

Psalm 36 is a Psalm of David that is written for the choir director. This is one of the rare Psalms in which David identifies himself as “the servant of the LORD.” The only other Psalm where David does this is Psalm 18. So David wants us to realize that he is writing from the perspective of being a “servant of the LORD.” More than likely the reason for this is because of the subject matter. He is going to describe people who are not servants of the LORD.

Now it is clear from the repetition of the word “lovingkindness” or “mercy” (**36:5, 7, 10**) that David did not believe he deserved to be a “servant of the LORD.” He obviously believed it was due to God’s grace and mercy. In fact, it seems to me that David realized the potential for doing that which is evil (**i.e. 36:11**).

Now there are three main character descriptions that David gives in this Psalm:

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION #1 – The character of the ungodly. **3:1-4**

There are eight character traits give in this text which describe those whom God classifies as ungodly, evil, and wicked:

Ungodly Character Trait #1 - The ungodly has a heart that continually listens to transgression. **36:1a**

Now some translations follow the Hebrew text which says “transgression speaks within my heart,” and other translations follow the Septuagint Greek text which says “transgression speaks within himself or within his own heart.”

The truth is “all” people are sinful and all people are people who have sinful hearts. All people have a part to their heart that is lured to that which is sinful. However, the point here is that an ungodly person continually listens to and yields to the sinful passions of the heart and has absolutely no remorse about it.

By virtue of the fact that transgression speaks, it is very possible that there is a literal reference to transgression speech. We do know that there were many who did verbally attack David. Ungodly people are drawn to transgression talk.

We may, in many ways, determine whether we are godly or ungodly by our response to the sin of our own hearts. If it doesn’t bother us that we are lured to sin, we have a serious, spiritual and ungodly problem. If we are deeply bothered by our sin, we are on the path of the godly.

Ungodly Character Trait #2 - The ungodly have no fear of God. **36:1b**

This is quite an amazing statement. The word for “fear” is not the typical Hebrew word used with the typical “fear of the LORD” admonitions. The word used for fear here is one that emphasizes fearing something to the point of being terrified to the point of trembling (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 671). This is a fear that literally shakes in terror.

Now David's point here is that the ungodly person is never afraid to sin because he has absolutely no terrifying fear of Almighty God. The fear of God is nothing he sees with his eyes or feels in his heart. He does not fear God, he does not fear God's Word, and he does not fear God's punishment. He is not afraid to sin because he has no sense of getting before God and being terrified and trembling.

The antithesis of this ungodly person is the godly person who does fear God. The godly person does keep God and His Word before his eyes and fears at the thought of making God angry.

Ungodly Character Trait #3 - The ungodly are flattered by their own iniquity. **36:2**

The word "flatter" means to be a part of something that is flattering and smooth. The point here is that ungodly people are not uneasy in their sin; they are smooth in their sin. When he discovers his sin, instead of hating it he is flattered by it.

Let's be clear on this point. Godly people sin. Godly people do commit iniquity and they do transgress. The difference is godly people hate their sin and they hate themselves when they do sin. Not the godless. A godless person is actually flattered and brags about his sin. He flaunts it; he enjoys it; he loves it; he brags about it.

Ungodly people flatter themselves in their own sin. They flatter themselves into thinking that they are so good that God will just welcome them with open arms. Godly people are appalled by their sin.

Ungodly Character Trait #4 - The ungodly have wicked and deceitful speech. **36:3a**

Ungodly people are liars and they think nothing of lying. They are verbally deceitful and they use their speech to deceptively influence others. Notice, one of the things that reveals ungodly people are their "words." Their words are wicked and deceitful.

Charles Spurgeon said "wickedness" and "deceit" are a pair of hell dogs that generally hunt together.

Ungodly Character Trait #5 - The ungodly have ceased being wise or doing good. **36:3b**

From God's perspective, ungodly people have stopped any form of true wisdom and any form of doing true good. Ungodly people, who have no fear of God, flatter themselves and they think they are so wise and scholarly. Perhaps one place where this is truly seen is in schools and universities. Most think godless professors are so wise and so good. But in God's view they have no wisdom and no capability of doing anything He would classify as good.

Ungodly Character Trait #6 - The ungodly plans his wickedness. **36:4a**

Ungodly people actually lie in bed and plot evil. The bed is not a place of sleep but of evil scheming. It is not a place of rest but of wrong. This may be a reference to immoral behavior, which typically takes place in a bed.

An ungodly person actually lies down in bed at night and thinks about the wicked things he wants to do and is going to do. He comes up with an evil game plan. By the way, evil begins in thought. What one thinks about determines a lot.

Ungodly Character Trait #7 - The ungodly pursues his wickedness. **36:4b**

The ungodly person sets himself on a path that is not good. Contextually, the wicked person plans his evil and then gets up out of bed and pursues it.

Ungodly Character Trait #8 - The ungodly does not hate evil. **36:4c**

A godless person has no aversion to evil whatsoever. He is not afraid of evil; he is not convicted that his evil is wrong; he does not hate evil; he does not refrain himself from evil; he loves evil.

Every now and then a righteous person gives in to wickedness. But when a righteous person does, he hates it and despises it. That is not true for one ungodly. One true test of a person's godliness is their hatred of what is evil.

Now the fact is, there is a part in all of our hearts that is wicked and desperately so. I am convinced that David believed if God decided to destroy everyone, He would have just cause. However, because of the lovingkindness and mercy of God, He does not do that.

This brings us to our second character description:

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION #2 – The Character of God . **36:5-9**

In sharp contrast to the character of the ungodly, David launches into a description of the character of God. John Calvin believed that David made this drastic transition from depraved man to Holy God, because it is the only means of recovery of ourselves to God because we are all depraved. The wicked person does not know God or things about God and doesn't care. But the righteous person wants to know about God. There are eight character traits David brings out about God:

Character Trait #1 - God's mercy and lovingkindness is limitless. **36:5a**

The mercy and lovingkindness of God must extend to the heavens because that is the only way we are going to get there. That word "lovingkindness" or "mercy" refers to God helping those who are totally hopeless and helpless. God's people are not flattered by their sin; they realize how hopeless and helpless they are, and that leads them to depend totally on the mercy of God.

Character Trait #2 - God's faithfulness is limitless. **36:5b**

God has a fidelity to every gracious promise and provision He has ever made. No matter how unfaithful we may have been, God is always faithful and true to Himself and His Word. A godly person who is sinful, always realizes he can count on God's faithfulness.

Character Trait #3 - God's righteousness is limitless. **36:6a**

The word "mountains" refers to the "mighty mountains," the mountains that stand the tallest and the strongest. The righteousness of God is tall and sublime. It is firm and unmovable. God is righteous and His righteousness stands out like a mountain in this dark world. By the way, the mountains are the mountains of God.

Just as we could never measure up to the height of a mountain, so we cannot ever measure up to the righteousness of God.

Character Trait #4 - God's judgments are limitless. **36:6b**

God is carrying out deep judgment which you and I cannot even begin to fathom. He does things and permits things none of us can begin to explain.

Character Trait #5 - God is the sovereign preserver of men and animals. **36:6c**

God preserves literal men and He preserves literal animals. He is sovereign over all people and all creation.

Men may not fear God and some men act like beasts, but what they do not realize is that it is God who preserves them.

Character Trait #6 - God's mercy and lovingkindness are precious . **36:7a**

Godly people recognize the priceless, precious value of the mercy of God.

Character Trait #7 - God's mercy and lovingkindness are redemptive . **36:7b**

One great result of God being merciful is that sinners can find a refuge in Him. Humanity can find an eternal refuge in the shadow of the wings of God.

Character Trait #8 - God's blessings are abundant . **36:8-9**

God gives the blessing of salvation (**36:7b**); God gives the blessing of an abundant life (**36:8a**); God gives delights to life (**36:8b**); God gives refreshment to life (**36:9a**); and God gives light to life (**36:9b**).

A wonderful life is in store for one who loves God and goes to God's "house" (**36:8**). God blesses His people and their life is not miserable; it is fulfilling and delightful.

CHARACTER DESCRIPTION #3 – The prayer of the godly. **36:10-12**

In view of the fact that there is a wickedness to man and a holiness to God, David makes four requests:

Request #1 - He asks that God would continue to allow those who know Him to recognize and experience the mercy of God. **36:10a**

This is not something we deserve or merit.

Request #2 - He asks that God would continue to allow those who are upright in heart to develop in righteousness. **36:10b**

God must in fact do this very thing.

Request #3 - He asks that God would not permit even the foot of pride to overcome him. **36:11a**

Nothing will destroy the blessings of God faster in one's life than pride.

Request #4 - He asks that God would not let the wicked drive him away from God. **36:11b**

Wicked people can lure you away. Wicked people do cause others to fall. They can potentially influence a person to the point he falls so far away from God he cannot rise again for God.

David realized his own potential to do evil. He saw man for who he is and He saw God for who He is.