

Imprecatory Psalms – Truth in Tension

- 1) Love and do good to all men, but never aid the wicked or take part in their works.
 - “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt 5:44-45).
 - “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them” (Rom 12:14).
 - “Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the LORD? Because of this, wrath has gone out against you from the LORD” (2 Chr 19:2).
 - “Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies” (Ps 139:21-22).
 - “If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house or give him any greeting, for whoever greets him takes part in his wicked works” (2 John 1:10-11).

- 2) Pray that all men be saved, but recognize that many will not be saved and do not seek their welfare.
 - “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim 2:1-4).
 - “Do not pray for the welfare of this people. Though they fast, I will not hear their cry, and though they offer burnt offering and grain offering, I will not accept them. But I will consume them by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence” (Jer 14:11-12).
 - “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that” (1 John 5:16).
 - “But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works” (Rev 2:20-23).

- 3) Never seek revenge, but enforce the law and punish the guilty.
 - “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord’” (Rom 12:19).
 - “If anyone kills a person, the murderer shall be put to death on the evidence of witnesses” (Num 35:30).

- 4) Do violence to no man, but defend yourself and others in keeping with God’s will.
 - “But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles” (Matt 5:39-41).
 - “If a thief is found breaking in and is struck so that he dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him” (Exod 22:2).
 - “Whoever knows the right thing to do and fails to do it, for him it is sin” (James 4:17).

5) Ask God to destroy those who will not repent, but continue to warn the wicked of the wrath to come.

- “Appoint a wicked man against him; let an accuser stand at his right hand. When he is tried, let him come forth guilty; let his prayer be counted as sin! May his days be few; may another take his office! May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow! May his children wander about and beg, seeking food far from the ruins they inhabit! May the creditor seize all that he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his toil!” (Ps 109:6–11).
- “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers. You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell?” (Matt 23:29, 32–33).
- “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed” (Gal 1:8–9).
- “Son of man, I send you to the people of Israel, to nations of rebels, who have rebelled against me. They and their fathers have transgressed against me to this very day. The descendants also are impudent and stubborn: I send you to them, and you shall say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD.’ And whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house) they will know that a prophet has been among them” (Ezek 2:3–5).

6) Fight against the wicked and kill them without pity, but only at the direct command of God and in accordance with His will.

- “And you shall consume all the peoples that the LORD your God will give over to you. Your eye shall not pity them, neither shall you serve their gods, for that would be a snare to you” (Deut 7:16).
- “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one” (Heb 10:32–34).
- “Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen, white and pure, were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty” (Rev 19:11, 14–15).

“It is Christlike to desire the downfall and punishment of the enemies of God. This may be done without personal malice, or a vindictive or revengeful spirit. Indeed, the imprecatory psalms are: (1) pure, unselfish zeal for the honor of God, (2) holy hatred of that which is contrary to the nature of God and His divine purposes, (3) righteous indignation—anger without sin (Eph 4:26), (4) a desire to see the righteous character of God vindicated, (5) a desire that those who hold God in contempt be held accountable, and (6) a desire to give glory to God’s justice and goodness” (Miller, “The Imprecatory Psalms” 2013 RR 33.8).

Luther put it this way: “We should pray that our enemies be converted and become our friends and, if not, that their doing and designing be bound to fail and have no success and that their persons perish rather than the Gospel and the kingdom of Christ.”