy (loving kindness) is most excellent, precious and amiable as being most necessary and beneficial to his elect. Given this incomparable and proven mercy, the Lord’s chosen cheerfully commit themselves thereto and are abundantly satisfied when so doing.

That this great mercy is so excellent is shown by the word “excellent”, meaning precious, such as the **precious stones** the Queen of Sheba brought to Solomon (1 Kings 10:2) and the **precious stones for beauty** utilized in the building of Solomon’s house (2 Chronicles 3:6). *The meaning is, that the loving-kindness of God is to be estimated only by the value set on the most rare and costly objects. (Barnes).*

⁸They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of thy house; and thou shalt make them drink of the river of thy pleasures.

The picture presented here is one of overflowing and abundant growth and success. Please consider this church circa 1960 vis-à-vis today; God did that!! We are talking fertilizing showers; look at how things grow, prosper and bloom after such a rainfall. Only God can create and send those showers; man is helpless in his efforts to do so. **Thou crownest the year with thy goodness; and thy paths drop**

fatness. (Psalm 65:11). [T]hat ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory. (Isaiah 66:11).

The word “pleasures” here means Eden, as in the garden of. This is a portrait of a condition that is pristine, perfect, enjoyable and altogether lovely. We get a taste of it here on earth; we experience it fully in the world to come. **Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.** (Matthew 5:6).

[A]nd thou shall make them drink of the river of thy pleasure; the love of God, whose streams make glad the city of God; or the fulness of grace, which is in Christ, out of which believers draw with joy, and drink with pleasure; or eternal glory and happiness, enjoyed in the presence of God, in which is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore; a never ceasing torrent of them. (Gill).

⁹For with thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light.

What is this fountain of life? Well, it certainly includes God the Creator providing natural life, spiritual life and eternal life. It also must include that great Fountain filled with blood, the dreadful sacrifice of our Savior. God himself is the fountain of living waters; life begins with him and is freely and abundantly distributed.

Consider sample (of many) Scriptural proclamations about this fountain: **The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death.** (Proverbs 14:27). And this: **For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.** (Jeremiah 2:13). The Lord’s church is portrayed as a fountain of gardens, a well of living waters, and streams from Lebanon. (Song 4:15). And, John saw a new heaven and a new earth, and in that context proclaimed: **And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.** (Revelation 21:6).

¹⁰O continue thy lovingkindness unto them that know thee; and thy righteousness to the upright in heart.

This verse deals with two blessings – loving kindness and righteousness – being continually and everlastingly bestowed on individuals who know God and

are upright in heart. Those two descriptors are synonymous, that is to say, those who know God are ipso facto upright in heart.

To get some understanding as to what it means to know God, let's consider 1 John 4:7, 8: Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love. Loving your fellow elect is an undisputable sign that you know God. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. (John 17:3). And here is the sincere plea of every one of these highly favored persons: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death. (Philippians 3:10). And finally, to know God is to believe God and his word: [F]or I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day. (2 Timothy 1:12).

The Psalmist here asks that these incomparable blessings “continue” on these unique people. The Hebrew word used here means "to draw;" hence, "to draw out," in the sense of "continuing" or "prolonging." * * * *The desire of the psalmist here is, that God would make the manifestation of his loving-kindness "continuous" or "perpetual" to His people; that it might not be fitful and interrupted, but always enduring, or constant.* (Barnes).

¹¹ Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked remove me.

“Foot of pride” is a most interesting phrase. Most suggest it refers to David’s enemies and highlights their haughtiness and insolence. Surely, each child of God needs daily protection from such enemies who would trample them early and often. Feet trample!

A second meaning can be seen here as well; that is, our internal pride, which is an ever-present threat. **When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom.** (Proverbs 11:2). Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord[.] (Proverbs 16:5). **But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.** (James 4:6).

Either way, it is clearly good to continually join this prayer, that the foot of pride not come against us and overthrow us. Similarly, plead for protection from the hand of the wicked, the “hand” referring to that part of the body by which we

accomplish anything. Our prayer is that we not be moved or removed by such a wicked hand, but that we stand firm.

¹²There are the workers of iniquity fallen: they are cast down, and shall not be able to rise.

Where is “there?” The very spot where they, those workers of iniquity, attempt to harm the Lord’s people. Right there, where they came against us, where they practiced their treachery and malice, that very spot, they will receive their downfall. That’s where!

This is a recurring theme throughout the Psalms. Frequently a Psalm will begin in sadness, despondency and depression yet ends in triumph. Often the author is sad as he surveys his surroundings but before all is said and done, the clouds have dissipated, the mind becomes calm and the spirit becomes triumphant. I dare say we are very much familiar with this pattern.

The wicked fall and cannot recover, as opposed to the righteous when they slip and fall. **The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord: and he delighteth in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand.** (Psalm 37:23, 24).

Contrast that with this verse’s pronouncement about the iniquity workers. They will ultimately be utterly overthrown, their discomfiture is complete so that they will never be able to rally again. As a corpus, Revelation 18:21 describes that final casting down: **And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great millstone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.**

Check out this concise observation from Jamieson-Fausset-Brown: *There – in the acting of violence, they are overthrown. A signal defeat.*



These men went from being slaves in 1865 to being members of Congress starting in 1869 (41st Congress). **Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? * * * Know ye not that we shall judge angels?** (1 Corinthians 6:2, 3). Things can (and will) change very quickly! **[W]e shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump[.]** (1 Corinthians 15:51, 52). Twinkling of an eye: the least conceivable duration of time; a jerk of the eye (wink); a trice, meaning before a man can shut his eyes and open them again. **When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.** (Colossians 3:4). **Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.** (1 John 3:2).

By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. (1 John 5:2). Are you looking for practical evidence that you love the Lord's elect? Well, this verse answers that. "By this we know"; here's how we know. *The love of God and the keeping of his commandments, is an undoubted evidence of our love to our brethren.* (John Cotton).