

The Gospel and Fear

The contrasts described by Psalm 56 are essential to overcoming the fear of man. In the first verse we see, "...God...man...". This is the foundational contrast for believers to remember to not be afraid. Ed Welch's book title, "When People are Big, and God is Small", captures the reason people are controlled by the fear of man. We must remember that God is big and that people are small, or we will not be able to overcome peer pressure, co-dependency and the fear of man. The next contrast, which is connected to the first, is seen in the words "for me" in verse 9, and the words "against me" in verse 5. David knew God was for him and that people were against him. Those who were against him were ruthless, notice his description of their opposition "man tramples on me" (v1), "many attack me" (v2) and "They stir up strife, they lurk, they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life" (v6). They were also relentless. The words "all day long" appear three times to describe the constant nature of their opposition. It is also significant that David refers to those who oppose him as "my enemies" (v2) and "the peoples" (v7) This indicates his enemies who were opposing him were from other nations, outside of Israel. These people worshipped false gods and idols, instead of the one, true God. Since David was the King of Israel, he represented those who worshipped God and the nations who didn't worship God hated him. He was the target of their hostility toward true religion. But, David knew God was for him. David describes his favor from God as including God's deep love for him, a love which counted his "tossings" and collected his "tears". Everything about his life, including his sleeplessness and his sadness was known and remembered by God as if it were all written in God's book (v8). David was the object of great hate from the godless, but was also the object of great love from God.

The confidence declared in Psalm 56 is the result of David realizing that God is big and by contrast people are small. This Psalm has a chorus, or refrain. It is found in vv. 3-4 and in vv. 10-11. It is essentially "In God I trust, I shall not be afraid". David could overcome the fear of man by trusting in the speaking God, whose word he praised. David did not separate God and his Word. Because he worshipped God, he praised his word which revealed God's person and God's promises. This gave him confidence. Not only did David trust God because of God's attributes and assurances revealed in His word, he also realized that in contrast to God, his enemies were frail flesh and mere men, "What can flesh/ man do to me?" (vv. 4c, 11b).

Finally there are conclusions that can be drawn from this Psalm, which celebrates and anticipates God's deliverance of David from his enemies and physical death at their hands.

1. God will deliver Christians from their enemies and physical death at their hands, until their purpose on earth is completed. (People can't take your life, which is Christ, unless and until God's plan for your life has been accomplished.)
2. God did deliver Christ to his enemies and to both physical death at their hand, and spiritual death, so people would be saved from eternal death after physical death, by grace through faith in Christ. (Though God did deliver David from those who wanted to take his life, he did not spare his own Son, the true and better David, but delivered him up for us all.)
3. God may deliver Christians to their enemies and to physical death at their hands, for his glory, as they refuse to renounce their faith in Christ in the face of death. (God delivered David the King from death at the hands of his enemies, but not Paul the Apostle. Jesus said, in Matthew 10:28, the contrast between God and man should be remembered if we face death for Christ by men, and begin to be tempted to fear our enemies.)