

IN RESPONSE – TREMBLE AND DO NOT SIN, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

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We have been examining the use of the psalms of the Old Testament in the New Testament. Jesus Christ is fully present in the Psalter. When we sing the Psalms, we often sing of Christ. Christ is Jehovah. He is the great shepherd of the sheep. Israel is the church.

In this light we have taken a look at Psalm 2, Psalm 110, and Psalm 22 as used in the New Testament. We have also examined Psalm 23 and Psalm 80 in light of New Testament teaching. We now turn our attention to Psalm 4 and Psalm 5. In doing so, we follow the thought of Calvin who rightly maintains the Psalms to be an anatomy of the soul. Calvin says, "I have been accustomed to call this book, I think not inappropriately, 'An Anatomy of all the Parts of the Soul;' for there is not an emotion of which any one can be conscious that is not here represented as in a mirror."¹ The Psalms therefore lay before us a divine appraisal of the soul in all its delights, maledictions, and foibles.

Calvin goes on to say, "It is by perusing these inspired compositions, that men will be most effectually awakened to a sense of their maladies, and, at the same time, instructed in seeking remedies for their cure. In a word, whatever may serve to encourage us when we are about to pray to God, is taught us in this book."²

What about singing praise to God which speaks of the range of emotions capable within the human soul? Calvin answers, "There is no other book in which we are more perfectly taught the right manner of praising God, or in which we are more powerfully stirred up to the performance of this religious exercise."³ *No other book of hymns more powerfully stirs us to the performance of our duty before God.* Calvin adds, "Here there is nothing wanting which relates to the knowledge of eternal salvation."⁴ Do we dare make such statements about uninspired hymns? If singing the inspired songs of the Psalter gives us all that is

necessary in our hymnody, we need not look elsewhere for better songs for use in worship.

Psalm 4 is an example. We take verse 4 as a touchstone because the apostle Paul references this text in Ephesians 4:26. Psalm 4:4 reads, "Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still." Ephesians 4:26 says, "Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Paul appears to quote the Greek Old Testament.⁵ Calvin rightly acknowledges the Psalm portion refers to unbelievers.

Now he exhorts his enemies to repentance, if peradventure, their madness was not wholly incorrigible. In the first place, he bids them *tremble*, or *be troubled*; a word by which he rebukes their stupidity in running headlong in their wicked course, without any fear of God, or any sense of danger. And certainly the great presumption of all the ungodly in not hesitating to engage in war against God, proceeds from their being hardened through an infatuated security; and by their thoughtlessness, they render themselves stupid, and become more obdurate by forgetting both God and themselves, and following whithersoever lust leads them. He tells them that the best remedy to cure their rage, and prevent them from *sinning* any longer, would be to awaken from their lethargy and begin to be afraid and tremble; as if he had said, As soon as you shall have shaken off your drowsiness and insensibility, your desire of sinning will abate; for the reason why the ungodly are troublesome to the good and the simple, and cause so much confusion, is because they are too much at peace with themselves.⁶

Paul uses the psalm to emphasize an important aspect of Christian living.

As to the passage of the Psalm, the idea of trembling will be quite appropriate. "Do not choose to resemble

madmen, who rush fearlessly in any direction, but let the dread of being accounted foolhardy keep you in awe." The word sometimes signifies to strive or quarrel, as, in that instance, (Genesis 45:24), "See that ye fall not out by the way"; and accordingly, the Psalmist adds, "Commune with your own heart, and be still,"—abstain from furious encounters.

In my opinion, Paul merely alludes to the passage with the following view. There are three faults by which we offend God in being angry. The first is, when our anger arises from slight causes, and often from no cause whatever, or at least from private injuries or offenses. The second is, when we go beyond the proper bounds, and are hurried into intemperate excesses. The third is, when our anger, which ought to have been directed against ourselves or against sins, is turned against our brethren. Most appropriately, therefore, did Paul, when he wished to describe the proper limitation of anger, employ the well-known passage, *Be ye angry, and sin not.* We comply with this injunction, if the objects of our anger are sought, not in others, but in ourselves,—if we pour out our indignation against our own faults.⁷

I make a point of this to indicate that when we sing Psalm 4 we review supremely New Testament teaching with regard to sin and anger.

The Geneva Bible renders Psalm 4:4, "Tremble and sin not: examine your own heart upon your bed and be still."⁸ The note indicates we ought to tremble "for fear of God's judgments." We will put this idea in context in the next lesson as we examine the fore part of the Psalm.

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¹ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:xxxvii.

² *Ibid.*

³ *Ibid.*, xxxviii-xxxix.

⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxix.

⁵ Greek: ὀργίσεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε· Greek Old Testament, ὀργίσεσθε καὶ μὴ ἁμαρτάνετε

⁶ Calvin, 1:44-45.

⁷ *John Calvin Collection*, Version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Ages Digital Library, 1998).

⁸ *The Geneva Bible, A facsimile of the 1599 edition* (Ozark, MO: L.L. Brown Publishing, 1990).

IN RESPONSE - TREMBLE AND DO NOT SIN, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

Answer when I call, O God who justifies./In my stress you freed me; hear in grace my cries./Sons of men, how long will you glory shame?/Will you love what's worthless? Will lies be your aim?//Know the LORD His saints has set apart in grace,/And the LORD will hear me when I seek His face./Tremble in your anger, yet from sin depart./On your be in silence speak within your heart.¹

David does not give the circumstance of this psalm. He wrote Psalm 3 on the occasion of Absalom's revolt and his need to take flight from this rebellion. Psalm 4 may have a similar setting. Saul was also a perpetual enemy.

Verse 1 introduces the psalm. "Answer me when I call, O God of my righteousness! You have relieved me in my distress; be gracious to me and hear my prayer." David confesses the Lord as the One from whom righteousness comes. Shades of Psalm 32:2, "How blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit!" When God does not hold us accountable for our sins because Christ paid the penalty for them, we are blessed. When our sins are not imputed to us, righteousness from God is imputed to us. God is the God of our righteousness. David also tells us God relieved his distress in the past and will do so again. God is gracious to His children.

On the other hand, "the wicked are not so" as indicated in Psalm 1:4. Psalm 4:2 therefore continues, "O sons of men, how long will my honor become a reproach? How long will you love what is worthless and aim at deception? Selah." In this verse, Spurgeon indicates, "We are led from the closet of prayer into the field of conflict."² The wicked love deception and worthless lying. These are the *sons of men*, the seed of the woman (Genesis 3:15), and the children of the

devil (John 8:44). The wicked reproach the godly *because of their holiness and righteousness*. Evil men consider it better to bring good men down than to rise to the level of goodness themselves.

Verse 3, "But know that the Lord has set apart the godly man for Himself; the Lord hears when I call to Him." David makes two important points in response to the ungodly. First, those to whom righteousness has been imputed by grace through faith, are set apart for God by God's grace. Again, Spurgeon is to the point. "Election is a doctrine which unrenewed men cannot endure, but nevertheless it is a glorious and well-attested truth, and one which should comfort the tempted believer."³ Second, "Election is the guarantee of complete salvation, and an argument for success at the throne of grace. He who chose us will surely hear our prayers. The Lord's elect shall not be condemned, nor shall their cry be unheard."⁴

So David calls wicked and ungodly people of the world to particular action. Verse 4, "Tremble, and do not sin; meditate in your heart upon your bed, and be still. Selah." Men and women ought to tremble in fear before God because of their sins. Spurgeon exclaims, "How many reverse this counsel and sin but tremble not."⁵ Matthew Henry says of David, "He addresses himself to the children of men, for the conviction and conversion of those that are strangers to God, and that will not have the Messiah, the Son of David, to reign over them."⁶ Henry adds, "God, by the psalmist, here reasons with sinners to bring them to repentance."⁷

Spurgeon lays out this plea,

O that men would take the advice of this verse and commune with their own hearts. Surely a want of thought must be one reason why men are so mad as to despise Christ and hate

their own mercies. O that for once their passions would be quiet and let them *be still*, that so in solemn silence they might review the past, and meditate on their inevitable doom. Surely a thinking man might have enough sense to discover the vanity of sin and the worthlessness of the world. Stay, rash sinner, stay, ere thou take the last leap. Go to thy bed and think upon thy ways. Ask the counsel of thy pillow, and let reason speak! Let the clamorous world be still awhile, and let thy poor soul plead with thee to bethink thyself before thou seal its fate, and ruin it forever!⁸

Paul applies this text to professing Christians. Ephesians 4:25-27 reads, "Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth each one of you with his neighbor, for we are members of one another. Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity." Turn away from lying; be angry at your own sin first of all. Tremble before God because of your sin and repent. God has been gracious in the past; He will be so again. Trust Him. In the words of the psalmist, "Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and trust in the Lord" (Psalm 4:5). Israel offered regular sacrifices. Righteously performed, spiritually performed, they "set forth the Redeemer, the great sin-atonement lamb; there is therefore, the full gospel in this exhortation of the Psalmist."⁹

When we sing Psalm 4, we receive direction from the Spirit regarding sin and judgment, grace and the gospel. Matthew Henry directs us. "In singing these verses we must preach to ourselves the doctrine of the provoking nature of sin, the lying vanity of the world, and the unspeakable happiness of God's people; and we must press upon ourselves the duties of fearing God, conversing with our own hearts, and offering spiritual sacrifices...."¹⁰

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¹ *The Book of Psalms for Singing* (Pittsburgh: The Board of Education and Publication, Reformed Presbyterian Church of North America, 1973), 4B.

² Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David* (Newark: Cornerstone Publishing Company, n.d.), 1:38.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, 1:39.

⁶ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Revel, n.d.), 3:251.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Spurgeon, 1:39.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Henry, 3:253.

IN RESPONSE – THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, PART 1

by Dennis Prutow

We are looking at Psalms quoted in the New Testament with a view to their applicability to New Testament worship. As noted earlier, the Psalms rehearse an anatomy of the soul, as Calvin puts it. This anatomy lesson is picked up in the New Testament to give us a proper understanding of our inner life. The Psalms therefore provide an excellent vehicle for teaching us about ourselves.

A proper vehicle for this teaching is song. And Paul plainly tells us part of the worship of the church is “speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Ephesians 5:19).¹ Paul quotes from Psalm 5:9 in Romans 3 to help describe the sinfulness of fallen humanity. “There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue” (Psalm 5:9).

So we take time to look at Psalm 5 as a song worthy of use in public worship.

Throughout the first, second third and fourth Psalms, you will have noticed that the subject is a contrast between the position, the character, and the prospects of the righteous and the wicked. In this Psalm you will note the same. The psalmist carries out a contrast between himself made righteous by God’s grace, and the wicked who opposed him.²

The Psalm begins with these three verses. “Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my groaning. Heed the sound of my cry for help, my King and my God, for to You I pray. In the morning, O LORD, You will hear my voice; in the morning I will order my prayer to You and eagerly watch.” David sets himself before God and seeks an audience. His prayer is of two sorts. He comes to God in word; he comes to God in meditation. The Authorized Version reads, “Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation.” Matthew Henry puts it this way, “David’s prayers

were not his words only but his meditations; as meditation is the best preparative for prayer, so prayer is the best issue of meditation.”³ Spurgeon adds, “Words are not the essence but the garments of prayer.”⁴

Davis seeks the face of the LORD. We have seen how Paul equates the LORD with Jesus Christ. This LORD, says David, is “my King and my God.” So it is with Jesus Christ. We ought to confess Him as King and God. We ought to own Him as *our* King and *our* God. David cries out to *his* LORD, *his* King, *his* God.

David also commits himself to prayer before his LORD *in the morning*. “This is the fittest time for intercourse with God. An hour in the morning is worth two in the evening. While dew is on the grass, let grace drop on the soul.... Prayer should be the key of the day and the lock of the night.”⁵ Matthew Henry adds, “Morning prayer is our duty; we are the fittest for prayer when we are in the most fresh, and lively, and composed frame, got clear of the slumbers of the night, revived by them, and not yet filled with the business of the day.”⁶

David says he *orders* his prayer.

It is the word that is used for the laying in order of the wood and the pieces of the victim on the altar, and it is used also for the putting of the pieces of the shewbread upon the table. It means just this: “I will arrange my prayer before thee”; I will lay it out upon the altar in the morning, just as the priest lays out the morning sacrifice.⁷

David now reflects the attitude of the LORD toward the wicked. Verses 4-6.

For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; no evil dwells with You. The boastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. You destroy those who

speaking falsehood; the LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.

Evil men take pleasure in wickedness. “Although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them” (Romans 1:32). There is no evil in God. “God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). God stands against the boastful. “Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5).

God also hates those who do iniquity. We are reluctant to speak in such graphic terms. We want to say God hates the sin but loves the sinner. But the Scriptures are quite plain in this place. “To be hated of God is an awful thing. O let us be very faithful in warning the wicked around us, for it will be a terrible thing to fall into the hands of an angry God!”⁸ Hebrews 10:31 reminds us of this. “It is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”

The Lord abhors lying and murder. These sins are preeminent manifestations of the evil one. “You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

In all the areas spoken of by David, we see New Testament doctrine regarding life before God. Matthew Henry therefore reminds us,

In singing these verses, and praying them over, we must engage and stir up ourselves to the duty of prayer, and encourage ourselves in it, because we shall not seek the Lord in vain; and must express our detestation of sin, and our awful expectation of that day of Christ’s appearing which will be the day of the perdition of ungodly men.⁹

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¹ We maintain the “psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” to which Paul refers are the Psalms of the Old Testament. See my study on Colossians 3:16 to pursue this matter.

² Charles Spurgeon, *A Treasury of David* (Newark: Cornerstone Publishing Company, n.d.), 1: 49.

³ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Revel, n.d.), 3:255.

⁴ Spurgeon.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶ Henry.

⁷ Spurgeon.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹ Henry, 256.

IN RESPONSE - THEIR THROAT IS AN OPEN GRAVE, PART 2

by Dennis Prutow

In this lesson we continue our exposition of Psalm 5 and we come to the text Paul quotes in Romans 3. Verse 7, "But as for me, by Your abundant lovingkindness I will enter Your house, at Your holy temple I will bow in reverence for You." David contrasts himself with the wicked. He commits himself to the public worship of his God and his King. Private prayer in the morning is essential. Public worship of the Almighty is also essential. "David was much in secret worship, prayed often alone (v. 2, 3), and yet was very constant and devout in his attendance on the sanctuary. The duties of the closet are designed to prepare us for, not to excuse us from, public ordinances."¹

David knows when he approaches God in worship, it is not on the basis of his own goodness. "I will not come there by my own merits; no, I have a multitude of sins, and therefore I will come in the multitude of thy mercy. I will approach you with confidence because of thy immeasurable grace."² The temple was not yet built in Jerusalem. David directs his worship to heaven, to the true temple where God "dwells in light ineffable."³

Spurgeon divides the Psalm in two parts and indicates this is the end of part one. David begins anew the contrast between himself and the wicked. "Now we come to the second part, in which the Psalmist repeats his arguments and goes over the same ground again."⁴ Verse 8, "O Lord, lead me in Your righteousness because of my foes; make Your way straight before me." David implores God to lead him in righteousness. We may view God's righteousness here in two ways. Spurgeon says David refers to "not my righteousness, for that is imperfect, but in *thine*, for thou art righteousness itself."⁵ Calvin takes a different tact, "The righteousness of God, therefore in

this passage, as in many others, is to be understood of his faithfulness and mercy which he shows in defending and preserving his people."⁶ God's leadership, brought to bear by His word applied by the power of His Spirit always leads in a straight path.

David now returns to his description of his enemies, the ungodly. Verse 9, "There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction itself. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue." Jesus challenges the Jewish people opposed to Him in the same way, "You brood of vipers, how can you, being evil, speak what is good? For the mouth speaks out of that which fills the heart" (Matthew 12:34). If destruction and Abaddon dwell within, lying and deception are inevitable. When these people open their mouths, they reveal death itself. Proverbs 26:28 warns, "A lying tongue hates those it crushes, And a flattering mouth works ruin." Paul uses this text, among others from the Psalms and Isaiah, "to show the general corruption of all mankind; for they are all prone to malice, Titus iii:3."⁷ David's indictment fits all the wicked. David is a type of Christ, the persecuted head of the church of his day.

When Paul, (Romans 3:13) in quoting this passage, extends it to all mankind, both Jews and Gentiles, he does not give to it a meaning of greater latitude than the Holy Spirit intended to give. Since he takes it as an undeniable point, that under the person of David, there is here described to us the church, both in the person of Christ, who is the head, and in his members, it follows that all those ought to be reckoned among the number of his enemies, who have not been regenerated by the Spirit of God, whether they are without the pale of the visible church, or within it. For David, in this passage, does not summons either the Assyrians or the Egyptians to the judgment-seat of God, but the degenerate Jews, who, being circumcised in

the flesh, gloried in their descent from the holy lineage of Abraham. Paul, therefore, does not wrest these words from their genuine meaning when he applies them to all mankind, but asserts, with truth, that David showed in them what is the character of the whole human family by nature.⁸

David describes the problem of sin existent in the days of Paul and fully extant in our day. Calvin adds this, "There is no doubt that human nature is described in these words, in order that we may see what man is when left to himself, since Scripture testifies that all who are not regenerated by the grace of God are in this state."⁹

The Psalm therefore presents to us the unregenerate human condition in contrast to the righteous, that is, in contrast to those who receive righteousness from God on the basis of grace through faith. Calvin says further,

The condition of the saints would be in no way better unless this depravity were amended in them. That they may still, however, remember that they are not different from others by nature, they find in what remains of their carnal nature, from which they can never escape, the seeds of those evils which would continually their effect in them if they were not prevented by being mortified.¹⁰

Psalm 5 is therefore a Christian song for the church today. "In singing these verses, and praying them over, we must by faith put ourselves under God's guidance and care, and then please ourselves with his mercy and grace and with the prospect of God's triumphs at last over all his enemies and his people's triumphs in him and in his salvation."¹¹

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¹ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Westwood, NJ: Revel, n.d.), 3:256.

² Charles Spurgeon, *A Treasury of David* (Newark: Cornerstone Publishing Company, n.d.), 1:52.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1979), 1:58.

⁷ Henry, 3:257.

⁸ *John Calvin Collection*, Version 1.0 (Albany, OR: Ages Digital Library, 1998).

⁹ John Calvin, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans and to the Thessalonians*, Ross Mackenzie, trans., D. Torrence and T. Torrence, eds. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), 67.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Henry, 3:258