

Principles of the Ungodly Compared with Godly

Psalm 36

Psalm 36 – *“An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes, for he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates. The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit. He has ceased to be wise and to do good. He devises wickedness on his bed. He sets himself in a way that is not good. He does not abhor evil.*

Your mercy, O LORD, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Your righteousness is like the great mountains; Your judgments are a great deep. O LORD, You preserve man and beast. How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings. They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures, for with You is the fountain of life. In Your light we see light.

Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart. Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the workers of iniquity have fallen; they have been cast down and are not able to rise.”

Background Notes

In Psalm 36 the principles by which ungodly people live are contrasted with the life and experience of godly people – those who know and love the attributes of the true and living and loving God.

We don't know the occasion of this psalm, but the title says that it is *“To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of David, the servant of the Lord.”* The chief musician was choir director. Thus Psalm 36 was set to music and used at the Temple for worship. The title refers to David as “the servant of the Lord.” This title was given to David by the Lord, as His anointed king (2 Samuel 3; 2 Samuel 7).

Psalm 36 presents the great contrast between the way the ungodly person thinks and acts, and the way God's thoughts and actions are directed toward the blessing of the believer.

This psalm has been concisely outlined as follows: the wickedness of the wicked (v1-4); the graciousness of God (v5-9); and the confidence of the Christian (v10-12). Or even more concisely: the sinner (v1-4), the Savior (v5-9), and the saint (v10-12).

Another commentator divided this psalm into two sections: the lawless and his evildoing (v1-4), and the Lord and His lovingkindness (v5-12).

Doctrinal / Teaching Points

1. The SOP of the ungodly is to not follow the Lord, and not fear the Lord.

“SOP” stands for Standard Operating Procedure. The standard operating procedure of the ungodly person is to not follow and not fear the Lord. *“An oracle within my heart concerning the transgression of the wicked: There is no fear of God before his eyes, for he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates. The words of his mouth are wickedness and deceit; he has ceased to be wise and to do good.*

He devises wickedness on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not abhor evil” (v1-4).

In verse 1 David claims that the Lord has given him special revelation and insight as to how the wicked think and look at life, and thus the principles for how they live. Their bottom line is that **they have no fear of God, if they believe in God at all.**

Ungodly and wicked people silence and soothe their guilty consciences by continuing to do evil: *“for he flatters himself in his own eyes, when he finds out his iniquity and when he hates.”* They can’t see how wicked they are. Thus, ungodly people become desensitized to sin. It is possible, by the way, for a believer to become desensitized to sin. For example, TV sitcoms have desensitized Christians to sexual sin by making jokes about it, and treating sexual sin as an amusing practice.

Because ungodly people do not fear God, their talk is wicked and their thoughts are wicked (v3-4). They even plot and plan wickedness on their beds as they fall asleep (v4). These verses not only describe the practices of radical terrorists today, but anyone who willfully or ignorantly forsakes the moral standards of God.

The SOP of the ungodly is to not follow and not fear the Lord.

2. The SOP of the godly is to experience and enjoy the attributes of God

What is “the chief end of man,” as the Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it? “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.” Our doctrinal point is just another way of stating this great truth. The Standard Operating Procedure of the godly person is to experience and enjoy the attributes of God. Notice that David not only lists some of the attributes of God, but he describes them from the standpoint of experiencing them and enjoying them (v5-10).

The *lovingkindness* of God is mentioned in verses 5, 7 and 10. Lovingkindness – this is the Hebrew word *hesed*. Some translations use the word “love” or “mercy” because *hesed* is hard to translate into any one English word. Thus *lovingkindness* is used. The word means love that is steadfast, faithful, protected, righteous, and loyal. It is an attribute of God.

Notice how David not only states God's lovingkindness as one of God's attributes, but David also enters into the enjoyment of this wonderful attribute of God: *"Your lovingkindness, O LORD, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds"* (v5).

And verse 7: *"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God! Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings."* What a great illustration of the lovingkindness of the Lord! We are safe and secure under His protective wings!

And verse 10: *"Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart."*

The righteousness of God, another one of God's attributes, is like the beautiful mountains - solid and immovable, and defining the moral landscape. *"Your righteousness is like the great mountain"* (v6). The sovereign plans and decisions and judgments of God are deep and beyond us, but we know they are for the benefit of man and beast (v6).

If the Lord owned a house on earth, how would you like to be an honored guest? Think of the accommodations and the amenities and the provisions. Think of how we could commune with the Lord, and ask Him all our questions! It would be like the Garden of Eden before the Fall of Mankind. Like Heaven on earth! That's exactly the idea in verses 8 and 9: *"They [the godly] are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light."* And we can enjoy these benefits **before** we go to Heaven if we walk with the Lord!

Do you want insight and understanding of what life is all about? Then, right in line with Psalm 36:9, 1 John 1:7 says, *"Let us walk in the light as He Himself is in the light."*

The SOP of the godly is to experience and enjoy the attributes of God.

Practical Applications

1. Come to the fountain of life!

Do you remember Juan Ponce de Leon, a Spanish explorer who was searching for the fountain of youth in Florida back in early 16th century? He never found it! But people today are still searching for the fountain of youth. They're doing whatever they can to look young forever - but unfortunately the aging process continues to take its toll.

How much better to find the **fountain of life**! David found the fountain of life because he knew the Lord. He says to the Lord, *'For with You is the fountain of life'* (v9). In Psalm 36 the ungodly did not find the fountain of life. Have you found the fountain of life?

In Jeremiah's day, the Lord rebuked the people of Judah for turning away and forsaking the fountain of living waters. *"For My people have committed two evils: They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns—broken cisterns that can hold no water" (Jeremiah 2:13).*

How foolish they were to turn away from a fountain of fresh water! How foolish they were to try to quench their thirst with stagnant water from broken cisterns that obviously couldn't hold fresh water. Yet that's exactly what the unbelievers of Jeremiah's day were doing - and that's what unbelievers are still doing! The fountain of life is readily available, but people turn away from the Lord and try to quench their spiritual thirst with the muddy and stagnant waters of this world's empty cisterns. How foolish. How sad.

Have you found the fountain of life? In John 4:14 the Lord Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, *"Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst, but the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* The Samaritan woman believed Him, and she found the fountain of life.

Again the question, have you found the fountain of life? Come to the fountain of life!

2. Pray for your preservation with the right philosophy.

"Oh, continue Your lovingkindness to those who know You, and Your righteousness to the upright in heart. Let not the foot of pride come against me, and let not the hand of the wicked drive me away. There the workers of iniquity have fallen; they have been cast down and are not able to rise" (v10-12).

In this psalm we've seen two philosophies of life: the philosophy of the ungodly person and the philosophy of the godly person. Here in the closing section of this psalm, David prays that he will be preserved from falling for the proud godless philosophies of ungodly people, because the ungodly are perishing.

Hebrews 11:25 says that there are *"pleasures in sin for a season."* So following the right and godly philosophy of life is not automatic, and it may not be easy. The philosophy of proud, ungodly people may look and sound good on the surface, but the pleasure of sinful philosophy and activity is fleeting. It won't last!

We need to pray, as David did, that the Lord's unfailing love and righteousness, and our continuing experience and enjoyment of these attributes of God, would **preserve us from slipping into a philosophy of life that is not fully biblical**. Many Christians have backslidden in this area, to their great sorrow.

"Don't let the hand of the wicked push me away!" (v11). Pray that you will be preserved by the right philosophy.