

# Two Ways

Psalm 36:1

*To the choirmaster. Of David, the servant of the LORD.*

Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart; there is no fear of God before his eyes.

<sup>2</sup> For he flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.

<sup>3</sup> The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good.

<sup>4</sup> He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil.

<sup>5</sup> Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds.

<sup>6</sup> Your righteousness is like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O LORD.

<sup>7</sup> How precious is your steadfast love, O God! The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

<sup>8</sup> They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights.

<sup>9</sup> For with you is the fountain of life; in your light do we see light.

<sup>10</sup> Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart!

<sup>11</sup> Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me, nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.

<sup>12</sup> There the evildoers lie fallen; they are thrust down, unable to rise.

Vs

Psalm 37 *Of David.*

<sup>1</sup> **X** (*aleph, '*

**A**las. Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!

2 For they will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb.

3 **ב** (*bet, b*) **B**elieve in the LORD, and do good; dwell in the land and befriend faithfulness

4 Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

5 **ג** (*gimel, g*) **C**ommit your way to the LORD; trust in him, and he will act.

6 He will bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday.

7 **ד** (*dalet, d*) **D**on't move in the presence of the LORD and wait patiently for him; fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way, over the man who carries out evil devices!

8 **ה** (*he, h*) **E**nd you anger, and forsake wrath! Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil.

9 For the evildoers shall be cut off, but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land.

10 **ו** (*vav, v*) **F**or in just a little while, the wicked will be no more; though you look carefully at his place, he will not be there.

11 **ו** But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace.

12 **ז** (*zayin, z*) **G**nashing their teeth at him, the wicked plots against the righteous.

13 But the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming.

14 **ח** (*het, ch*) **H**ilt and sword drawn, the wicked bend their bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way is upright;

15 **ח** Hitting their own heart their sword plunges deep, and their bows shall be broken.

16 **ט** (*tet, t*) **I**ninitely better is the little that the righteous has than the abundance of many wicked.

17 For the arms of the wicked shall be broken, but the LORD upholds the righteous.

18 **י** (*yod, y*) **J**ehovah knows the days of the blameless, and their heritage will remain forever;

19 they are not put to shame in evil times; in the days of famine they have abundance.

20 **כ** (*kaf, k*) **K**iss the wicked goodbye; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures; they vanish-- like smoke they vanish away.

21 **ל** (*lamed, l*) **L**o, the wicked borrows but does not pay back, but the righteous is generous and gives;

22 for those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land, but those  
 23 **נ** (*mem, m*) **M**an's steps are established by the LORD, when he delights in  
 24 his way;  
 25 though he fall, he shall not be cast headlong, for the LORD  
 26 upholds his hand.  
 27 **נ** (*nun, n*) **N**ow I am old, but I was once young. Never have I seen the  
 28 righteous forsaken or his children begging for bread.  
 29 He is ever lending generously, and his children become a  
 30 blessing.  
 31 **ו** (*samech, s*) **O**nly turn away from evil and do good; thus shall you dwell  
 32 forever.  
 33 For the LORD loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They  
 34 are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut  
 35 off.  
 36 **ו** (*ayin, '* ) **P**erpetually dwelling upon it, the righteous shall inherit the land.  
 37 **פ** (*pey, p*) **Q**ueenly wisdom is uttered by the mouth of the righteous, and  
 38 his tongue speaks justice.  
 39 The law of his God is in his heart; his steps do not slip.  
 40 **צ** (*tsade, ts*) **R**eady for the righteous, the wicked watches and seeks to put  
 41 him to death.  
 42 The LORD will not abandon him to his power or let him be  
 43 condemned when he is brought to trial.  
 44 **ק** (*qof, q*) **S**tay fast in the LORD and keep his way, and he will exalt you to  
 45 inherit the land; you will look on when the wicked are cut off.  
 46 **ר** (*resh, r*) **T**hus I have seen a wicked, ruthless man, spreading himself like  
 47 a green laurel tree.  
 48 But he passed away, and behold, he was no more; though I  
 49 sought him, he could not be found.  
 50 **ש** (*shin, sh*) **U**pright and blameless, mark them and behold, for there is a  
 51 future for the man of peace.  
 52 But transgressors shall be altogether destroyed; the future of the  
 53 wicked shall be cut off.  
 54 **ת** (*tav, t*) **V**ictorious salvation of the righteous is from the LORD; he is their  
 55 stronghold in the time of trouble.

The LORD helps them and delivers them; he delivers them from the wicked and saves them, because they take refuge in him.<sup>1</sup>

35:5 Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!"

## Psalm 36-37 with 35:6

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# Two Ways

HOLY SCRIPTURE DESCRIBES TWO—and only **two**—roads or “ways.” Everyone is on one road or the other. The first way *seems right to man* (**Prov 14:12**) because it is *the way of his heart* (**Isa 57:17**), **deep within him**. It is a way of *establishing (religious) rules and traditions* (**Mark 7:9**) of his own making, and thus to him and others it has the *appearance of wisdom* (**Col 2:23**). Because it only seems right, it is self-deceptive. He cannot think of another possible road to walk, even though he is with knowledge and intent *rejecting a different way* (**Mark 7:9; Rom 2:15**) that he knows about all too well. That is what self-deception does.

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<sup>1</sup> For an interesting commentary on the acrostic of Psalm 37 see EnochWasRight, “Psalm 37 – Acrostic of the Hebrew Letters – Message to the Ages,” *ATE*, <http://www.abovetopsecret.com/forum/thread964044/pg1>

This way takes on very specific attributes. It is *the way of the fool* (Prov 12:15); *the way of the sluggard* (Prov 15:19); *the way of the crooked* (Prov 22:5); *the way of an adulteress* (Prov 30:20); and *the way of the treacherous* (Prov 13:15). These are summed up as: *the way of sinners* (Ps 1:1); *the way of the wicked* (Jer 12:1); and *the way of evil* (Prov 8:13). Personified as *the way of Cain* (Jude 1:11); *the way of Balaam* (2Pe 2:15); *the way of Jeroboam* (1Kg 16:26); *the way of Ahab* (2Kg 8:27); and *the way of the kings of Israel* (2Ch 21:13), many in these categories won't admit that they are. Rather, it is always someone else. Nevertheless, it becomes all-encompassing as *the way of man* (Jer 10:23); *the way of this people* (Israel; Isa 8:11); and *the way of the nations* (Jer 10:2). That's pretty much everyone. Thus, Jesus says it is a very broad road and it leads to destruction and many are they who find it (Matt 7:13). In a word, it is *the way of death* (Jer 21:8).

There is another road or way the Bible talks about. Jesus says it is extremely **narrow**. It is **hard**—filled with pitfalls and dangers and temptations to make you serve off the way. Therefore, few find it (Matt 7:13-14). It is personified as *the way of David and Solomon* (2Ch 11:17); and *the way of king Asa* (1Kg 22:43), therefore some have. These are summed up as

*the way of the good* (Prov 2:20) and *the way of God's saints* (Prov 2:8). These people walk *the way of righteousness* (Matt 21:32); *the way of understanding* (Isa 40:14); *the way of good sense* (Prov 21:16); *the way of wisdom* (Prov 4:11); *the way of insight* (Prov 9:6); *the way of faithfulness* (Ps 119:30); and *the way of holiness* (Isa 35:8).

How do they know about this way? They have been told about it. It is *the way of the commandments* (Ps 119:32); *the way of precepts* (119:27); *the way of testimonies* (119:14) of God. Hence, it is *the way of truth* (2Pe 2:2). But it is also called *the way of the gospel* (1Co 9:12), and this becomes the reason why some get and stay on this narrow way. They are told not only about law, but also the good news and in God's grace, some come to believe it even though it is against everything their old heart told them. Where does this way come from? It is the Triune way, for it is *the way of God* (Acts 18:26); *the way of the Lord* (Acts 18:25); and *the way of the Spirit* (Rom 7:6). This is its power. This is its origin. Summing it up, this is *the way of peace* (Rom 3:17); *the way of salvation* (Acts 16:17); and *the way of life* (Jer 21:8).

## Psalm 35-37 and the Two Ways

Psalms 36-37 discuss these two ways in the form of songs. They were deliberately positioned together in the Psalter to compare and contrast them. Before we get to them, we need to see that these two psalms make up **part of a larger unit**. Some have put the unit as Psalms 35-41,<sup>2</sup> while others see the unit as beginning in Psalm 34, with Psalm 34 as a kind of thanksgiving introduction.<sup>3</sup> In either case, this is the last unit of Book I of the Psalter.

Like probably every song in Book I, these are all Psalms of David. They speak of evil, suffering, and deliverance. Psalms 35-37 speak of evil; folly, and the triumph of Wisdom, while 38-41 talk about anguish, confession of sin, and prayers for deliverance.<sup>4</sup> Psalms 35-36 **share the themes of evil, wicked people**, and it is probable that Psalm 37 is a response to Psalm 35, if not also 36. For example, Psalm 35 assumes that wickedness needs to have its proper end, as

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<sup>2</sup> Daniel C. Owens, *Portraits of the Righteous in the Psalms: An Exploration of the Ethics of Book 1* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2013), 195.

<sup>3</sup> Willem A. VanGemenen, *The Expositor's Bible Commentary 5* (revised edition), ed. Tremper Longman II David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 76. There are, in fact, many word connections between Psalm 34 and 35 as we have seen.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* VanGemenen's discussion has an extended outline of book I that is quite helpful.

David petitions the LORD to bring shame and frustration on those who seek his harm (Ps 35:4) and pleads that they may become like chaff in the wind (10, 20, 35-36). But in the same song, he asks, “O LORD, how long will you see?” (17). Psalm 37 answers, “The Lord laughs at the wicked, for he sees that his day is coming” (Ps 37:13).<sup>5</sup>

As for the theme of “the way” (*derek*), while we have seen it in several earlier Psalms (especially Psalm 25), we find it now in all three songs.<sup>6</sup> In Psalm 35:6, the song sings, “Let their way be dark and slippery, with the angel of the LORD pursuing them!” But what is there way? Psalm 36 answers, “[The wicked] (vs.1) ... sets himself in a way that is not good; he does not reject evil” (Ps 36:4). It then talks about this for several verses. Psalm 37 then contrasts this to way of the “upright” (37:14). It is the LORD’s way (23, 34). The conclusion is that you should commit your way to the LORD (5) and do not fret over the one who prospers in his way (7), for the Lord will take care of him in due time. Besides seeing our theme today, a larger point again is that

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<sup>5</sup> Owens, 197.

<sup>6</sup> See Catherine Petranj, *Pedagogy, Prayer and Praise: The Wisdom of the Psalms and Psalter*, Forschungen zum Alten Testament, 2. Reihe 83 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), 150.

there is much reward in taking the time to meditate not just on one song at a time, but upon units of songs that have been placed together to further enrich your understanding of the important themes raised by the psalmists. Let's do this now with this theme of "the way" in Psalms 36-37.

## Psalm 36: Human Depravity vs. The LORD

As we have already studied Psalm 35, we will move on to 36 which begins with similar themes. Its structure can be arranged as a chiasm or as a series of strophes (i.e. stanzas) that change in themes.

Stanza 1	Description of the wicked (vv 1–4)
Stanza 2	Praise of God's character (vv 5–6)
Stanza 3	Praise of God's <i>hesed</i> in particular (vv 7–9)
Stanza 4	Petition for deliverance from the wicked (vv 10–12) <sup>7</sup>

Or, more elaborately:

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<sup>7</sup> Rolf A. Jacobson and Beth Tanner, "[Book One of the Psalter: Psalms 1–41](#)," in *The Book of Psalms*, ed. E. J. Young, R. K. Harrison, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 339.

- 1a) Ps 36:1-4, Transgression speaks to the wicked/ takes pride in himself + achieves iniquity:
- 1b) 36:5-6a, The greatness of the lovingkindness + righteousness of the Lord;
  - 1c) 36:6b, Your judgments are a great deep;
  - 1d) 36:6c, Man and beast You preserve, O Lord;
  - central axis) 36:7a, How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!**
  - 2d) 36:7b-8, The children of men take refuge in You/ You satisfy them with fullness + delights;
  - 2c) 36:9, For with You is the fountain of life; In Your light we see light;
  - 2b) 36:10, Continue Your lovingkindness + righteousness to those who know You, the upright in heart;
- 2a) 36:11-12, Let not foot of pride + hand of the wicked overtake me + push me away [from You].

The first section is clearly **36:1-4**. This is where we learn about “**the way**” of the wicked. As we have seen, it is a way that is “not good” because the wicked does not reject evil (**Ps 36:4**). However, rather than tell us about the kinds of things they do outwardly, these verses explain **what the wicked person is like inwardly** that makes them then turn to outward acts of wickedness. We might call it a short discussion on Total Depravity, and it is truly terrifying in what it reveals to you.

In a way that will later be copied by the Apostle Paul, David—“**the servant of the LORD**” (**Ps 36:1**)—writes “**to the choirmaster**” (or “for the End”), about the **body parts of**

the wicked—their hearts, their eyes, and their mouths. This has the advantage of making the doctrine more personal, more embodied. What he says is deeply troubling and shows just how impossible it is for the wicked to extricate themselves from *themselves*.

*Their hearts.*<sup>8</sup> The heart is the center of the affections in the Bible. An affection is the seat or realm of deep emotional love of things. The wicked hear the words of “**Transgression**” (Ps 36:1). This word is personified, as if it were a demon speaking an oracle<sup>9</sup> to them in a dark place in the still of the night. Like a soothsayer’s words from another world, what they hear is so compelling to them, they absolutely must listen. They are transfixed by it. The word can be translated as “**rebellion**.” Where it speaks is not merely to the ears, but to their hearts, in the “deep” recesses of their innermost being. They love it. They love daring and wanton sin, they love breaking the bounds of law and justice.<sup>10</sup> Like a beautiful woman on the street corner

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<sup>8</sup> On “heart” see 36:1; 37:31 where transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart vs. the law of God speaks to the godly in his heart (also 35:25; 36:10; 37:4; 15; 38:8; 10; 39:3; 40:8; 10; 12; 41:6).

<sup>9</sup> The Hebrew of Psalm 36 is particularly difficult. This phrase is literally “An oracle of transgression to the wicked.”

<sup>10</sup> Spurgeon, *Treasury*, Psalm 36:1.

wooing them into her bed, it speaks and they obey for they love what they hear and see. This is why they listen, and this is made clearer in the next term.

*The eyes.*<sup>11</sup> Another body part is introduced. “**There is no fear of God before his eyes**” (36:1b). They do not wince at his word. They do not tremble at his law. They do not shudder at the sound of his voice. They have **no fear** of who he is or what he will do to them. Why? Because they do not see him. It was the same then as it is today. If you can’t see God, he isn’t real. These are sensual people whose senses cannot detect God. Therefore, he isn’t there. Therefore, there is nothing to fear.

Then, because the eyes do not see him, they turn around and do even more. But what? “**He flatters himself in his own eyes that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated**” (2). To flatter yourself in your own eyes is to be **self-deceived**. And this is probably the most dangerous place a person can ever be in. For no matter what they hear, they themselves will not allow truth to speak to their hearts. Why?

Because they do not think anyone will find out what they are doing. The Hebrew here is extremely difficult to

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<sup>11</sup> Eyes do not have a parallel in Psalm 37, but see 34:15; 35:19, 21; 38:10.

translate. The question becomes, who is the subject of finding out the sin? Most translations take **the subject as God**. The idea would thus be, “A man flatters himself in his own eyes, thinking that God will not be able to find out his iniquity.” The problem is, there is this tricky word “hated.” Of course God hates sin, so the word here seems out of place.

Thus, some translations take the **subject as the man himself**, and to me, this is an even more frightening possibility, if that is possible. The meaning would be this, “He sees himself in such a flattering way that he does not discover his own error and hate it.”<sup>12</sup> As he flatters himself in his sin, he becomes so utterly self-deceived, his pride is so gigantic that he can’t even look truth in the face and see it for what it is. It becomes impossible to see sin and to hate it, to turn from and repent.

I saw **an example** of that this week when Tucker Carlson (FOX News) had Planned Parenthood’s Executive Vice President Dawn Laguens on his show. His questions centered around what exactly that is in the womb. I think

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<sup>12</sup> This is from the French translation Traduction oecuménique de la Bible. See **Robert G. Bratcher** and William David Reybourn, *A Translator’s Handbook on the Book of Psalms*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1991), 343.

the majority of the exchange is worth hearing as an illustration of what the Psalm is talking about.

“Why is abortion so important to Planned Parenthood that you are willing to forego half a billion dollars a year in federal subsidies to keep it?”

Her answer? *“Planned Parenthood believes in the wisdom and power of the individual to decide what care is right for them, and no one is going to bully, threaten, or bribe us to not have that view.”*<sup>13</sup>

He presses, “That doesn’t change the question. Why include abortion? Why not take it out? A lot of people think it’s murder.”

*“Women deserve access to the full range of health care, which includes safe, legal abortion.”*

He presses more. “Planned Parenthood provides around 300,000 abortions a year, the majority are after five and a half weeks, when the fetal heartbeat can be detected. As someone who works there, what do you think of that? What do you think is being aborted?”

*“Abortion is a right in this country. It is not a viable fetus. So make your own choice.”*

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.dailywire.com/news/14393/carlson-presses-planned-parenthood-evp-what-do-you-amanda-prestigiacomono#>

“Yes, but specifically, you work at the biggest abortion provider in the country. If you can hear the heartbeat of this thing, this fetus, what is it? Is it a human being?”

*“I think that’s up to each individual to decide what they believe. One in three women in this country have an abortion. It is up to them to decide.”*

“But what do you think?”

*“What I’m here to talk about today is the bill to take away heart and cancer screening.”*

“Yes, you’ve said that. But the reason this is such an issue is because you work for the biggest abortion provider in the country. You are one of the people who run it. So I want to know what you think. If you can hear the fetal heartbeat and then it’s extinguished, what do you think of that? Is that a big deal to you, if not why not?”

*“I take seriously all of the health care work that we provide at planned parenthood. I believe in safe, legal abortion.”*

“I know but what do you think?”

*“I’m not going to make a judgment.”*

“Why can’t you give me a straight answer? This is at the core of what you do. It’s not like you haven’t thought of this.”

*“I would say it’s a fetus.”*

“But what is a fetus?”

*“It’s up to each woman to decide. You and I can differ on this all day.”*

*“We’re not even differing because you’re not even telling me what you think.”*

*“No, I said that I . . . seventy percent of Americans believe that Roe v. Wade should be the law of the land.”*

*“Look, I’ve heard the talking points. I want to take this deeper. A lot of people say this is killing a life. A heart is beating. You can hear it. I want to know if that bothers you. Do you ever stop and think, ‘Wow, a life is being taken?’ Do you think that?”*

*“I personally favor safe, legal abortion. I personally do not believe that is a viable fetus.”*

*“I’m not saying ‘viable.’ Of course it’s not viable. That’s not the question. Why are you giving me robotic responses? I’m asking you a human question, I hope you’ll favor me with a human answer. Is that a human being or not? It doesn’t seem like a tumor. It often has a different blood type. I would have thought you would have thought about that.”*

*“I have thought about it very much for myself, but I won’t project on other women what I believe.”*

*“You’re still not answering, at all. I know you’re smart, but you are giving me a series of rehearsed and very childish*

answers. It's disappointing. Haven't you ever grappled with this?"

*"I often look at protesters and think of how heartless they are at yelling at women."*

*"But you haven't thought at all about why people might feel that way? That was a uniquely shallow conversation. Thanks for joining us."*

My purpose here is to show you through an example **just how self-deceived we can get about Rebellion**. It gets to the point where it is no longer possible to find out your own sin and hate it. And the reason is because **there is no fear of God** before the eyes. Instead, you look in the mirror and flatter yourself at what you see, unable to find out your own iniquity. It is no more possible than for this poor woman to answer his question than for a leopard to change its spots. The point is not that everyone else has these but me, for that is to become the very verses we are discussing. We all have these blind spots, even Christians. But how much more those who have no fear of God before their eyes? This is a truly terrifying thing, because it speaks of **the impossibility of reforming yourself**, of coming to repentance over sin.

*The mouth.*<sup>14</sup> Instead, something else happens. Another body part is introduced. “The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit; he has ceased to act wisely and do good” (Ps 36:3). The mouth takes what is in the heart and it projects it outside of the body into the world. It is as Jesus said, “How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt 12:34).

But be careful about being deceived by how you read this verse. I don't think he is speaking about lewd, obnoxious, profane speech, at least not up front. The Pharisees thought they are doing and saying good, and that is part of the problem. The language is that his mouth speaks “trouble” and “deceit.” Deceit (*mirmah*) is deception, the same idea from the previous verse. Deceptions deceive. They are deceitful because they appear one way when they are actually another. Trouble (*aven*) can mean wickedness or it can mean sorrow. These deceitful words create both wickedness and sorrow, but people don't think this is what they do.

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<sup>14</sup> On “mouth” see 36:3; 37:30 where the words of the wicked mouth are trouble and deceit vs. the mouth of the righteous which utter wisdom (also 34:1; 35:21; 38:13-14; 39:1, 9; 40:3).

John Piper recently said, “There is great pressure on this generation to pursue ‘good’ in ways that have nothing to do with God.”<sup>15</sup> This pursuit of “good” is not pleasing to God, because it doesn’t proceed from faith. Furthermore, it turns on itself, so that soon, it becomes a pursuit of what is actually bad, because it can’t tell the difference between the two. Because he no longer acts wisely (or has turned his back on wisdom), he no longer does good. Instead, “He plots trouble while on his bed; he sets himself in a way that is not good (*tob*); he does not reject evil (*ra*)” (4).

Can you see the direction of all this? Can you see where it begins? This isn’t about what evil looks like so much as it is about how it comes into being, how it is born (see **James 1:13-15**). Evil hearts love rebellion, do not fear God, flatter and deceive themselves, so that repentance is impossible, sin cannot be hated, words become treacherous and deceitful, good is no longer done, wisdom is no longer sought, trouble is plotted in the still moments of the night, evil is not rejected. This is the way of wicked. It is the depth of human depravity. And **everyone is in this “way” from birth.**

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<sup>15</sup> Desiring God, Tweet and accompanying video, March 14, 2017.

Thankfully, the we don't have to wait until Psalm 37 to get some kind of good news. Beginning in vs. 5, the song takes a different direction. We can read this as a series of repeating themes. The first is **the lovingkindness and righteousness of the LORD (36:5-6a, 10)**. The Gospel is an announcement of what God has done, but first, it starts with who God is. Put simply: The Gospel is God! Before a person can be moved out of their desperate condition, they have to know who God is.

He is **the God (LORD) of steadfast love**—*hesed* or **covenantal** love. We've seen the word before in the Psalms. It is love rooted not merely in God's **attribute** of Love (God is Love), which would be enough, but also in his **covenantal condescension** to man as Yahweh, the **covenant name**. This condescension is his love put into action towards us in promises and deeds already said and accomplished. Therefore, we can see and praise him for his lovingkindness.

The song makes it concrete by expressing it in terms of **creation**. It extends "**to the heavens**." It is called **his faithfulness, which reaches to the skies** (36:5). **Faithfulness** means that he will do exactly as he has sworn, and will never take back his word. He can be trusted completely. So great

is it that it reaches to the other end of the universe. Furthermore, his **righteousness is like the mountains** (6). Righteousness is God's holiness and rightness put together. And it is said to be as firm and unmovable as the mountains he has created.

Notice how **vs. 10** returns to the theme. “**Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you, and your righteousness to the upright of heart!**” He doesn't say how they get this way. It is simply a prayer of acknowledgment that some are this way, and he prays to God to remember who he is (the prayer is more for David than it is God) and to do what he is said he will do.

**Psalm 36:6b** talks about God's **judgments**. It says they are **like the great deep**. God's judgments are his courtroom verdicts passed down upon the children of man from heaven. Being a great deep they are unfathomable, literally. You can't get to the bottom of them. They belong to him and him alone, for we do not have enough wisdom and knowledge to call them into question. Yet, we know they are right because of who he is.

This also has a parallel in **vs. 9**, and it is a very interesting one indeed. “**For with you is the fountain of life; in your**

light do we see light.” The greatest judgment God has rendered against sin in this world thus far has been the Flood. In Genesis it says, “In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth” (Gen 7:11). Hence, the parallel between fountains and the deep.

Suddenly, this introduces us to Wisdom and Torah. As someone has said, “As I meditated on the connection of the great deep to its fountains, I realized that the great depth of wisdom of the Lord’s judgments of right and wrong, the definition of righteousness and sin that we have in Torah, the first five books of Moses, is a fountain of life. It is revealed wisdom from God to man (revealed, because it is wisdom man would not have been able to discover on his own without God), thus it is His light that enables us to see.”<sup>16</sup>

Notice the language of Wisdom in Proverbs. “The LORD possessed me at the beginning of his work ... When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were

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<sup>16</sup> Christine Miller, “Psalm 36 Chiastic Structure,” A Little Perspective (Apr 29, 2014), <http://www.alittleperspective.com/psalm-36-chiastic-structure/>.

no springs abounding with water. Before the mountains had been shaped ... when he established the heavens, I was there ... when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep ... And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it ... Whoever finds me finds life” (Prov 8:22, 24, 25, 27, 28, 32, 33, 36). Wisdom and Torah are not just laws, but gospel is also found in them. All of these are included in God’s judgments.

God saves both man and beast (Ps 36:6c). **Salvation.** Here it isn’t talking about eternal life from sin (animals are not forgiven of sin). It is speaking in a very earthy way. God saves them, even as he did in the days of Noah on the Ark. But the parallel, “The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings. They feast on the abundance of your house, and you give them drink from the river of your delights” (7b-8), this tells us that eternal life is possible for the children of mankind. It is offered to all without exception (i.e. “the children of Adam”).

But the center of the poem expresses the heart of how this is possible. It is **by delighting in God’s covenantal love.** “How precious is your steadfast love, O God!” (Ps 36:7a).

David prays to God that he would not let the foot of arrogance come upon him, for he delights in God's steadfast love. He prays that God would not let the hand of the wicked drive him away from the LORD (11). He does not want to go to where the evildoers lie fallen and are unable to rise (12). But only God can do this, even as only God can save. But how? Though a very special kind of revelation about him, which begins with his steadfast love and faith that comes from hearing it.

## **Psalm 37: Human Depravity vs. The LORD**

Enter Psalm 37. Psalm 36 has described to us the way of the wicked, and shown us the way of the LORD. Psalm 37 will now show us more of the ways of both, but especially of the LORD, and in doing so, it will show you how to not walk in the way of the wicked. It does this in the form of an acrostic-alphabet poem, which we have seen before. Of course, the problem is, I said earlier that the depravity of the wicked—which we are all born into—is of such great deceptive power, that no one of themselves can break it. Therefore, it would seem to be hopeless, not just for the

“really wicked,” but for everyone. But **nothing is hopeless for the LORD**, beloved. Remember that the next time you think someone couldn’t possibly be saved by him *or* be sanctified by him.

Psalm 37 answers the question right up front. The **first 11 verses** can be summarized: **Do not fret because of evildoers, but trust in the Lord.**<sup>17</sup> **Vv. 34-40** parallel them. “Fret not yourself because of evildoers; be not envious of wrongdoers!” (Ps 37:1). He tells you not to, because your natural inclination is to do exactly that! Why not fret? “They will soon fade like the grass and wither like the green herb” (2). The wicked thinks he will stand forever. But the days of man are maybe three score and ten. Or add another twenty? Big deal. Then he’s dead.

But how do you possibly do this, given that you are wicked yourself? “**Trust in the LORD**” (3). While a command, it is a command **rooted in the goodness of God in**

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<sup>17</sup> The Psalm has the following structure:

1a) **Psa 37:1-11**, Do not fret because of evildoers, but trust in the Lord.

1b) **Psa 37:12-20**, The wicked seeks to destroy the just, but the Lord will uphold him/ destroy the wicked

**central axis) Psa 37:21-31**, **Three- part theme repeated for emphasis**

2b) **Psa 37:32-33**, The wicked seeks to destroy the righteous, but the Lord will uphold him

2a) **Psa 37:34-40**, Wait on the Lord + keep His way/ you will inherit the land/the wicked shall be cut off

Christ, as we will see at the end. It is not a command for you to do something, but for you to let God do it. It is rooted in his covenantal love, his covenantal name, his covenantal promises. In a word, it is rooted in the Gospel. That is what we saw in the previous song about the kind of God he is. Trusting in the LORD is good news, especially based on what he has done in Christ Jesus.

The word “trust” (*batach*) is the familiar word for the Psalms which means hope. This hope is shown in the next verse, “Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart” (4). To trust in him is to take delight in him, to love him, to take pleasure in his lordship over your life. It is then to trust in the future with the Only-Sovereign at the helm. Rather than a proverb for life which could lead to heresy, giving you’re the desires of your heart is a future oriented stance of faith *with regard to* what he will do with his enemies.

To trust also means to commit your way to the LORD (5). Here is our word “way” for the first time in Psalm 37 (it appears five times). You have a way. But the right way is to commit it to the LORD. Again, this means to place your hope in him for the future. “Trust him, and he will act” (5).

But it also means to “do good” to “befriend faithfulness” (3). This refers to being righteous rather than wicked. Trust leads to obedience. But we said no one can do this. In fact, Psalm 36:1’s “there is no fear of God before his eyes”, becomes Paul’s capstone verse that summarizes the great depravity of all humanity without exception (Rom 3:18). No one is righteous (10), no one seeks God (11), no one does good (12), and there is no fear of God before their eyes.

Therefore, trusting in the LORD has to mean the opposite of you trying to do good. Instead, it is as Ps 37:6 says, “He will bring forth your righteousness ... and your justice.” It is God’s sworn covenantal duty to cause you who trust in him to bear fruit of righteousness, which is the fruit of his Holy Spirit, even as it is his delight to grant faith to all his elect prior to it (Acts 13:48; Rom 12:3; Php 1:29; etc.). In his light we see light (36:9). Do you see the order. First God. Then you. Thus, he will cause us you to bring forth righteousness as the light (6). Do you see that trusting in him is what pleases him, and that doing this is what makes a person cease to be wicked simply because it pleases God to change your heart and life? Do not wait to trust him. Do it now as you hear the word and it is close to you.

“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him” (7). With regard to what? First, with regard to the wicked. “Fret not yourself over the one who prospers in his way (his WAY again), over the man who carries out evil devises!” (7). We’ve already seen why. Second, with regard to your sin. “Refrain from anger, and forsake wrath!” (8). Many times we get angry because of someone else’s wicked behavior (or at least what we perceive to be wicked behavior). This can include even the ones who are most cherished in this world to us. Our response seems right: Let me get angry at their sin like Jesus did! But what does the Psalm say? “Fret not yourself; it tends only to evil” (8). In getting angry at sin, it is very often the case that you are wanting to take God’s place. And in doing so, you become the man of Psalm 36:1-4 again, self-deceived about your own sins.

The Lord will deal with wickedness in his time. If they are not elect, they will be punished in hell. If they are, then Christ’s blood either will justify them or has already justified them, and he will work out their sin as he sanctifies them. God might use you in that process, but not because of your anger, because it tends only to evil. So put your hope in him again. Listen to the good news: “Evildoers shall be cut off,

but those who wait for the LORD shall inherit the land” (9). Soon the wicked will be no more (10). But the meek shall inherit the land and delight themselves in abundant peace (11). Though not a beatitude in this Psalm, this is where Jesus gets perhaps his most famous of all the Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Therefore, blessed are you when you are meek in this way, when you trust in him and look to him to set straight all that is crooked.<sup>18</sup>

The end of the song is the same way. “Wait for the LORD and keep his way” (34). His WAY! What is his way? “The Torah of God is in his heart; his steps do not slip” (31).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>18</sup> There are two parallel chiasmic structures in vv. 1-11 that can be helpful in remembering what you read here.

**1a) [Psa 37:1-4](#), Do not fret because of evildoers, they shall be cut off; but trust in the Lord:**

*1b) [Psa 37:5a](#), Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him*

*1c) [Psa 37:5b](#), And He shall bring it to pass*

*2c) [Psa 37:6](#), He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light, and your justice as the noonday*

*2b) [Psa 37:7a](#), Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him*

**2a) [Psa 37:7b-11](#), Do not fret because of evildoers, they shall be cut off; but wait on the Lord:**

*1a) [Psa 37:9b](#), But those who wait on the Lord, they shall inherit the earth*

*1b) [Psa 37:10a](#), For just a little while and the wicked shall be no more  
*central axis) [Psa 37:10b](#), Indeed, you will look carefully for his place**

*2b) [Psa 37:10c](#), But it shall be no more*

*2a) [Psa 37:11a](#), But the meek shall inherit the earth; And shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace*

<sup>19</sup> **Going Deeper:** The connection between the Lord’s way and the Christian’s way is summarized by the word Torah, which has an almost parallel history in the way it is used in the Bible (Dt 9:12, 16; 1Kg 2:3; 3:14; Jer 5:4; Prov 4:11; etc.). Torah here refers not merely to

He has shown you, O man, what is good and what the Lord requires of you (**Mic 6:8**): You do justly. You love mercy. You walk humbly with the LORD. The song finishes by recapping the inheritance of the land (**34**), and way of the wicked perishing (**35-36**), the hope of the future for the man of peace (**37**), the salvation of the righteous (**39-40**), so that what you have heard at the beginning will stay with you to the end.

**Vv. 12-20** describe the way of the wicked and God's response to them. **Vv. 32-33** parallel them. It is summarized in the first two verses. What do the wicked do? **They plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth at him (12)**. They draw the sword and bend the bows to bring down the poor and needy, to slay those whose way [the **WAY** again] is upright (**14**). And what is God's response to them? Anger? Not here. "The Lord [curiously **Adonai**] laughs at them, because he knows their day is coming" (**13**). If that is his reaction, why isn't it ours?

What does their day look like? The sword that they unsheathe at the poor, it will enter their own heart and their

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law, but also gospel. On *torah* and *derek* see Hans-Joachim Kraus, [\*A Continental Commentary: Psalms 1-59\*](#) (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 320-21.

bows will be broken (15). The arms they use to harm the righteous, they shall be broken (17). The wicked will perish like the glory of a green pasture or like smoke—it vanishes never to be seen again (20).

But in the meantime, Yahweh knows the days of the blameless. His eyes are always here. He sees all. Their heritage will remain forever (18). They will not be put to shame in evil times (19). If they live through famine, they still have abundance in the LORD (19). If the wicked watches the righteous and seeks to put him to death, the LORD will not abandon him or let him be condemned on the great Day (32-33). And therefore, better is the little that the righteous have than the abundance of the wicked (16). So do not envy them. Do not covet them. Covet the LORD, and desire him. “Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame” (Rom 10:11).

Vv. 21-31 are the center of the poem. It contrasts the righteous and wicked. The wicked borrows and does not repay (21). The righteous is merciful and lends (26), and yet his children do not beg for bread (25), an amazing promise for those who worry about material possessions in this life. Jehovah-Jireh (Gen 22:14): The LORD provides. Why?

Because the Lord does not forsake them, but rather upholds them (24). The descendants of the wicked shall be **cut off** (22, 28), but those blessed by him will **inherit** the earth (22, 28). The **steps** of the upright are ordered by the Lord (23), the upright delights in the Lord's way (30), none of his **steps** shall slip.<sup>20</sup> The steps of a man are established by the LORD, when he delights in his way (23).

And what, ultimately speaking, is the way of the LORD? It is obedience. It is walking on the narrow road. “Turn away from evil and do good; so shall you dwell forever” (27). The good news is, this was already done for you by the Lord Jesus Christ. This is why he calls himself

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<sup>20</sup> The structure of this section:

#### **Psa 37:21-31**

1.1) **Psa 37:21**, **The wicked borrows and does not repay**, But the righteous shows mercy and gives

1.2) **Psa 37:22**, **Those blessed by Him shall inherit the earth**, but those cursed by Him shall be cut off

1.3) **Psa 37:23-24**, **The steps of the upright are ordered by the Lord/ He delights in his way/ He upholds him**

2.1) **Psa 37:25-28**, **The righteous is merciful and lends**, for the Lord does not forsake him:

1a) **Psa 37:25-26**, I have not seen the righteous forsaken, He is ever merciful and lends

*central axis*) **Psa 37:27**, **Depart from evil, and do good; and dwell forevermore**

2a) **Psa 37:28**, For the Lord loves justice, and does not forsake His saints; they are preserved forever

2.2) **Psa 37:28b-29**, **The descendants of the wicked shall be cut off**, but the righteous shall inherit the earth

2.3) **Psa 37:30-31**, **The upright delights in the Lord's way (law)/ upholds it/ None of his steps shall slip**

“The Way” (John 14:6). This is why his followers were called followers of “the Way” (Acts 24:14). Trusting in Jesus as the one who has done this for you is the way to the celestial city, for he has gone there before you, he has been given life forever in his resurrection, there he dwells and awaits all those who delight in him.

Those are the two roads of Scripture. Which way will you walk? The way of life or the way of death? The way of the wicked, or the way of the Word of God?