

THE WORD OF GOD UNLEASHED



**PRAISING GOD**

**BY KEEPING HIS LAW**

*PSALM 146*

MATTHEW MCKAY BELLEVILLE

**Eric Stewart, Pastor of [OneLife Church](#) (Flint, Mi):**

As the old saying goes, "People can't hear what a person is saying since they are too busy watching what they are doing." Christians claim to praise God today with their words; however, their actions as it relates to the treatment of the oppressed and vulnerable in our society reveals that they ascribing their praise to the State. In this booklet, Matt Belleville reveals to us in Psalm 146 what truly praising God looks like. I would commend this booklet to any Christian who is truly passionate about praising God according to what the Bible teaches.

**Jason Garwood, Teaching Pastor at [Cross & Crown Church](#):**

*Matthew Belleville's booklet on Psalm 146 packs in more practical theology than most seminaries accomplish in a semester. This is both theology, and practice; deconstruction and reconstruction. We need them both, and this booklet gives a firm foundation of these concepts straight from the Book of Psalms.*

**Gordan Runyan, Pastor of Immanuel Baptist Church (Tucumcari, NM):**

*Matthew Belleville's bite-sized exposition of Psalm 146 is needed medicine for what ails us as modern Christians. His writing is clear and straightforward. It displays the heart of one who loves God and God's people. But be forewarned: His aim is not to make you feel better about the low state of your service to Christ. It is to spur you on to love and good works. For myself, I confess he has hit that target.*

**Jason Sanchez, Founder of [Reconstructionist Radio](#):**

*Because The foundation of God's throne is righteousness and justice, His very word is law. In order to have a proper view of ethics and justice, we must understand God's revelation to man, which is found in the Bible. Matthew Belleville's introductory primer explains the objective word of God and gives excellent practical suggestions on how to apply God's law-word in the spheres of influence that God has given each one of us.*

**Martin G. Selbrede, Vice President of [The Chalcedon Foundation](#):**

*The Psalms make for dangerous reading ... and dangerously life-changing commentary. When I first arrived in Texas in 2001, my new church decided they'd like to have me teach their adult Bible study class, but they didn't want any controversies erupting out of it. "Here's an idea," the elders reasoned, "let him teach from the Psalms. What could possibly go wrong?" Plenty, as it turns out because the Psalms are as prophetic and relevant to the totality of life as any other part of Scripture. My survey of key psalms ended up being a tour de force of biblical application, often more hard-hitting than the sermons being delivered by the pastor in the main service. Bottom line: there are no "safe" scriptures that fail to challenge man in his complacency, least of all the Psalms.*

*This new exposition of Psalm 146 has much to commend it. It's not long-winded or overly technical, but it does open our eyes in ways far too many modern run-throughs fail to do. What has been done here for Psalm 146 by the author needs to be done for the rest of the Psalter as well, putting important truths in reach of the reader seeking to understand how the Scriptures speak with one unified voice from beginning to end.*

*This short commentary is suitable for the new Christian as well as for seasoned students of the Bible because it brings the Psalm to life in the 24/7 domain, rather than restricting it to a confined space on Sunday morning. This booklet does justice to a key part of Scripture -- and that, by definition, will always be edifying, because "the entering in of Thy Word bringeth light" (Psalm 119:130). (And if you don't find the discussion about the psalm's literary structure compelling, remember: the main points the author makes rest entirely upon the psalm's content, not its structure. Bottom line: don't go off into the weeds and turn your back on the weighty matters being addressed.)*

*I highly recommend this short volume and look forward eagerly to subsequent expositions in this series. It is high time we unleash the whole counsel of God among His people, setting aside the prevailing shallow understandings of God's Word that so cripple His people, making their salt so tasteless. Booklets like this constitute an important step in the right direction.*

## Psalm 146

*"Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul! I will praise the Lord as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.*

*Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation. When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.*

*Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord his God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry.*

*The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*

*The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!"*

## Introduction:

This psalm teaches us how to praise our Lord - ascribing to Him the glory He already has, for His name is above every name.

Most evangelicals know that God calls us to praise Him and that such a call is *not* an optional component of Christianity. But do we understand what that means? What is praise? And how do we praise God?

Some common definitions of praise include:

- The singing and praying that occurs during the worship service at church.
- Devotion time and other instances of dwelling on thoughts about God.
- Every part of the worship service is praise, including preaching and communion.

There may be some other views held about praise that I did not write here, but those are not the focus of this current endeavor. The point here is not to prove any of these ideas categorically false. I want to focus on what is left out, which is the very thing this psalm teaches us.

## Learning by Bookends

Many modern readers miss the importance of structure in the Bible. This facet of writing was crucial to writers in ancient times, especially the Hebraic writers. Among various literary techniques employed in Scripture, you'll find *chiastic structure*. To find a chiasm, ask this question of any portion of text you are studying, "What does it begin and close with?" The answer will help determine the main point of the section of Scripture under consideration.

Psalm 146 opens and closes with the identical phrase, "Praise the Lord!" These bookends tell us that what falls between is informing the reader (or singer) to that end. No matter how foreign it may seem at first to the subject of praise, we must mold our mind to the text so that it is no longer foreign; this is an aspect of obedience to God and submission to His Word.

Here is a visual of the Psalm:

1. Praise God
  1. There is no salvation in princes (this would include influential people in communities).
    1. A prince's schemes die with him.
      1. The blessed man finds his hope in God.
    2. God is the source of all things (including life).
  2. God brings about justice, righteousness, and salvation.
2. Praise God

With that chiasm in mind, we know the subject of the psalm is praise. The center of the chiasm indicates the main point of the psalm. In this psalm, the central point is that the blessed man finds his hope in God. We could also say that hope in God is the mark of a blessed man. Working out from the center to either end will extrapolate on the main point, usually with positive and negative examples. The negative is the prince's "salvation" plans. The positive is God's perfect redemption.

From the chiasm in this psalm, I would make this argument: applying our blessed hope in God results in the care of the lowly and the establishment of righteousness, whereas confidence in man results in failed plans, initiatives, legislation, subsidies, and whatever else they might promise.

## The Let Down of the State

Q: Why should we not trust in princes (civil magistrates)?

A: "...in whom there is no salvation." "When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish."

1. Salvation is not something a prince, king, queen, president, a prime minister, legislature, senator, governor, or mayor can provide. You might say, "Yes yes, of course, a mere man cannot be the substitutionary sacrifice to atone for my sin." Salvation, though, is not only applied to our soul in the Bible. Here a few examples from the Bible that could be considered "salvation" provided by God:

- God saves through the supernatural destruction of enemies (Exodus 14:30)
- God saves nations covenanted to Him when they go to war against aggressive oppressors (Numbers 10:9)
- God saves nations from plunderers (Joshua 2:16)
- God protects His people from their enemies (Psalms 18:6)
- God saves humble people by bringing down prideful people (Psalms 18:27)
- God saves sailors from storms (Psalm 107:23-32)

This list is not exhaustive, but it helps demonstrate that we cannot limit God's saving to only our souls. God is in the business of salvation in many different ways and areas of our lives. This is another reason we should praise God and not trust in princes.

2. Princes are not eternal. They will shrivel up and die and so goes their promises and plans too. Isaiah 2:22 sums it up nicely, "Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he?" The work of princes have an impact for a time after their "rule," but neither the prince nor their work last forever, unlike God Himself and His sovereign plans for the future. Instead of looking to a new party, election, tax scheme, or anything else princes and their collaborators promise, look to and trust in God for the renewal of your country.

Q: Is trusting in princes really that serious of an offense to God?

A: I believe what the prophet has to say is very helpful in Jeremiah 17:5,

"Thus says the Lord: "Cursed is the man who *trusts in man* and makes flesh his strength, whose heart *turns away from the Lord.*" (emphasis mine) Jeremiah goes a step further with what we have outlined so far; trust in any man, instead of God, is an active rejection of (turning from) God.

Q: Is there hope for my nation?

A: Yes! National renewal is the result of obedience to God:

“If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. (Leviticus 26:3-6)”

## The Doing of God

Q: "Why is God praised?"

A: "... who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever; who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin."

1. God is the sovereign maker of everything. Solids, gases, and liquids make up the natural world. We even refer to the reality of how the world works as the "natural order of things," meaning the way God ordained the world to work. However, the "natural world" did not always exist. Solids, gases, and liquids had to be created. We only have an ordered universe because God made the world and gave it a particular order. The natural is entirely supernatural, being the work of our transcendent God. God is the Creator and to be praised; man is not. *Do not trust in princes.*

2. God in his sovereignty brings about justice for people under oppression or affliction. Whether done by others, sickness, or weather and natural disasters, all oppression and misery come from sin. God is the only one who can right wrongs, make raging storms still, make disease vanish, and cause crooked men to walk straight according to God's Law, but man cannot. *Do not trust in princes.*

## Representation

Q: "How does God bring justice for orphans, widows, and the oppressed and sickly?"

A: Through His people. The singers of the psalm.

Representation is probably the least favorite point found in this psalm, or in the whole Bible for that matter. Delegated authority from God might be the most dreaded point which is plastered all over the Old and New Testaments. We are called to bring about justice on behalf of God.

Q: "How does God provide for the poor, widowed, and orphaned?"

A:

- 1.) There are the gleaning laws. In the Old Testament, any of the crops that dropped or were missed on the vine during harvest were to be left for the poor to come and gather for themselves. The edges and corners of the field were also left unharvested for the poor.
- 2.) The poor tithe was to be every three years and was a tenth of one's increase.
- 3.) Children are to materially take care of their parents when their parents are too old to provide for themselves.
- 4.) A local gathering of believers may also help provide for "true widows" in their midst.
- 5.) The opportunity to work is to be provided for those who are in poverty but not lazy.

Q: "How does God give justice to the oppressed?"

A:

- 1.) Christian men are morally required to respond to cries for help; this is seen in the command for women to cry out while being raped. It assumes men of faith will be men of action. This would result in a society where neighbors come to one another's aid when oppressors are on the scene.
- 2.) By establishing Christian courts once again, the oppressed will see justice served.
- 3.) Opposition to political corruption is good work to expose anti-Christian legislation.
- 4.) Advocating for children in the womb outside of murder mills in your community (abortion providers) is another way Christians can respond to the oppressed.

For a Christian to exempt himself from the duties required by God's Law is a choice to *not* praise God. God determines the way He will work out His healing, execution of justice, and His restoration of the downtrodden - by the work of His people. To hand it off to another is to deny praise to God. To call princes to do what God says He will help *you* do and bless *you* for doing is to praise the State instead of God.

*When we walk not according to God's Law, we make Him a liar.*

## Examples of Trusting Princes

Many churches have older saints in their midst. Depending on circumstances determined by God (death of their providers, financial disaster, inability to work, etc), these elderly saints can have little to no income. In some cases, they are even missing meals. Sadly, a standard solution for many local churches is to sign them up for welfare and other government stimulus programs. In other words, they are derelict in their responsibility of supporting the poor and aged in their midst. God requires the elderly's family to help them first, but if for whatever reason that support is not there, then the congregation is to provide. Giving over the care of the elderly to the State is trusting in princes. Instead, we are to believe in God and trust the means of provision He has commanded.

Trusting in the State to take care of the poor is also praising princes. God commands individuals in the covenant community to take care of the poor. To look to the State as the agency of poverty relief is not only a sin of omission on our part, it is also the approval of theft that is not allowed in God's Word. This is because these programs are funded through unlawful taxation.

## Praising God

Praise in action is what we need to see. As you may have observed, there are different categories of people in Psalm 146. For example, we see mentioned the blind, the oppressed, and the prisoner. While yes, there are spiritual allusions in these categories, they are real people too! Below is a list of ideas for us to put praise into action so that we can do justice and righteousness, which are the foundations of God's throne.

### Oppressed

1. There are brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing legal oppression in various counties, states, and countries. This persecution can come from homeschooling where government school attendance is mandatory, businesses being forced to serve those whom serving goes against their convictions, adopted kids being removed from the home because they are being taught Christianity, etc. The Universal and local Church should dedicate themselves to helping fund legal defenses for them, as well as intercessory prayer.
2. The church could provide for legal and financial costs to help persecuted Christians to leave their country.
3. Create a secret list of Christian families in your locale willing to take in women who are physically abused by their fathers, husbands, or boyfriends. The families should be prepared to take someone at any point during the day because extreme cases could be life-threatening and time sensitive.

### Hungry

1. If your local church owns a building, then have a stock of non-perishable goods that you can give to the poor. This "storehouse" ministry will take discernment and involvement with your community so that you know whether you are helping the poor or wasting resources on the lazy and idle.
2. Offer a yearly, monthly, weekly, or daily meal to families in poverty who are having a hard time purchasing meals. Focused meals for specific families can create a more intimate discipleship relationship than a free-for-all soup kitchen.

### Prisoners

1. Start prison ministries. Teach Bible, reading, math, business, entrepreneurship, and whatever else may equip them to be godly and productive individuals.
2. Start a theological library at the prison, as well as a library of other books that can help develop skills for the application of those theologies.
3. Work with business owners in and out of the Church to hire the men that have trained in your prison ministry. If you know one of the people recently released is not trustworthy or gifted for the jobs that are open at the moment, do not recommend them.

4. If your community, city, county, or state has a heavy presence of the sex-trade, learn the signs of a deal/transaction (pimping). Work with your local magistrate on action steps to rescue the women during an active deal.

### **Blind**

1. Helping those who are blind, or losing their sight can be done by providing glasses, contacts, surgeries, and diet changes.
2. Help with grocery runs for those who are blind and have no immediate family to help.
3. Take the time to find books written in braille that could be an encouragement, or read to them. The preference will be different according to the individual.

### **Bowed Down**

1. Interview the homeless in your community. Ask why the individual is homeless. Find out what their expertise is, and if they are trained in a skilled trade. Ask them if they are willing to work should the opportunity provide itself. Publish the knowledge to those in your community. This is similar to an item above.
2. This may be a stretch in interpretation, but it certainly fits with the command to love your neighbor. Consider caring for the elderly who are "bowed down" in age. They can be those who have lost children, either by death or abandonment and now have no one to care for them. A way to out-serve the "princes" is to take care of the elderly, especially as more and more legislative effort is put towards euthanasia. We should relish the opportunity to serve the aged.

### **Sojourners**

1. Some cities in the US will take in a large number of refugees leaving/fleeing their countries for refuge. Christians should be ready to help refugees arriving to their community by helping them find employment, housing, and teaching them the local geography and layout of important places in the community.
2. Startup classes for conversational English and reading for foreigners. Lessons can also serve those who have gone to your country for work. You would be surprised how many come with limited English.
3. Open up your home to international college students. Disciple them into a Biblical worldview according to the ethical-judicial standards of God's Word. Discuss how it affects their field(s) of study.

### **Widow and Fatherless**

1. When widows in the Church cannot afford a Christian school or must work to provide for her household, then her brothers and sisters should either help with tuition or homeschool her children.
2. Outside of the abortion mills plead for the lives of our pre-born neighbors who are being assassinated, call their parents to repentance, and publically pray imprecatory psalms against the assassins ("doctors").

3. Many fatherless children will not have training for life. Reach out to families in the community such as single mothers and single foster parents, for example. Offer trade training, apprenticeships, and various forms of Christian education.

## Render to God what is God's

God has reserved specific tasks for Himself. He has also appointed particular ways of completing those tasks. To deny that the job is His, or change the means He has prescribed, is to defraud God of the praise which He deserves. Instead of recognizing God as the only One who can create and save, man attempts to hand over these abilities to a "messianic" State. You either praise God as He has instructed, or you praise another and commit idolatry. *Praise God and do not put your trust in princes.*

## Put legs on it

To begin with, we asked the question, "what is praise?"

In this examination of Psalm 146, we discovered that praise involves the whole man and his whole life, all the time. We are embracing a stunted view and practice of praise when we reduce praise to only prayer and the singing of praise. It is that too, but it is much more than that.

Due to the comprehensive nature of biblical praise, we should not be surprised at how detailed even a psalm like this can be in setting forth concrete expressions of praise across so many concerns. The interior verses of Psalm 146 are no less descriptive of "praise" than Psalm 150. Psalm 146 puts legs on the concept of praise while Psalm 150 focuses on details such as musical instruments and singing. We can even combine their teaching: let everything that hath breath (Ps. 150) observe how this is to be done (in Ps. 146).

May we praise our God with our entire life and being, in all things by His grace.

Written by Matthew Belleville

- [Reformed Expressions](#)