

## **Responding to Ungodly Authority , 4**

**By David de Bruyn**

### **Proverbs 29:2**

We've been looking at Responding to Ungodly Authority for the past 3 weeks. All of us encounter ungodly authority at some level or another, be it husbands, fathers & mothers, pastors, managers or government. Responding to godly leadership does not take much effort or even help from the Holy Spirit; it is quite natural to respond kindly to kind and godly people. But how are we to respond to unkind, unbalanced, abusive leaders? We've been looking at the life of David and seeing his response to ungodly authority. David practiced godly submission. He knew that even ungodly leadership was placed there by God, and were he to rebel, he would be fighting God. He also knew he was to obey God through and in spite of that ungodly leader. Then last week we saw the balancing truth to godly submission and that is humble confrontation. David confronted Saul, not to try to remove him, but to restore him. He had the right goal. He also went at the right time, and had the right attitude, a non-threatening, humble submissive attitude which nevertheless confronted him over his sin.

Now you may exercise godly submission before an ungodly leader, and you may at some point be led to confront them over their sin. Does that mean they will change? Does that mean they will turn around? What happens if they don't?

Well, that's exactly what happened in David's situation. He confronted Saul twice , but Saul's sin and evil did not cease; he gave merely a token apology. Saul went ahead in his sin. What do you do when your confrontation has been met with rejection, denial, counter-accusations, silence or anger?

Remember, by confronting that ungodly leader in the right way at the right time, you have put him at a crossroads. He can either humble himself and soften his heart, or he can harden his heart and refuse. The book of Proverbs is very clear about the results of ignoring the correction of others (Proverbs 12:15 13:18 15:10 15:12 15:32 29:1). You don't have to do anything to ungodly leaders who reject biblical counsel. They have sealed their fate. Once they have spurned your counsel, what must you do? Prov 9:7-8 tells us. "He that reproveth a scorner getteth to himself shame: and he that rebuketh a wicked *man* getteth himself a blot. <sup>8</sup>Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee." There is a time to realize that this leader has so hardened his heart that he is unreachable, and is in God's hands. He has despised accountability, or at least been afraid of it, and has severed the hands that were held out to save his usefulness. What is left for him? He arise truly in God's hands.

But it is not enough to just mouth those words and become passive and detached. In fact, we are as active as ever as we practice the final means of dealing with ungodly authority.

### **Passionate Prayer**

We underlined this fact last week, your confrontation is not an attempt at removal, but an attempt at restoration. No confrontation should be like that of an ultimatum, 'you change, or else'. If we take that approach then what we are saying is that we are laying down the law, and leadership must submit to us. No, a godly response to

ungodly authority insists that it is God who will take down the ungodly leader in His time; remember David's words in I Samuel 26:10. So therefore, a leader's negative response to our confrontation is not an excuse to rebel now or seek to remove him by our own hand. Rather we resort to passionate prayer.

Since we believe that it is God who sets up and God who takes down, it is He that we must turn to with all our hearts for the final solution to ungodly leaders. Since He placed them there, He alone has the right to remove them or deal with them. So we appeal to Him to deal with the situation in our prayers.

Of course, we have been praying all along, we know that much. We have been praying for the leader to be changed, for power to submit, for a godly testimony, for boldness to confront. But now, our prayers take on a different character. The content and requests in our prayers shift direction.

David certainly did this. David practiced passionate prayer over his situation with Saul. This may surprise you, but did you know that over 40 of the Psalms are prayers for deliverance from the ungodly? A large portion of them were written by David when fleeing from Saul. God has chosen to give a large portion of space in His Word to prayers prayed by an innocent being afflicted by the ungodly. That's very significant. God is making sure we know that we must turn to Him ultimately for the solution. Yes, there is the human side; we must practice godly submission. We must practice humble confrontation. But having done all we can do humanly, we are to turn to God for Him to work.

We tend to get unbalanced. We either want to do it all ourselves, confront, and if there's no change, remove the ungodly leader. By that attitude we show that we are not in submission to anyone, including God. Or other times we say, "Let's pray about it" but never put feet to our prayers, and thus become theoretical and impractical. This is just a mask for cowardice and fear of confrontation. In fact, the two are to go together: our human actions, and prayer.

As we said, the emphasis in these prayers is now different from what we may have been praying before. The actual requests are quite different. In fact, they may surprise you. They confuse a lot of people when they read them in the Psalms. Many of the kind of prayers we're looking at are commonly called the 'imprecatory psalms'; they bewilder many with what seems like a vengeful, angry tone. But in fact, they are a balanced response to ungodly authority.

These Psalms are based on a single idea, that of Divine Retribution. This is the truth that it is not God's children's place to fight for their rights, it is God who will defend the oppressed and take vengeance on the oppressor. These psalms are based on this unshakeable faith that God sees, that He is a Just and Fair Judge who will punish evil and vindicate righteousness (Proverbs 20:22, 22:22-23, 24:17-18). They are based on God's righteousness, His reputation, His authority over the wicked, and are supposed to cause repentance in the wicked and praise in the righteous.

To believe in divine retribution is to exercise great faith, and to necessarily be a person of prayer. If you believe God will sort this leader out, you cannot sit by idly, you pray passionately that God will perform this spiritual law of divine retribution.

What are we to pray about? Well, I'd encourage you to spend time in the book of Psalms and see David's prayers. Look for the words 'deliver' and 'save', for they come up often as David cried out for God to deliver Him. Nevertheless, there are some things which come up repeatedly, and I believe they are models for us to include in our prayers.

Because the prayer we are praying is now effectively a prayer for justice, David approaches it very much like a courtroom scene. He does 5 things:

- 1) He states his grievance
- 2) He highlights the sin of those oppressing him
- 3) He highlights his innocence
- 4) He highlights the nature of the Judge
- 5) He asks for deliverance for himself, and judgement on his enemies

David effectively makes a strong case for the Just Judge to plead his case and to rule in his favour. If we are to have the same outcome we need to have a similar prayer, and in deed a similar life. Let's look at these a bit more closely.

- 1) First, David stated his grievance. Over and over, David describes in detail to the Lord, what he is going through. He describes their pursuit of him, their slander, their maliciousness, their deceit and betrayal. He speaks of his sleeplessness, his tears, his anguish, his suffering. David is telling God that he has been wounded. He is not griping over a personality issue or upset that someone's leadership style rubs him the wrong way. He has been wronged and he tells the Lord how. It important to do this. Sometimes, it just clears your mind as to what the real issue is , where you have really been wronged. It's not complaining or being self-pitying to earnestly pour out your heart before God. Much of the Psalms space is taken up by David doing just that. And for God to intervene, there must be a legitimate grievance before him. God relieves and delivers the oppressed, and the first stage is to show that you truly are one. God is the revealer of hearts; there can be no deceit before him, and very often, you may have found, even your self-deceit is revealed as deceit while you are praying. Yes, God knows if you are oppressed or being abused, but to neglect praying it is to really adopt an indifferent attitude. God wants us to be as children crying out for our Father to defend.
- 2) David makes the sin of his enemies very clear. He has been wounded. Now he highlights that the grievance committed against him is not accidental or incidental. There are deliberate evil perpetrators. David brings them before God's court. He shows God their sin. He does not show only God how personally they have injured him, he points out their continual wickedness. He is quick to point out that their evil is more than just a personal issue; their actions are causing God's name to be blasphemed. God's silence seems like He is condoning their actions. David is showing that their evil is treason against heaven, and deserving of swift judgment. He is showing that God has every right to punish their evil.

Don't be afraid to highlight the individual sins of this ungodly leader before God. Yes, God knows, but this is a courtroom where you are pleading for justice. And naming the sins of the ungodly leader helps you crystallize the issue in your mind.

Remember, prayer is not getting God to do your will. It is shaping your own heart to be in accordance with His will. And often, the prayer for justice is enough to get you to sort through the non-issues, focus on the real problem and rest in the Lord's decision.

- 3) David highlights his own blamelessness before God. There are some Psalms where he confesses his sin and asks for forgiveness, but in the large majority, David speaks of his integrity, his uprightness, his righteousness, his blamelessness. What is he doing? He is stating his credentials as an innocent who has been wronged. He is not in the same basket as his attackers, as the ungodly Saul. He has sought God with all his heart.

Perhaps if there's one point in all this that we should labour, it's this one. If you are going to pray a prayer of justice, be sure you are the just one. If you are seeking to be vindicated, make sure your life is free from blame. If that ungodly leader ultimately weighs up as more God-fearing than you, no matter how much you may despise their leadership, you will come up wanting in the judicial scales of God (Proverbs 17:3). The only way for your prayer to be effectual is for you to be righteous and blameless. If you have corrupted your heart with unforgiveness, malice and hatred, then your prayer for vindication is hypocrisy. If you have allowed indifference, rebellion and bitterness to fester within you, then you cannot speak like David of your integrity and blamelessness. That's why the real power to overcome an ungodly leader is not in the force of your words, but in the godliness of your life. God will not indefinitely allow the ungodly to remain oppressive of the very godly. Perhaps the reason Israel often had wicked kings for such extended periods of time was that they themselves were not much godlier and therefore they frankly had a suitable leader. People often get the kind of leader they deserve.

I know it can be a vicious circle, the ungodliness of the leader provokes you to rebellion, spiritual indifference or hardness, which in turn prevents you from being blameless and thereby requiring God's deliverance. But that is exactly why you need to follow God with all your heart, that you may be as harmless as doves, and yet as wise as serpents.

The only one who has the authority to pray an imprecatory psalm is a truly blameless believer who has been wickedly and unfairly abused and oppressed. That is why it is far wiser to seek to be in submission than to be in rebellion, for from a place of submission, you are far less likely to do evil.

- 4) He highlights the nature of the Judge (Ps 56:8-12). He reminds God of His character. Many of the great prayers of the Bible do this. They remind God of His promises, of His nature, and call Him to act accordingly. Now, we know God does not forget who He is or need reminding in that way. But to do so is to emphasise your personal knowledge of and relationship with the true God. It's like saying, "I know you! It's not like you to act in such and such a way!" David says over and over, you are the righteous judge. You are the one who punishes sin. You relieve the oppressed and deliver the abused. 102:17 Basically, David is setting the stage for God to act in accordance with His nature. God is just, He is fair, He does know our pain, He does deliver the innocent. David has proved his own innocence and highlighted the guilt of his attackers - he now calls upon the integrity and character of the Judge to judge righteously. There is nothing wrong with reminding God of His nature, He

doesn't need it, but we certainly do, a reminder of His fairness, His kindness, His power, His control, His desire for us to be treated righteously.

- 5) Finally, David calls on God to vindicate Him, and punish his enemies. 109:6-20. We may think that this is not in keeping with the New Testament law of grace. It's true that the age of grace has given men a greater opportunity to repent, but it doesn't mean at all that God has gone soft and will not punish sin as harshly. He will, though He give men greater 'space' to repent in this age.

The main thrust is deliverance and vindication on a personal level, but also humiliation and punishment of the enemies on a public level.

'No I could never pray that!' But keep the balance in mind here. David actually wept over Saul when he died, but he prayed for him to be destroyed. How do we work it out? Our grief over sin, our grief over God's name being blasphemed must be greater than a personal preference; Also remember in I Corinthians 5, Paul's command is that the sinning brother be 'delivered unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh'. Why? "So that his soul may be saved".

The attitude in praying this is one of waiting on God to deliver, not demanding immediate justice (Psalm 27:13-14).

Ultimately, the prayer for justice is showing God that there is a crime being committed. It shows God that you are truly innocent, being wounded by a vicious perpetrator. It calls upon God, being just in His nature, to vindicate and punish. Really, this final stage tests, "How badly do you want deliverance?" Enough to skip some sleep and pray extra? Enough to plead to God in the kind of fervent, passionate prayer that God delights in? Or are you still in rebellion, angry, and hopeful you can work the situation out your own way? A reluctance to pray reveals a pride that is still trying to operate in its own strength for its own motives and its own glory.

Ungodly authority will be with us till we leave this earth. The key is not in avoiding it, but in knowing how to deal with it. The first stage is godly submission. The second is humble confrontation. The third is passionate prayer.

How are you responding to ungodly authority today? What is it revealing about your pride, your anger, your rebellion? Take courage, that God is grieved when His sheep are scattered. God will fully repay the man who creates righteousness on his own standards. He will not allow His name to be blasphemed indefinitely. But in the meantime, we must do our part: godly submission, humble confrontation and passionate prayer. May these qualities aid you and me in our encounters with ungodly leaders till we are freed of this life and have only perfect authority in heaven.