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Psalm 36

To the choirmaster. Of David, the servant of the LORD.

(NRSV)

- 1 Transgression speaks to the wicked deep in his heart;
there is no fear of God before his eyes.**
- 2 For he flatters himself in his own eyes
that his iniquity cannot be found out and hated.**
- 3 The words of his mouth are trouble and deceit;
he has ceased to act wisely and do good.**
- 4 He plots trouble while on his bed;
he sets himself in a way that is not good;
he does not reject evil.**
- 5 Your steadfast love, O LORD, extends to the heavens,
your faithfulness to the clouds.**
- 6 Your righteousness is like the mountains of God;
your judgments are like the great deep;
man and beast you save, O LORD.**
- 7 How precious is your steadfast love, O God!
The children of men take refuge in the shadow of your wings.**
- 8 They feast on the abundance of your house,
and you give them drink from the river of your delights.**
- 9 For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light.**
- 10 Oh, continue your steadfast love to those who know you,
and your righteousness to the upright of heart!**
- 11 Let not the foot of arrogance come upon me,
nor the hand of the wicked drive me away.**
- 12 There the evildoers lie fallen;
they are thrust down, unable to rise.**

Psalm 36 does not conform to any one type of Psalm. It is a Psalm in which lament, wisdom and hymn are blended. As a general theme, the character of the wicked (verses 1-4) is contrasted to the righteous character of God (verses 5-12). Verse 1 is the only place in the Psalter where transgression (rebellion) is personified as an evil spirit, alluring the wicked away from God. Verses 1-4 are a kind of meditation on the nature of evil people, but without a prayer for their destruction, as in some of the other Psalms (see for example in Psalm 35). The Psalm then continues with praise of God's goodness (verses 5-9). The final section is the Psalmist's prayer asking God to continue to bless the righteous and to protect them from the wicked (verses 10-12).

The great evil of which the Psalmist speaks is that in verse 1b: 'There is no fear of God before the eyes of the wicked. The wicked do not fear God, because they do not take God seriously as the one who punishes evil and rights the wrongs. Thus, there is nothing to restrain them from sinning. That short-sightedness is deeply seated in the heart of the wicked. In his scathing summary of human depravity, St. Paul quotes from this verse to teach us something about the depth of human wickedness (see Romans 3:10-18). It is such that it vitiates the conventional distinction between the righteous and the wicked. All have sinned, none can boast of being righteous. They alone can claim to be righteous who by faith possess Christ's righteousness.

Prayer to accompany Psalm 36:

Lord God, source of light and life, by the light of your truth let the virtuous know your goodness and sinners feel your mercy, so that together they may drink from your river of delight and rejoice now and ever in your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Linger longer over verse 9:

**For with you, O LORD, is the fountain of life;
in your light do we see light. (VU's motto)**