

## Principles of Imprecation (Selected Psalms)

Well, this is the last lesson in our series on the imprecatory prayers or imprecations in Scripture, and I just want to answer a slander that was leveled against me several weeks ago where somebody accused me that I would never be able to get through all of these in my goal, my time. I want you to know that I am right on time, I'm right on track, so we are finishing exactly where I promised that we would finish.

Today we're going to suggest, or I should say I am going to suggest some principles for praying imprecatory prayers and to consider the principles, the theology, and the truth that must be weighed in the heart and mind of the believer as we pray against evil and evildoers. And in order to review, we talked about a theology of the Psalms at the beginning. We talked about bad interpretations of some of the imprecatory psalms, and for those of you who may be new, imprecatory psalms are the psalms or prayers in Scripture that call for curses against God's enemies, sometimes against personal enemies, where the psalmist or the pray-er asks God to curse, to judge, to send affliction or destruction upon his enemies. And these are very prolific in Scripture. Two-thirds of the Psalms have imprecatory elements. So we considered some of the bad interpretive approaches to those psalms, and then we looked at two psalms, Psalm 69 and Psalm 109, both of which are Messianic psalms but also psalms with imprecatory elements in them, two of the most notorious of the imprecatory psalms. And then last week I sort of gave you a collection in no specific order other than the order that I gave them in of twelve considerations or observations or things that we have sort of seen as we've worked through this entire series. The intention there was to sort of put all of the theological pieces out on the table so that we could put them together today in—what I'm going to give you are five principles for praying imprecatory psalms.

Before I do that, I'm just, in a matter of—very quickly, I want to go through and sort of rebuild that superstructure, as it were, giving you some of the theology, some of the hermeneutics, some the principles that we've covered, and I am not going to list all twelve of what we had last week, but these are the ones that I want to bring before you today.

Number one, justice is a good thing. Justice is a good thing. It's part of God's character, it's part of His nature. He is righteous, He is just. Desiring a good thing is a good thing; that's number two. Praying for a good thing is a good thing because God is going to do that good thing. He is going to accomplish that good thing. He's going to do so without sinning and without any measure of unrighteousness. Those were four.

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Number five, the Psalms and other imprecations should be understood in light of God's promises. God has promised to destroy evil, to destroy evildoers. The Psalms begin with those promises in Psalm 1 and 2, and therefore when you get into the rest of the Psalter and you see prayers for God to do what He has promised to do, it shouldn't strike us as odd or it shouldn't surprise us that there would be prayers for God to do the very thing that He has promised that He is going to.

Number six, imprecations or psalms should be interpreted in light of Christ as the fulfillment of them. Since Christ is the one who is going to return—He's going to judge His enemies and destroy the wicked. He's going to punish the impenitent. This is what He has promised to do. This is what we should expect Him to do. Therefore when we read of this in the Psalms, we ought to be reading those prayers of imprecation and cursing as sort of echoes of the judgment that is to come, warnings therefore to the impenitent and the unrighteous in this world.

I'm going read to you Psalm 18:37–50, and I want you, as we read this together, I want you to notice the things in here that sound as if they could come off the lips of the Savior as He returns in the kind of judgment that is mentioned in Revelation 19. Now this is David who is writing this prayer, this psalm, but as we read this, I want you to hear David's voice then echoing out against God's redemptive plan, as it were, and recognizing that David is here speaking not only on his own behalf in some ways but also on behalf of his greater Son, who would come to establish his kingdom and to destroy the wicked. Psalm 18:

37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them, and I did not turn back until they were consumed.

38 I shattered them, so that they would not be able to rise; they fell under my feet.

39 For You have girded me with strength for battle; You have subdued under me those who rose up against me [He has made His enemies a footstool for His feet, for instance].

40 You have also made my enemies turn their backs to me, and I destroyed those who hated me.

41 They cried for help, but there was none to save, even to the Lord, but He did not answer them.

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42 Then I beat them fine as the dust before the wind; I emptied them out as the mire of the streets.

43 You have delivered me from the contentions of the people; You have placed me as head of the nations; a people whom I have not known serve me.

44 As soon as they hear, they obey me; foreigners submit to me. (Ps. 18:37–44 NASB)

Now that is something that could be said by Christ. That is what is going to happen. People who hate Him will end up serving Him. He will subdue the nations. He will place His enemies under His feet.

45 Foreigners fade away, and come trembling out of their fortresses.

46 The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of my salvation,

47 the God who executes vengeance for me, and subdues peoples under me.

48 He delivers me from my enemies; surely You lift me above those who rise up against me; You rescue me from the violent man.

49 Therefore I will give thanks to You among the nations, O Lord, and I will sing praises to Your name.

50 He gives great deliverance to His King, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed, to David and his descendants forever. (Ps. 18:45–50 NASB)

Now, I hope that you can see as you read that, that David's voice is echoed in God's greater redemptive plan, the Lord Jesus Christ, who could say some of these very same things. And therefore, when we read in the Psalms of the judgment that will fall upon the wicked and the king who executes that judgment, we interpret that in light of God's eschatological plan that David is often speaking for his greater Son who is the fulfillment and will finish this job of executing the judgment on the unrighteous.

And number seven, a high view of Scripture requires that we receive the imprecatory prayers as instructive. We don't dismiss them. We don't put them in the corner and remain ashamed of them like a red-headed stepchild. We don't try to make excuses for them. We have to accept them and embrace them as inspired Scripture. These are inspired authors, righteous men who prayed and wrote these things, and we have to

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understand them in light of God's truth. They inform us really of God's view of sin and of evil.

And then lastly, one last consideration, these things serve as examples for our own prayer regarding the wicked. I believe that they are illustrative. I believe that we are to learn how it is that we should view the wicked and how we should pray against wickedness in our day through the imprecatory prayers. So it is my conviction—as if I have not already put all of my cards out on the table at this point in the study—it is my conviction that not only can we pray imprecatory prayers, there are situations where we should indeed pray imprecatory prayers.

So now the question remains, how? Now, let me offer a word of clarification. I am not saying that *you* must pray imprecatory prayers. If you don't feel comfortable praying imprecatory prayers—I'm not saying you are obligated to pray for anything in particular. But I am suggesting that if you see evil in our day and you cry out for God to execute justice and judgment upon His enemies and those who perpetrate that evil, I think you are entirely justified in praying the type of prayers that we see in the Psalms. I think at times that that is appropriate. So how do we do this? Five guidelines of principles for praying imprecatory prayers. And I'm going to go through each of these, a little bit of explanation with each one of these. I have some Scripture references too. And then I think that we'll be done with this in time to ask any questions at the end if you have any questions. Of course, if you have a question anytime in the middle of this, feel free to raise your hand.

Number one, imprecatory prayers must be God-centered. They must be God-centered. They must be theocentric, show a desire for the honor of God. Ultimately, it is His word, His honor, His justice, His righteousness, and His name that is on the line. And so, we wish for Him and desire and should pray for God to vindicate His own name and His own righteousness. And therefore, our prayers should be God-centered not just normally in our prayers but also in the imprecatory prayers. They should be theocentric. Psalm 83, for instance, verses 16–18—notice the psalmist's desire for the vindication of God's name. “Fill their faces with dishonor, that they may seek Your name, O Lord. Let them be ashamed and dismayed forever, and let them be humiliated and perish, that they may know that You alone, whose name is the Lord, are the Most High over all the earth.” What does the psalmist ultimately want? He wants the wicked to be judged, to be filled with shame, not just because he delights in the punishment or the pain of people, but he wants or delights in the vindication of God's name and God's

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righteousness. This is a theocentric prayer. So, yes, there are imprecatory elements there, but it is not man-centered. It's not about me that the psalmist is praying. He wants God's name, His nature, His righteousness, and His justice to be vindicated, and one of the ways that God vindicates those things is by judging the impenitent.

We see it in Psalm 139. We've returned to this one time and again.

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. (Ps. 139:19–22 NASB)

What is the psalmist's real issue here? They take Your name in vain. They're men of bloodshed. They speak against God wickedly. And he is so filled with righteous indignation over how the wicked speak of and defame God's name that he wants God vindicated.

I would dare say I don't know if I know one Christian out of ten who has that kind of indignation. Because about the minute we start to feel that way, then we feel like we have to step back and temper it and say no, no, I need to love my enemies, and I need to have all the warm feels inside of my heart for them. And as I said last week, there is a balance there where we want to love our enemies, but there's also the other side of that coin where we are indignant when God is blasphemed. And we get righteously indignant about that. I think we err on the side of being righteously indignant. That's where I think Christianity today errs on not going that far. I should say we err on the side of being loving and gentle and compassionate and gracious and mollycoddling people who blaspheme God. We don't err—evangelicalism does not err on the side of a righteous indignation. It's not like you walk into a church and go, man, that's a church full of righteously indignant people over the wicked in the world. And nobody's ever walked in here and said that. It is not like we are over on that end of the pendulum at all.

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So for the psalmist, these are sometimes his own personal enemies, but the psalmist, even when he prays for God to judge his own personal enemies, he is praying for God to vindicate His righteousness. So it's not that we pray this way for our neighbor who doesn't appreciate the fact that we play our Sovereign Grace music too loud while we're doing yard work. We are not praying this against them. We're not praying against the person who cuts us off in traffic that way. These are people who have made us their enemy because they have made God their enemy, but really what makes us righteously indignant is not how they treat us but how they treat God. God's glory is tied to the fulfillment of His Word, and so the vindication of His name is what is at stake. And when He fulfills His promises to destroy His enemies, He will indeed vindicate His name. So there must be a righteous anger and a righteous desire for wickedness to cease and for God's justice and His name to be vindicated.

Now it is possible to desire imprecations or curses with the wrong attitude or the wrong heart. And I think we see this in Luke 9:51. "When the days were approaching for His ascension, He was determined to go to Jerusalem [this is Jesus]; and He sent messengers on ahead of Him, and they went and entered a village of the Samaritans to make arrangements for Him" (vv. 51–52). Just remember, the Samaritans hate the Jews, the Jews hate the Samaritans.

53 But they did not receive Him, because He was traveling toward Jerusalem.

54 When His disciples James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?"

55 But He turned and rebuked them, [and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of;

56 for the Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them."]  
And they went on to another village. (Luke 9:53–56 NASB)

And what were they indignant about? The Samaritans had rejected them. Well, they were Jews and the Samaritans were Samaritans. This was just par for the course. Samaritans rejected Jews, Jews rejected Samaritans. There was a mutual hatred, a common understanding of their animosity toward one another, and so when the Samaritan village would not receive Christ and His apostles—"Should we command fire to come down from Heaven upon them?" That's, by the way, that's a little overwrought judgment, don't you think? Right? You could just go to another village. Sure, it's another two- or three-mile walk, but you could make that before sunset, surely? And Jesus said,

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“You don’t know what spirit you are of. The Son of Man did not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.” Now, when He comes back, He is not coming to save men's lives but to destroy them. So that's His eschatological judgment that is coming with His next return. But the timing for the judgment was not right. Jesus is saying that. And the attitude—the offense did not justify what they were asking for. So the disciples are not righteously indignant when they are asking this. Instead, the disciples are personally offended that these Samaritans wouldn't welcome them into the village.

There's another example of the Lord rebuking an unrighteous vengeance in Ezekiel 25.

15 Thus says the Lord God, “Because the Philistines have acted in revenge and have taken vengeance with scorn of soul to destroy with everlasting enmity,”

16 therefore thus says the Lord God, “Behold, I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, even cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast.

17 I execute great vengeance on them with wrathful rebukes; and they will know that I am the Lord when I lay My vengeance on them.” (Ezek. 25:15–17 NASB)

So the Lord there reproves the Philistines for enacting curses and vengeance themselves, but then it is not vengeance that is necessarily the wrong thing, for the Lord says, “I'm going to pour out My vengeance upon the Philistine for what they have done, a right and appropriate curse.” So, we must therefore have a righteous anger, be slow to anger, concerned with righteousness and justice and holiness and not our personal agendas. In other words, we don't pray imprecatory prayers with an itchy trigger finger. Imprecation is not our first response. It shouldn't be. It shouldn't be the first thing that jumps to our mind. We see evil and the first thing we want to do is start citing Psalm 118 and Psalm 69 and Psalm 109 with all of the curses—that should not be the initial response of somebody who has a righteousness inside of themselves. It's not to say that that should never be a response at any point in seeing wickedness, but it shouldn't be the first response. And such righteous anger leaves the execution of that justice to God.

Now you can see how this would require some self-examination when we pray prayers against evil and wickedness, right? Am I praying this because I'm righteously indignant that my God has been blasphemed, or am I praying this because this person has personally offended me? Am I praying this because I'm really passionate about justice and righteousness, or am I praying this because somehow I have been slighted or wronged? And that requires some self-examination and examining the heart and

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thinking through your prayers. But isn't that what we're supposed to do with all of our prayers? Right, when I pray for this provision, am I praying for this provision because I'm discontent with what God has given to me or because I actually need it? Really all of our prayer should be a matter of self-examination in the praying of it so that we would conform our hearts and our minds and our souls to God's will in this situation, allowing truth about Him and about righteousness and justice to inform our prayers. Imprecatory prayers, I think, are the same way. We have to examine ourselves in our own hearts when we're praying against wickedness.

Number two, we pray for God's justice out of concern for the innocent because we are concerned for others. Now, it might be that we are the innocent party aggrieved in something. So it is appropriate to desire or pray for God's justice when an innocent party is aggrieved or hurt, and it's also appropriate to do that when we might be the innocent party aggrieved and hurt. That sometimes happens.

So let me give you an illustration. Let's say somebody were to break into my house and kill my wife sometime when I am away at work. And I come home and I find her there. I don't know who did it. The criminal is out there wandering around. I would pray for law enforcement to find him, to identify the killer, to seize that killer, to get him. I want justice to be done. I want that returned upon his own head, and I would be praying for the death penalty to come down for that person who had done that to my wife. Anybody here that wouldn't pray for that if somebody was murdered that you were close to and the murderer was going free? I think we would all pray that justice would be done, that the perpetrator would be caught, and that they would be swiftly and summarily dealt with according to the fullest extent of the law and of justice. Well, if it is appropriate to pray that when my wife has been harmed, how much more is it appropriate to pray and desire the same thing when our God has been harmed? And I don't know if you've noticed this or not, but my wife doesn't compare to the majesty and the glory of God. She's great, but she's not that great. And so if it's OK for me to pray that, for my wife's killer to receive justice, it is appropriate, even though I'm the aggrieved party in a sense, certainly appropriate for us to pray for the ultimate Sheriff of the universe to make sure that justice is done and to execute that justice upon somebody else so that their crimes against others would cease.

So, sometimes we are the aggrieved party. This is number two. We pray for God's justice out of concern for the innocent. Look at Psalm 35:7: "For without cause they hid their

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net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my soul.” You can see in a moment, Psalm 35 is an imprecatory psalm.

Psalm 59:3–4: “Behold, they have set an ambush for my life; fierce men launch an attack against me. Not for my transgression nor for my sin, O Lord, for no guilt of mine, they run and set themselves against me. Arouse Yourself to help me, and see!”

Psalm 109:2: “For they have opened the wicked and deceitful mouth against me; they have spoken against me with a lying tongue.”

These are psalms that have imprecatory elements or prayers, curses, in them. But notice that the aggrieved party is one who—the innocent one, the aggrieved party, is the person who is praying this. So, our concern should be for the innocent, the weak, and the vulnerable, but at the same time understand that sometimes we are the ones who are the aggrieved and the weak and the vulnerable that desire justice, in which case it's still OK to pray for that.

Notice here the concern for others. Psalm 109:16–20:

16 Because he did not remember to show lovingkindness, but persecuted the afflicted and needy man, and the despondent in heart, to put them to death.

17 He also loved cursing, so it came to him; and he did not delight in blessing, so it was far from him.

18 But he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, and it entered into his body like water and like oil into his bones.

19 Let it be to him as a garment with which he covers himself, and for a belt with which he constantly girds himself.

20 Let this be the reward of my accusers from the Lord, and of those who speak evil against my soul. (NASB)

Notice that he's mentioning there in that first part, the persecuted, the afflicted, and the needy man, the despondent in heart. It is a concern for others, and the psalmist is one of those people who is being oppressed in that way, which is why he describes himself there in those next two verses. So when we see children, widows, poor, vulnerable people, and we watch unrighteousness that is done to them, even by people in positions of power and authority, even elected officials, and we see the innocent suffering at the

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hands of sex traffickers and drug runners and terrorists, world leaders, politicians, abortionists, wicked women who promote that holocaust, pedophiles, groomers, child mutilators, murderers, rapists, looters, tyrants, unjust prosecutors—these are people who are at war with God. They promote wickedness and evil on a grand scale. They do great and tremendous harm against the innocent. How do you deal with that? I think it's appropriate to pray against them. And I think that the Psalms give us indications of how, why, and when it is appropriate to pray against them.

To be concerned for the innocent means that we should pray for the downfall of those who exploit the innocent, that God would thwart their plans, bring their schemes to nothing, destroy their enterprises, let justice fall, or save them and deliver them from that deception. Those are appropriate prayers. It is appropriate to pray against people who treat the innocent—and you understand that I understand we're not talking about people who are all morally innocent but people who do not deserve to be treated like that. Pedophiles, groomers, terrorists, evil, wicked people who take joy and delight in destroying other people, ruining lives, and violating God's Word, blaspheming His name, people that we would call moral animals—how do you pray against them? I think it's appropriate to pray imprecatory prayers against them.

What if some of them sit in the White House, Congress, and the Supreme Court, and they don't necessarily do those actions themselves, but they certainly facilitate and make it easier for people to do these actions? Somebody murders somebody else, a baby, a child, and then they get a slap on the wrist and they are released into the public with twenty hours of community service or some laughable judgment. The truth is that we live in a world where government is not even doing its most basic and fundamental service, which is to punish evildoers and reward those who are right. Our society is so broken the government cannot even do the two things that God tells it to do. It does everything else except for those two things. And so how do you pray for a government, a nation, a people, prosecutors who are intent on doing evil and facilitating evil? I think it's imprecatory prayers.

Third, imprecatory prayers must be prayers for what is just and righteous. It must be God-centered. It must be a concern for the innocent. And it must be prayers for what is just or righteous. Our prayers must be informed by biblical truth about justice, and they should align with God's character, His righteousness and His justice. It's unjust to ask for the death of the man who speeds through your neighborhood every day, but I don't think it is unjust to ask for God to let destruction fall upon child-mutilating doctors,

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people who think that pediatric care should look something like *The Island of Dr. Moreau*, some horrific thing that is going on in our culture, pedophiles, groomers in the sexualization of children, even false teachers who blaspheme God's name and exploit the poor, the needy, and the desperate while reviling God in the midst of all of that. I think imprecatory prayers are appropriate. We can pray against wicked and unjust rulers who are destroying people's lives, but we have to pray for proportional justice, that they would get what they are intending for others. And this, I think, is the example we see in Psalm 35:8: "Let destruction come upon him unawares, and let the net which he hid catch himself; into that very destruction let him fall." So the psalmist, when they pray for curses, they're not praying for a justice that is not commensurate to the crime, which is why in the imprecatory prayers you see the crimes listed and detailed and then you see what it is that they are calling for. It's not overbearing. They're calling for justice. So when we ask for God to give justice, we should be asking for that justice which is commensurate to the crime that has been committed that we're asking God to intervene in. So we are not asking for anything that is over the top or wrong in that sense.

Psalm 109:17–18: "He also loved cursing, so it came to him; and he did not delight in blessing, so it was far from him. But he clothed himself with cursing as with his garment, and it entered into his body like water and like oil into his bones." So he liked cursing, cursing came upon him. He didn't like blessing, instead he got the curse. And Psalm 109 is describing—it's an imprecatory psalm. It describes that judgment that comes, and it is a this-for-that judgment. They've done this, and this is the justice, so I'm asking God to do what is right and appropriate in the case of this person. And so we are asking God to bring justice, a poetic justice that is proportional and just, where it fits the crime. And we should do this with an eye to the justice that is to come, remembering that in the end God will have His say and justice will be done for these very same people.

That brings us to number four, the fourth principle. We leave the execution of judgment in God's hands. We do not take it upon ourselves. Romans 12:19: "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." So we pray for justice. We pray for judgment. We pray against the wicked. But then we commit that into the Lord's hands, understanding that His timing is best, and we're asking Him to do something that is appropriate to what is going on. And we don't take the judgment or the justice of that, the execution of that, into our own hands.

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David did this. There was a time when he waited and he could have avenged himself on his enemies, but he was restrained, and he didn't. As I mentioned last week, he let Shimei go. David sometimes executes the justice instantly that was deserved, and other times he was very restrained in doing that. And there is this indication when you read the Psalms that the psalmist is asking God to do something and then leaving it into the hands of God to find the best way and the best time to do that very thing. We are not the instruments of God's justice. We don't speak prophetically on behalf of the Messiah-King. We're not in David's unique position. And so we are to pray in accordance with God's will, and His will is to vindicate His people, to judge sinners and sin, and we're asking Him to do what He has promised to do. And then we pray with the proper motivation of love and compassion and righteous indignation, and then we trust God to answer His way and His time and leave the execution of it into His hands. By the way, did Jesus love His enemies? He did. Did Jesus pronounce judgment upon His enemies? He did. Is Jesus going to come back and execute judgment on those enemies? He will.

You see David's example in Psalm 109:4–6: “In return for my love they act as my accusers; but I am in prayer. Thus they have repaid me evil for good and hatred for my love. Appoint a wicked man over him, and let an accuser stand at his right hand.” So clearly David had a love for this person and he had shown it, and he is not motivated, even in asking for judgment, he is not motivated by his personal animosity or personal malice.

Psalm 35, I think, is instructive, and I want to look at a series of verses here, and I want you to notice three things. And I would commend Psalm 35 for you for your own meditation and study. First, David's accusers accused him without cause. Look at Psalm 35:7. And I'm going to give you some selected passages here from Psalm 35. “Without cause they hid their net for me; without cause they dug a pit for my soul.” “Do not let those who are wrongfully my enemies rejoice over me; nor let those who hate me without cause wink maliciously” (v. 19). So he was an innocent man, and he's suffering affliction at the hands of these people who are wrongfully his enemies. And three times there he says—four times he asserts it. Three times he directly says this is without cause. It's not that he was a perfectly righteous man and not that he was not a sinner. David certainly was, but in terms of the affliction he was enduring, this is an unjust affliction. There's nothing that he had done that deserved to be treated like this.

And David, even in that psalm, describes his own kindness to these people. Look at verses 13 and 14. “But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I

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humbled my soul with fasting, and my prayer kept returning to my bosom” (v. 13). Right? When they were afflicted, I was praying for them. I humbled myself and put on sackcloth for them. And I fasted for them. And I was concerned for these people. “I went about as though it were my friend or brother; I bowed down mourning, as one who sorrows for a mother” (v. 14). When these people were afflicted with physical illness, I prayed for them, I wore sackcloth for them, I was in mourning over them like it was my own mother who was sick and ill. This is the kindness with which David had treated these enemies.

And then he prays for their judgment. Verse 24:

24 Judge me, O Lord my God, according to Your righteousness, and do not let them rejoice over me.

25 Do not let them say in their heart, ‘Aha, our desire!’ Do not let them say, “We have swallowed him up!”

26 Let those be ashamed and humiliated altogether who rejoice at my distress; let those be clothed with shame and dishonor who magnify themselves over me.

27 Let them shout for joy and rejoice, who favor my vindication; and let them say continually, “The Lord be magnified, who delights in the prosperity of His servant.” (Ps. 35:24–27 NASB)

David there is praying for God to vindicate His justice upon those enemies. I want you to notice something. David had treated them with kindness. He had prayed for them. He continued to pray for them. They persecuted him without cause, without any just reason to do that. And he expresses his love for them, his concern for them, and prays for God's judgment on them, those two things together. He expresses his love and his concern for them, and he prays for God's judgment upon them. Now, it is up to all of us to mature in Christ to the point where we can put those together and have those in our heart at the same time.

Now is it possible to pray imprecatory prayers with malice and evil in your hearts? It is. Is it possible to pray with the wrong motives for our petty grievances in spiteful and vengeful, sinful anger and sadistic, bloodthirsty wrath? Is it possible to pray that way? It is possible to pray that way. And might I suggest then that you don't pray imprecatory prayers that way. That should go without saying, right? If the only way that you can pray for God to judge your enemies is in the way I've just described—evil malice in your

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heart, wrong motives, sinful anger with a vindictive bloodlust—then don't pray imprecatory prayers. But if you can pray with a heart of love and concern for the innocent and a desire for that enemy to be saved, and you're asking God to do something to stop this evil from happening anymore and therefore to bring justice and judgment and wrath in some way that God sees fit—if you can do those at the same time, then I think we can pray imprecatory prayers. Desiring God's justice is not a sinful desire necessarily. Desiring a curse upon those who do exceeding evil is not a sinful desire. Praying for that curse upon that person is not inherently sinful because these can be holy and righteous desires that the righteous have.

Now, let me offer you some examples of New Testament imprecations. This will probably take about five minutes, and then I think we'll be done and have time for some questions. You see examples of New Testament imprecations from the heart of people who talk about loving your enemies and doing good to those who persecute you.

Galatians 1:6:

6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel;

7 which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ.

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be . . . [damned—the strongest word possible for damnation; he's to be cursed]

9 As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed! (Gal 1:6–9 NASB)

Now what is behind that? Just that Paul doesn't like competitors? Is that what it is? These guys go out there. They've got a different message. And then I come to town, and it's hard to get an offering going when they're trusting in somebody else. Was that what was behind that? No, it was the purity of the gospel because the eternal life and salvation of people is at stake. The glory of God and the continuation of the truth and the glory of His name revealed in the gospel of Christ is what is at stake. This created in Paul such a righteous indignation that anybody who would come in and alter the gospel by keeping everything intact but just adding one little thing, just one little thing—circumcision—to it, that person is worthy of judgment. And he asked that they be

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judged. Let them be accursed, eternally damned. First Corinthians 16:22: "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed. Maranatha."

Revelation 6:9–10:

9 When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained;

10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (NASB)

These are glorified and righteous saints who are praying for this. I would dare say that they have a better handle on holiness and righteousness than anybody in this room, right? These are glorified saints at the throne of God saying, "How long until You destroy them to judge them and avenge our blood upon these people?" What do they want? They want justice to fall. They have been martyred. In other words, this is a holy desire. You can pray something like this in the presence of God as a glorified saint with no sin present whatsoever.

Revelation 18:8—this is the destruction and judgment of Babylon. "For this reason in one day her plagues will come, pestilence and mourning and famine, and she will be burned up with fire; for the Lord God who judges her is strong." Here's the reaction of the wicked to those judgments, verse 17:

17 "For in one hour such great wealth has been laid waste!" And every shipmaster and every passenger and sailor, and as many as make their living by the sea, stood at a distance,

18 and were crying out as they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, "What city is like the great city?"

19 And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, "Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste." [in other words, all the wicked lament over the fall of Babylon, but here's the response of the righteous in Heaven.]

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20 Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her. (Rev. 18:17–20 NASB)

Therefore the judgment of God upon this city which wrought so much destruction on the face of the planet, the righteous saints in Heaven rejoice, and they are commanded—Heaven is commanded to rejoice at the righteous judgments of God.

Revelation 19:1–6:

1 After these things I heard something like a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, “Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God;

2 because His judgments are true and righteous; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and He has avenged the blood of His bond-servants on her.”

3 And a second time they said, “Hallelujah, her smoke rises up forever and ever.”

4 And the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures fell down and worshiped God who sits on the throne saying, “Amen. Hallelujah!”

5 And a voice came from the throne, saying, “Give praise to our God, all you His bond-servants, you who fear Him, the small and the great.”

6 Then I heard something like the voice of a great multitude and like the sound of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.” (NASB)

So what happens in Heaven when God's judgments are executed on the wicked? There is rejoicing. Now I want you to take that sentiment and that understanding and realize that people in our lives whom we know and whom we love who are not believers, when that judgment falls upon them and we have Heaven's perspective, this will be our response. That is hard for us to swallow here. But if God does something righteous in Heaven and we say, “No, not on my cousin. I didn't like that at all,” then you're just questioning God's wisdom and His justice. But when we have God's perspective on sin and unrighteousness, then we will rejoice over His judgments. And if in Heaven the glorified saints can rejoice over the righteous judgments of God, then I would submit to you that it is possible for the righteous to rejoice over God's righteous judgments in this

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world as well. And it is appropriate to pray for those judgments when the crime is worthy of that kind of judgment.

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