

# American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org  
Encouraging Christians to guard their heart May 2023

## Can I Pray Imprecatory Prayers?

by John W. Tweeddale



Yes. And you should. As difficult as that answer might be to swallow, it best accounts for the biblical record. Let me explain.

An imprecatory psalm is a type of lament. In Hebrew Wisdom Literature, lament psalms are the individual and corporate cries of God's people. The imprecatory psalms in particular vocalize Israel's tears in the face of injustice and suffering. By praying down the curse of God on His enemies, Israel sought to hold up the goodness of God's law for His people.

At root, an imprecatory psalm is an invocation of divine cursing. Examples of these imprecations include Psalms 5, 6, 35, 69, and 109, all of which are cited in the New Testament. Curse

pronouncements are interspersed throughout the biblical canon. For example, Jesus calls down woes of judgment on religious leaders in Matthew 23. Paul pronounces an anathema on anyone who preaches another gospel in Galatians 1:8-9. And the martyrs in heaven petition God to avenge their blood in Revelation 6:10.

The consistent witness of Scripture affirms the legitimacy of God's people making use of imprecatory prayers in their individual, family, and corporate prayers. Underlying this assertion is a basic assumption that the prayers of God's people should be rooted in all of Scripture. The Psalter is God's divinely inspired prayer book and hymnal. It gives us the language of petition and praise. The imprecatory psalms help give shape to the hurt and outrage that the people of God at times experience in a world desecrated by sin.

Some react to the harsh language of the

imprecatory psalms. While this is understandable, we mustn't lose sight of what our sin deserves. Others underscore the teaching of Jesus to love our enemies. But loving our enemies in the New Testament never comes at the expense of forgoing appeals to divine justice. Praying for God to punish the wicked is neither unloving nor vindictive but is an expression of faith in Him who judges justly (1 Peter 2:23). Still others want to limit the imprecatory psalms to old covenant Israel. While the circumstances of God's covenant people have changed with the advent of Christ, the same cruelties that plagued Israel as a believing people in a hostile world still haunt the church today. If we remove the vocabulary of the imprecatory psalms from our homes and churches, what else will Christians sing and pray when tragedy strikes?

To pray the imprecatory psalms is ultimately to pray as Jesus taught us to

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To pray the imprecatory psalms is ultimately to pray as Jesus taught us to

pray. As Christians, we long for God's kingdom to come. We yearn for His will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Praying the imprecatory psalms is not a call to arms but a call to faith. We lift our voices, not our swords, as we pray for God either to convert or curse the enemies of Christ and His kingdom. [Taken from *Tabletalk*, Ligonier Ministries, March 2019]

### Imprecatory Prayer: To Pray or Not to Pray?

by Steve Huston



There are good men, both Puritan and contemporary, on both sides of the issue of whether or not a Christian should pray imprecatory prayers. Here are some additional helps in understanding when and how to pray imprecatory prayers from one of my favorite Puritans, Thomas Manton (*Commentary on James* pp. 469-70).

“To direct you in this case of imprecation, I shall lay

down some propositions. (1.) There is a great deal of difference between public and private cases. In all private cases it is the glory of our religion to bless them that curse us, to pray for them that despitefully use us; so we learn of the great author of our profession, ‘He was numbered among transgressors, and he made intercession for transgressors,’ Isa. 53:12. ...we should be ready to forgive all private and personal wrongs; but in public cases, wherein divine or human right is... disturbed, we may desire God to relieve oppressed innocence, to ‘wound the hairy scalp of evildoers’, etc. (2.) In public cases we must not desire revenge directly and formally; so our prayers must respect the vindication of God’s glory, and the avenging of our own case only as it doth collaterally and by consequence thereupon: Ps. 115, ‘Not to us, not to us, but to thy name give glory;’ that is, not for our revenge, or to satisfy our lusts, but to repair the esteem of Thy mercy and truth. The main spring and sway upon the spirit should be a zeal for the divine

glory.... The vindication of God’s honour and ways is the main aim of their requests. (3.) God’s people do not desire vengeance against particular persons absolutely, but in the general against the enemies of the church, and expressly against such as are known to God to be perverse and implacable. (4.) Their ordinary prayers are against the plots rather than the persons of their enemies;... they can love the nature, though they hate the sin.”

If we choose to pray imprecatory prayers, we need to keep one thing in mind. Imprecatory prayers, like all prayers, are to be prayed in faith and one’s trust and hope must be in God’s sovereign will and plan. David’s belief in the goodness and sovereignty of God, his trust in his Heavenly Father, was not contingent on whether God answered his prayer according to his timing or desire. Come what may, David knew God, trusted God, and placed his whole hope on the God of Heaven. We must do likewise.

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