

# Psalm 36

**Introduction** – This psalm is a meditative prayer contrasting man's wickedness with the mercy of God. The first verse is quoted in Romans 3:18 where it is used as a summary of a long list of verses describing the wicked, or lawless (in the LXX) man. Paul uses this collection of verses to sum up the nature of all men, both Jews and Greeks, lost in their sin (Rom 3:9, 22-23). More deeply than it is comfortable to think, we are all rebels against God in our fallen nature. The contrast in Romans 3 and in Psalm 36 is the same; it is not between human evil and human goodness, but between human evil and divine mercy. And in this way, Psalm 36 is a wonderful foreshadowing of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

**No Fear of God** (vv1-4) – At the core, here is the issue. The wicked do not fear God. He may or may not be a "religious" man, but he is a functional atheist. And, if you think about it, every time we willfully sin we are in that moment functional atheists as well. In that moment, there is no fear of God before us (v1). We flatter ourselves to ourselves with our excuses for our sin, why we deserve it, why our imaginary god would not mind, our words are full of lawlessness and lies (v2). The humanist says that man is basically good; then why do we all have locks on our doors? The humanist claims that the problem of evil is a problem of ignorance, but the Word proclaims that it is a lack of fear of God, for *"the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge"* (Prov 1:7, 9:10). He cries that the problem is inequity in distribution or some social ill, something outside of ourselves. The Scriptures teach that the problem is that we hate God (Rom 3:9-23). The lack of an acknowledgment and right fear of God is like pulling the plug in the sink; the practical outworkings of our depravity cycles downward and society falls lower and lower in its abominations, finally refusing to abhor *any* evil (vv3-4). This is because the fear of the LORD is to hate evil (Prov 8:13) and so the lawless man has no brakes, the lawless society has no brakes. This is where functional atheism always goes over time.

**How Merciful is God?** (vv4-7) – The Psalm-singer contrasts this pitiful lawlessness with the abounding mercy of God, just as Paul does in Rom 3:24ff, as well as in many other places (i.e. Eph 2:4-5). His grace more than takes care of our wickedness (Rom 5:15). The Psalm-singer tries to measure the immeasurable: God's mercy reaches to the heavens and His faithfulness to the clouds (v5). God's righteousness is as strong and immovable, as majestic and serene, as a great mountain range (v6) and His judgments are as deep, unending, and unsearchable as the ocean floor (v6, Rom 11:33-36). *"God's dealing with men are not to be fathomed by every boaster who demands to see a why for every wherefore. The Lord is not to be questioned by us as to why this and why that. He has reasons, but He does not choose to submit them to our foolish consideration"* – Spurgeon. But by those judgments He preserves all of His creation (v7). The Psalm-singer bookends the vastness of God's faithfulness, righteousness and judgments with His mercy and lovingkindness (v5, 7 – same word in the Hebrew). When men comprehend the incomprehensible love of God, they trust in Him as in the shadow of His great wings (Eph 3:14-21). Jesus lamented that Jerusalem would not do so and left her desolate (Matt 23:37-38).

**How Good is God?** (vv8-9) – Like Paul's prayer, the Psalm-singer finds it difficult to evaluate the vastness of this mercy which God has poured out on us with such abundance. Not only does He bring us into His house and feed us; He gives us of the choice cuts of Prime Rib with all the fat and the best Cab to go with it (Psalm 63:5, Isaiah 25:6) – that is what His mercy/lovingkindness towards us is like. He gives us drink from "the torrent of Edens" in the Hebrew and these blessings make us "abundantly satisfied" (v7), literally "inebriated, drunk" in His lovingkindness. The New Covenant blessings are certainly in view, for we are promised in Him a "fountain of life" (John 4:10, 14) and in His light we see light (John 1:4, 8:12). In Christ, in His new creation, we are in a place and time of overwhelming blessings.

**A Declarative Prayer** (vv10-12) – The prayer is for this mercy to continue and for Psalm-singers to continue in His mercy, those who know God and His righteousness (v10). And while there is a prayer for protection against the wicked (v11), it ends with a declaration coming from eyes of faith: the wicked have fallen. In fact, in Jesus Christ, wickedness itself has fallen and is defeated. We are a testimony to just such a truth.

**Drunk on Mercy** – Our God is prodigal (wasteful, excessive) with His mercy. To be with the Father is to be invited to a great banquet where He lavishes Himself upon us. We might stop and think we don't deserve it – well of course we don't – that's the point. But what about pain and disease and financial troubles and relational sins and their consequences, and what about death? Remember that David suffered these and the Lord Jesus suffered them all on your behalf as well – and He conquered them all. Remember that He invites you to heaven every Lord's Day to be with Him where *"at His right hand are pleasures forevermore"* (Psalm 16:11). Finally, He will bring you to heaven and in the resurrection to the consummation of this New Creation where no one will be able to slander Him as some kind of tight-fisted, hard-nosed miser. He is not and He will not be with you. *"How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!"* Sing it and then live in it.