

October 13, 2009

Psalm 12 (ESV)

**Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone;
For the faithful have vanished from among the children of man.
Everyone utters lies to his neighbor;
With flattering lips and a double heart they speak.
May the LORD cut off all flattering lips,
The tongue that makes great boasts,
Those who say, "With our tongue we will prevail,
Our lips are with us; who is master over us?"
"Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan,
I will now arise," says the LORD; "I will place him in the safety for which he longs."
The words of the LORD are pure words,
Like silver refined in a furnace on the ground, purified seven times.
You, O LORD, will keep them;
You will guard us from this generation forever.
On every side the wicked prowl,
As vileness is exalted among the children of man.**

I like to trust people. At times I am too trusting, and I may be naïve about people and their motivations. But it is too painful and depressing to live in constant suspicion of the people around us. Then again, some of us have been manipulated or deceived so often that we feel like human truthfulness is nearly extinct. That must be how this psalmist felt. When we experience this kind of letdown, we become vulnerable to bitterness, and we may even decide that it just isn't worth trying so hard to be honest and humble while the rest of the world runs roughshod over us. It's at times like these that we must remember God and His truthfulness.

When people speak, they may lie. They may deceive and abuse and taunt. But when God speaks, His words are always true. *Always* true. The psalmist extols this characteristic of God and relies on it for survival. His belief in God's truthfulness, sincerity, and compassion becomes his lifeboat when all he sees around him is deceit and treachery. A central lesson of this psalm is that God is forever faithful to His word.

The thing I love most about this psalm is its representation of the words God chooses to speak. The "pure" words of God captured by the psalmist are significant. These aren't the only things that God ever says, but notice the difference between what God says here and the sorts of things that the unruly, unrepentant world declares. God says, "Because the poor are plundered, because the needy groan, I will now arise . . . ; I will place him in the safety for which he longs."

The ungodly boast and thrash about, threatening to capsize their neighbors with their vileness. Their emphasis is on personal power and pleasure at the expense of all others. God is the opposite. God's emphasis here is on empowering the weak, exalting the humble, and providing safety for those who are at risk. When God speaks, He does not speak to achieve self-glorification at our expense. Even though an almighty God could surely use and even abuse his rebellious creation if He wanted to, He doesn't. Because of our sinfulness, we deserve no more than God's punishment, but we receive no less than His mercy. Believe it and live in it. We can put our trust in Him. The challenge, then, is whether or not we go and do likewise.

To be like Him,
Patrick Barber