

Psalm 139:19-22

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/ps/ps-139/psalm-13919-22/>

David expresses his hope that the wicked will suffer for their disobedience, renouncing them from his life. He instead focuses on his own pursuit of righteousness.

Like many of us, David hungers for justice by his standards. He expresses his hope that God *would slay the wicked* for their disobedience. After spending so much of the psalm extolling God's wondrous character, it is no surprise that David wants punishment for those who don't show respect or reverence to God. However, he is careful not to tell God that He "ought" to slay the wicked. Sometimes we have a version of justice in our minds that we want God to execute, but like David, we have to be careful not to confuse what justice feels like to us with what God's justice is truly.

David's complaint is that these *men of bloodshed* choose to *speak against* God and they *take Your name in vain*. Taking the Lord's name in vain is a direct violation of the third commandment that "you shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain" (Exodus 20:7). It is not a light thing to disrespect the name of God, or to misuse it for our own gain. Using the Lord's name in vain includes speaking of Him falsely, such as invoking the name of the Lord to exploit others and satisfy our personal ends. It could also be to use God's name to justify behavior that is evil.

However, God promises that He "will not leave him unpunished who takes His name in vain" (Exodus 20:7). So, although David does not see the wicked being punished right now, they will not be permitted to continue living that way forever. Eventually, in God's timing, they will receive punishment for their disobedience.

Instead of focusing on the things he cannot control, David moves to the things he can. He asks rhetorically: *do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?* David cannot control how God treats the wicked, but he has responsibility in how he treats them. So he focuses on cultivating the proper response to their evil doing; David despises disrespect toward God. Although *hate* and *loathe* seem like strong words, they describe the way that God Himself feels about sin (Proverbs 6:16). David mimics this response in his own character, choosing to love what God loves and hate what He hates.

While David cannot control the wicked men or the consequences they receive, he can control his own actions in relation to them. Rather than be like them, or use their lack of consequences to justify his own sin, David tells God that *I hate them with the utmost hatred*, so much so that they have become his *enemies*.

In the face of sin, David is doing the hard act of taking a strong stance against it. He does not simply say that he does not sin, or that he is not like those men; he declares those sinners to be his enemies, people he will war against. David is demonstrating that the proper response to sin is

not one of apathy, or one that allows us to live our lives unaffected by the sin around us. Rather, it is a strong abhorrence of wickedness that does not allow us to be friends with sin.

How does the language here correspond with the teaching in the New Testament that insists we have no human enemies (Ephesians 6:12), and Jesus's teaching that we should bless those who hate us (Luke 6:22-27)? It is important to note here that the psalmist expresses *hate* against *those who hate you, O God*. At least one element to note when wrestling with such a question is that the *hate* the psalmist expresses here is to make God's enemies his own.

How does God tell us to deal with His enemies? Deuteronomy expresses the principle succinctly, that we are to allow God to execute judgment:

“Vengeance is Mine, and retribution,
In due time their foot will slip;
For the LORD will vindicate His people,
And will have compassion on His servants.”
(Deuteronomy 32:35a, 36a)

This verse from Deuteronomy is quoted in the New Testament:

“For we know Him who said, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY.’ And again, ‘THE LORD WILL JUDGE HIS PEOPLE.’ It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”
(Hebrews 10:30-31)

God will bring all things to judgement, and make all things right. This includes Jesus paying for all the sins of the world, healing the relationship with humanity for all who believe (Colossians 2:13-14). It also includes Jesus recompensing for deeds (Romans 2:6-8).

The Apostle Paul set forth a formula for dealing with enemies. This agrees with Psalm 139, in that it is appropriate to discern enemies. Paul tells us the best way to overcome God's enemies is to do good to them:

“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”
(Romans 12:20-21)

Biblical Text

**¹⁹ O that You would slay the wicked, O God;
Depart from me, therefore, men of bloodshed.
²⁰ For they speak against You wickedly,
And Your enemies take Your name in vain.**

**²¹ Do I not hate those who hate You, O Lord?
And do I not loathe those who rise up against You?
²² I hate them with the utmost hatred;
They have become my enemies.**