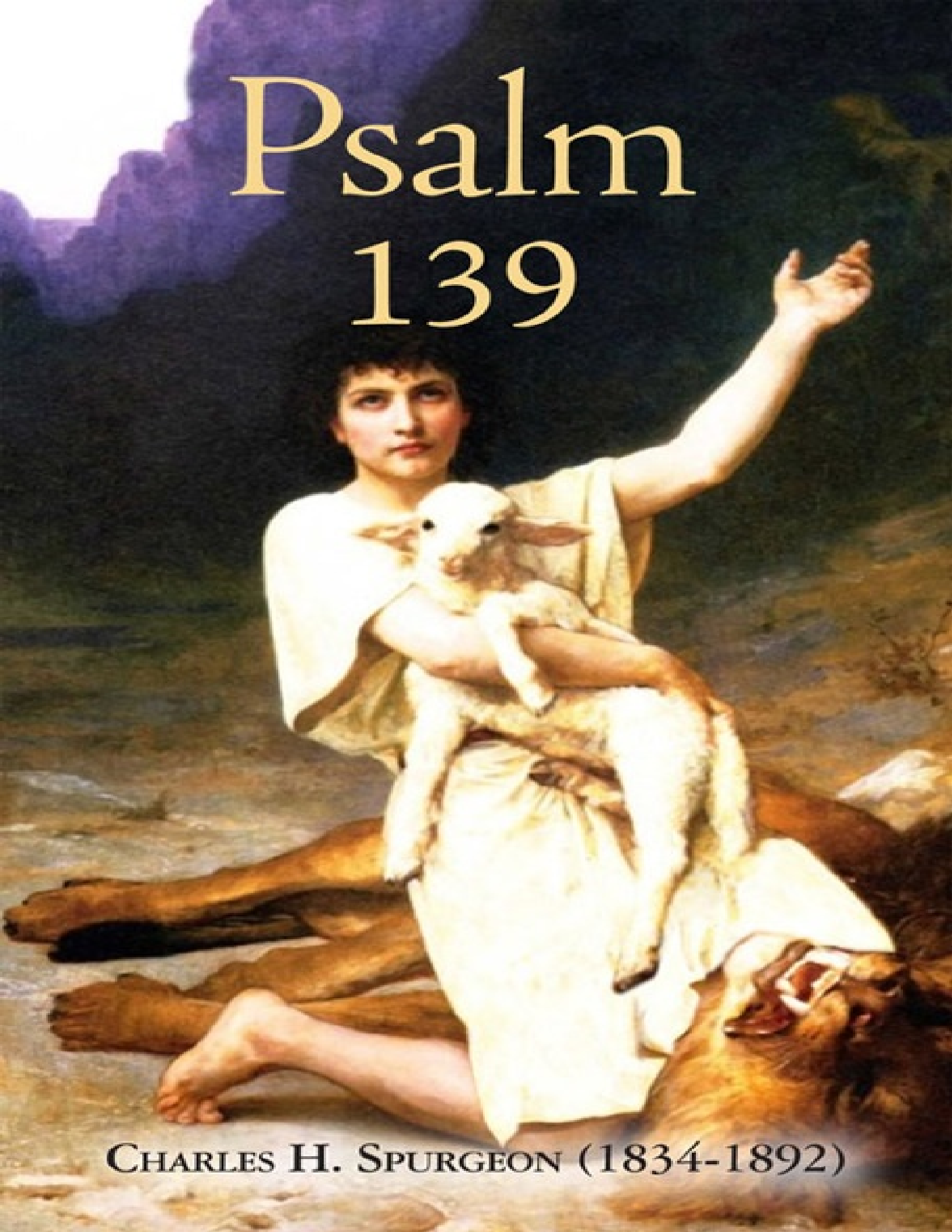
Psalm 139



CHARLES H. SPURGEON (1834-1892)

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Charles Haddon Spurgeon (1834-1892) was born in Kelvedon, Essex, England, June 19, 1834. Because his father and grandfather were pastors, Spurgeon was reared with the knowledge of the Gospel. Yet, he was not converted until a snowy January morning in 1850. In August of the same year, Spurgeon preached his first sermon to a small gathering of farmers. A year later, a village church called him as its pastor. In 1854, when he was nineteen, he was installed as shepherd over the flock of the New Park Street Chapel, Southwark, London, which later became the Metropolitan Tabernacle. Beginning in January 1855, Spurgeon's sermons were published weekly, a practice which did not cease until 1916, twenty-four years after his death. During his pastorate in London, Spurgeon ministered to a congregation of nearly 6,000 people each Sunday, published his sermons weekly, and wrote a monthly magazine. He also founded a college for pastors, two orphanages, a home for the elderly, a colportage society, and several mission stations. History's most widely read preacher (apart from those found in Scripture). Today, there is available more material written by Spurgeon than by any other Christian author, living or dead. The collected sermons of Spurgeon during his ministry fill 63 volumes. The sermons' 20–25 million words are equivalent to the 27 volumes of the ninth edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica and stand as the largest set of books by a single author in the history of Christianity. Although pain wracked his body in his later years and opponents attacked his ministry, Spurgeon continued to preach the Gospel until his death in January 1892. The keys to Spurgeon's success were a life of prayer and a simple yet profound faith in the grace and love of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Subject

One of the most notable of the sacred hymns. It sings the omniscience and omnipresence of God, inferring from these the overthrow of the powers of wickedness, since He who sees and hears the abominable deeds and words of the rebellious will surely deal with them according to his justice.…It flames out with such flashes of light as to turn night into day.…This holy song casts a clear light even to the uttermost parts of the sea, and warns it against that practical atheism which ignores the presence of God, and so makes shipwreck of the soul.

Verse 1

"*O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me.*" He invokes in adoration Jehovah the all knowing God, and he proceeds to adore Him by proclaiming one of His peculiar attributes. If we would praise God aright, we must draw the matter of our praise from Himself—"O Jehovah, *thou* hast..." No pretended god knows aught of us; but the true God, Jehovah, understands us, and is most intimately acquainted with our persons, nature, and character. How well it is for us to know the God who knows us! The divine knowledge is extremely thorough and searching; it is as if He had searched us, as officers search a man for contraband goods, or as pillagers ransack a house for plunder.

Yet we must not let the figure run upon all fours, and lead us further than it is meant to do; the Lord knows all things naturally and as a matter of course, and not by any effort on His part. Searching ordinarily implies a measure of ignorance which is removed by observation; of course this is not the case with the Lord. But the meaning of the psalmist is that the Lord knows us as thoroughly, as if He had examined us minutely, and had pried into the most secret corners of our being.

This infallible knowledge has always existed—"Thou *hast* searched me"; and it continues unto this day, since God cannot forget that which He has once known. There never was a time in which we were unknown to God, and there never will be a moment in which we shall be beyond His observation.

Note how the psalmist makes his doctrine personal: he saith not, "O God, thou knowest all things;" but, "thou hast known *me*." It is ever our wisdom to lay truth home to ourselves. How wonderful the contrast between the observer and the observed! Jehovah and me! Yet this most intimate connection exists, and therein lies our hope. Let the reader sit still a while and try to realize the two poles of this statement, the Lord and poor puny man, and he will see much to admire and wonder at.

Verse 2

"*Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising.*" Me thou knowest, and all that comes of me. I am observed when I quietly sit down, and marked when I resolutely rise up. My most common and casual acts, my most needful and necessary movements, are noted by time, and Thou knowest the inward thoughts that regulate them. Whether I sink in lowly self-renunciation or ascend in pride, Thou seest the motions of my mind as well as those of my body. This is a fact to be remembered every moment: sitting down to consider, or rising up to act, we are still seen, known, and read by Jehovah our Lord.

"Thou understandest my thought afar off." Before it is my own it is foreknown and comprehended by Thee. Though my thought be invisible to the sight, though as yet I be not myself cognizant of the shape it is assuming, yet Thou hast it under Thy consideration—and Thou perceivest its nature, its source, its drift, its result. Never dost Thou misjudge or wrongly interpret me: my inmost thought is perfectly understood by Thine impartial mind. Though Thou shouldest give but a glance at my heart, and see me as one sees a passing meteor moving afar, yet Thou wouldst by that glimpse sum up all the meanings of my soul, so transparent is everything to Thy piercing glance.

Verse 3

"Thou compassest my path and my lying down." My path and my pallet, my running and my resting, are alike within the circle of Thine observation. Thou dost surround me even as the air continually surrounds all creatures that live. I am shut up within the wall of Thy being; I am encircled within the bounds of Thy knowledge. Waking or sleeping I am still observed of Thee. I may leave Thy path, but You never leave mine. I may sleep and forget Thee, but Thou dost never slumber, nor fall into oblivion concerning Thy creature.

The original [Hebrew word] signifies not only surrounding, but winnowing and sifting. The Lord judges our active life and our quiet life; He discriminates our action and our repose, and marks that in them which is good and also that which is evil. There is chaff in all our wheat, and the Lord divides them with unerring precision.

"*And art acquainted with all my ways.*" Thou art familiar with all I do; nothing is concealed from Thee, nor surprising to Thee, nor misunderstood by Thee. Our paths may be habitual or accidental, open or secret, but with them all the Most Holy One is well acquainted. This should fill us with awe, so that we sin not; with courage, so that we fear not; with delight, so that we mourn not.

Verse 4

"*For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether.*" The unformed word, which lies within the tongue like a seed in the soil, is certainly and completely known to the Great Searcher of hearts. A negative expression is used to make the positive statement all the stronger: not a word is unknown is a forcible way of saying that *every* word is well known. Divine knowledge is perfect, since not a single word is unknown, nay, not even an unspoken word, and each one is "altogether" or wholly known. What hope of concealment can remain when the speech with which too many conceal their thoughts is itself transparent before the Lord? O Jehovah, how great art Thou! If Thine eye hath such power, what must be the united force of Thine whole nature!

Verse 5

“*Thou hast beset me behind and before.*” As though we were caught in an ambush, or besieged by an army that has wholly beleaguered the city walls, we are surrounded by the Lord. God has set us where we be, and beset us wherever we be. Behind us there is God recording our sins, or in grace blotting out the remembrance of them; and before us there is God foreknowing all our deeds, and providing for all our wants.[1] We cannot turn back and so escape Him, for He is behind; we cannot go forward and outmarch Him, for He is before. He not only beholds us, but He besets us.

And lest there should seem any chance of escape, or lest we should imagine that the surrounding Presence is yet a distant one, it is added—“*And laid thine hand upon me.*” The prisoner marches along surrounded by a guard, and gripped by an officer. God is very near; we are wholly in His power; from that power there is no escape. It is not said that God *will* thus beset us and arrest us, but it is done: “Thou *hast* beset me.” Shall we not alter the figure, and say that our heavenly Father has folded His arms around us, and caressed us with His hand. It is even so with those who are by faith the children of the Most High.

Verse 6

"*Such knowledge is too wonderful for me.*" I cannot grasp it. I can hardly endure to think of it. The theme overwhelms me. I am amazed and astounded at it. Such knowledge not only surpasses my comprehension, but even my imagination! It is high; I cannot attain unto it. Mount as I may, this truth is too lofty for my mind. It seems to be always above me, even when I soar into the loftiest regions of spiritual thought. Is it not so with every attribute of God? Can we attain to any idea of His power, His wisdom, His holiness? Our mind has no line with which to measure the Infinite.

Do we therefore question? Say, rather, that we therefore believe and adore. We are not surprised that the Most Glorious God should in His knowledge be high above all the knowledge to which we can attain: it must of necessity be so, since we are such poor limited beings. And when we stand a tiptoe we cannot reach to the lowest step of the throne of the Eternal.

Verse 7

Here omnipresence is the theme—a truth to which omniscience naturally leads up. "*Whither shall I go from thy spirit*?" Not that the psalmist wished to go from God, or to avoid the power of the divine life; but he asks this question to set forth the fact that no one can escape from the all-pervading being and observation of the Great Invisible Spirit. Observe how the writer makes the matter personal to himself: "Whither shall I go?" It were well if we all thus applied truth to our own cases. It were wise for each one to say, "The spirit of the Lord is ever around me: Jehovah is omnipresent to me."

"*Or whither shall I flee from thy presence*?" If, full of dread, I hastened to escape from that nearness of God which had become my terror, which way could I turn? "*Whither?*" "*Whither?*" He repeats his cry. No answer comes back to him. The reply to his first "Whither?" is its echo—a second "Whither"! From the sight of God he cannot be hidden, but that is not all: from the immediate, actual, constant presence of God he cannot be withdrawn. We must be, whether we will it or not, as near to God as our soul is to our body. This makes it dreadful work to sin; for we offend the Almighty to His face, and commit acts of treason at the very foot of His throne. Go from Him, or flee from Him we cannot: neither by patient travel nor by hasty flight can we withdraw from the all-surrounding Deity. His mind is in our mind; Himself within ourselves. His spirit is over our spirit; our presence is ever in His presence.

Verse 8

“*If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there.*” Filling the loftiest region with His yet loftier presence, Jehovah is in the heavenly place, at home, upon His throne. The ascent, if it were possible, would be unavailing for purposes of escape; it would in fact be a flying into the center of the fire to avoid the heat. There would he be immediately confronted by the terrible personality of God.

Note the abrupt words: “*Thou, there*.” “*If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there.*” Descending into the lowest imaginable depths among the dead, there should we find the Lord. “*Thou! ”* says the psalmist, as if he felt that God was the one great Existence in all places. Whatever Hades may be, or whoever may be there, one thing is certain, “Thou, O Jehovah, *art there*.”

Two regions, the one of glory and the other of darkness, are set in contrast, and this one fact is asserted of both—“Thou art there.” Whether we rise up or lie down, take our wing or make our bed, we shall find God near us. A “behold” is added to the second clause, since it seems more a wonder to meet with God in hell than in heaven, in Hades than in Paradise. Of course the presence of God produces very different effects in these places, but He is unquestionably in each; the bliss of one, the terror of the other. What an awful thought, that some men seem resolved to take up their night’s abode in hell, a night which shall know no morning.

Verse 9

“*If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea.*” If I could fly with all swiftness, and find a habitation where the mariner has not yet ploughed the deep, yet I could not reach the boundaries of the divine presence. Light flies with inconceivable rapidity, and it flashes far afield beyond all human ken. It illuminates the great and wide sea, and sets its waves gleaming afar; but its speed would utterly fail if employed in flying from the Lord. Were we to speed on the wings of the morning breeze, and break into oceans unknown to chart and map, yet there we should find the Lord already present. He who saves to the uttermost would be with us in the uttermost parts of the sea.

Verse 10

“*Even there shall thy hand lead me.*” We could only fly from God by His own power. The Lord would be leading, covering, preserving, sustaining us even when we were fugitives from Him.

“*And thy right hand shall hold me.*” In the uttermost parts of the sea, my arrest would be as certain as at home; God’s right hand would there seize and detain the runaway. Should we be commanded on the most distant errand, we may assuredly depend upon the upholding right hand of God as with us in all mercy, wisdom, and power. The exploring missionary in his lonely wanderings is led; in his solitary feebleness he is held. Both the hands of God are with His own servants to sustain them, and against rebels to overthrow them; and in this respect it matters not to what realms they resort, the active energy of God is around them still.

Verse 11

“*If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me.*” Dense darkness may oppress me, but it cannot shut me out from Thee, or Thee from me. Thou seest as well without the light as with it, since Thou art not dependent upon light that is Thine own creature for the full exercise of Thy perceptions. Moreover, Thou art present with me whatever may be the hour; and being present You discover all that I think, or feel, or do. Men are still so foolish as to prefer night and darkness for their evil deeds; but so impossible is it for anything to be hidden from the Lord that they might just as well transgress in broad daylight.

A good man will not wish to be hidden by the darkness; a wise man will not expect any such thing. If we were so foolish as to make sure of concealment because the place was shrouded in midnight, we might well be alarmed out of our security by the fact that, as far as God is concerned, we always dwell in the light. For even the night itself glows with a revealing force: “*even the night shall be light about me.*” Let us think of this if ever we are tempted to take license from the dark: it is light about us. If the darkness be light, how great is that light in which we dwell!

Note well how David keeps his song in the first person; let us mind that we do the same as we cry with Hagar, “Thou God seest me” (Gen 16:13).

Verse 12

Yea, of a surety, beyond all denial: "*The darkness hideth not from thee*." It veils nothing; it is not the medium of concealment in any degree what ever. It hides from men, but not from God.

"*But the night shineth as the day*." It is but another form of day: it shines, revealing all. It "shineth as the day"—quite as clearly and distinctly manifesting all that is done.

"*The darkness and the light are both alike to thee*." This sentence seems to sum up all that went before, and most emphatically puts the negative upon the faintest idea of hiding under the cover of night. Men cling to this notion because it is easier and less expensive to hide under darkness than to journey to remote places; and therefore the foolish thought is here beaten to pieces by statements that in their varied forms effectually batter it.

Yet the ungodly are still duped by their grovelling notions of God, and enquire, "How doth God know?" They must fancy that He is as limited in His powers of observation as they are, and yet if they would but consider for a moment they would conclude that he who could not see in the dark could not be God, and he who is not present everywhere could not be the Almighty Creator. Assuredly God is in all places, at all times, and nothing can by any possibility be kept away from His all observing, all comprehending mind. The Great Spirit comprehends within Himself all time and space, and yet He is infinitely greater than these, or aught else that He has made.

Verse 13

“*For thou hast possessed my reins*.” Thou art the owner of my inmost parts and passions—not the indweller and observer only, but the acknowledged Lord and possessor of my most secret self. The word “reins” signifies the kidneys, which by the Hebrews were supposed to be the seat of the desires and longings; but perhaps it indicates here the most hidden and vital portion of the man. This God doth not only inspect and visit, but it is His own; He is as much at home there as a landlord on his own estate, or a proprietor in his own house.

“*Thou hast covered me in my mother’s womb*.” There I lay hidden—covered by Thee. Before I could know Thee, or aught else, Thou hadst a care for me, and didst hide me away as a treasure till Thou shouldest see fit to bring me to the light. Thus the psalmist describes the intimacy that God had with him. In his most secret part, his reins, and in his most secret condition, yet unborn, he was under the control and guardianship of God!

Verse 14

“*I will praise thee*”—a good resolve, and one which he was even now carrying out. Those who *are* praising God are the very men who *will* praise Him. Those who wish to praise have subjects for adoration ready to hand. We too seldom remember our creation, and all the skill and kindness bestowed upon our frame; but the sweet singer of Israel was better instructed, and therefore he prepares for the chief musician a song concerning our nativity and all the fashioning that precedes it. We cannot begin too soon to bless our Maker, who began so soon to bless us: even in the act of creation He created reasons for our praising His name.

“*For I am fearfully and wonderfully made.*” Who can gaze even upon a model of our anatomy without wonder and awe? Who could dissect a portion of the human frame without marvelling at its delicacy, and trembling at its frailty? The psalmist had scarcely peered within the veil that hides the nerves, sinews, and blood vessels from common inspection; the science of anatomy was quite unknown to him; and yet he had seen enough to arouse his admiration of the work and his reverence for the Worker.

“*Marvellous are thy works.*” These parts of my frame are all Thy works; and though they be home works, close under my own eye, yet are they wonderful to the last degree! They are works within my own self, yet are they beyond my understanding, and appear to me as so many miracles of skill and power. We need not go to the ends of the earth for marvels, nor even across our own threshold; they abound in our own bodies.

“*And that my soul knoweth right well.*” He was no agnostic—he *knew*; he was no doubter—his *soul* knew; he was no dupe—his soul knew *right well*. Those know indeed and of a truth who first know the Lord, and then know all things in Him. He was made to know the marvellous nature of God’s work with assurance and accuracy, for he had found by experience that the Lord is a master worker, performing inimitable wonders when accomplishing His kind designs. If we are marvellously wrought upon even before we are born, what shall we say of the Lord’s dealings with us after we quit His secret workshop, and He directs our pathway through the pilgrimage of life? What shall we not say of that *new birth* which is even more mysterious than the first, and exhibits even more the love and wisdom of the Lord?

Verse 15

“*My substance was not hid from thee*.” The substantial part of my being was before Thine all seeing eye; the bones which make my frame were put together by Thine hand. The essential materials of my being before they were arranged were all within the range of Thine eye. I was hidden from all human knowledge, but not from Thee; Thou hast ever been intimately acquainted with me.

“*When I was made in secret.*” Most chastely and beautifully is here described the formation of our being before the time of our birth. A great artist will often labour alone in his studio, and not suffer his work to be seen until it is finished; even so did the Lord fashion us where no eye beheld us, and the veil was not lifted till every member was complete. Much of the formation of our inner man still proceeds in secret; hence the more of solitude the better for us. The true church also is being fashioned in secret, so that none may cry, “Lo, here!” or “Lo, there!” (Luk 17:21), as if that which is visible could ever be identical with the invisibly growing body of Christ.

“*And curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.*” “Embroidered with great skill” is an accurate poetical description of the creation of veins, sinews, muscles, nerves, etc. What tapestry can equal the human fabric? This work is wrought as much in private as if it had been accomplished in the grave, or in the darkness of the abyss. The expressions are poetical, beautifully veiling, though not absolutely concealing, the real meaning. God’s intimate knowledge of us from our beginning, and even before it, is here most charmingly set forth. Cannot He who made us thus wondrously when we were not, still carry on His work of power till He has perfected us—though we feel unable to aid in the process, and are lying in great sorrow and self loathing, as though cast into the lowest parts of the earth?

Verse 16

“*Thine eyes did see my substance*,” yet being imperfect. While as yet the vessel was upon the wheel, the Potter saw it all. The Lord knows not only our shape, but our substance; this is substantial knowledge indeed. The Lord’s observation of us is intent and intentional: “Thine eyes *did* see.” Moreover, the divine mind discerns all things as clearly and certainly as men perceive by actual eyesight. His is not hearsay acquaintance, but the knowledge which comes of sight.

“*And in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them*.” An architect draws his plans, and makes out his specifications; even so did the great Maker of our frame write down all our members in the book of His purposes. That we have eyes, and ears, and hands, and feet, is all due to the wise and gracious purpose of heaven; it was so ordered in the secret decree by which all things are as they are. God’s purposes concern our limbs and faculties. Their form, and shape, and everything about them were appointed of God long before they had any existence. God saw us when we could not be seen, and He wrote about us when there was nothing of us to write about. When as yet there were none of our members in existence, all those members were before the eye of God in the sketchbook of His foreknowledge and predestination.

This verse is an exceedingly difficult one to translate, but we do not think that any of the proposed amendments are better than the rendering afforded us by the Authorized Version. The large number of words in italics[2] will warn the English reader that the sense is hard to come at, and difficult to express, and that it would be unwise to found any doctrine upon the English words; happily there is no temptation to do so.

The great truth expressed in these lines has by many been referred to the formation of the mystical body of our Lord Jesus. Of course, what is true of man, as man, is emphatically true of Him who is the representative man. The great Lord knows who belong to Christ; His eye perceives the chosen members who shall yet be made one with the living person of the mystical Christ. Those of the elect who are as yet unborn, or unrenewed, are nevertheless written in the Lord’s book. As the form of Eve grew up in silence and secrecy under the fashioning hand of the Maker, so at this hour is the Bride being fashioned for the Lord

Jesus. Or, to change the figure, a body is being prepared in which the life and glory of the indwelling Lord shall for ever be displayed. The Lord knoweth them that are His: He has a specially familiar acquaintance with the members of the body of Christ; He sees their substance, unperfect though they be.

Verse 17

"*How precious also are thy thoughts unto me, O God!*" He is not alarmed at the fact that God knows all about him; on the contrary, he is comforted, and even feels himself to be enriched, as with a casket of precious jewels. That God should think upon him is the believer's treasure and pleasure. He cries, "How costly, how valued are Thy thoughts, how dear to me is Thy perpetual attention!" He thinks upon God's thoughts with delight; the more of them the better is he pleased. It is a joy worth worlds that the Lord should think upon us who are so poor and needy; it is a joy which fills our whole nature to think upon God—returning love for love, thought for thought, after our poor fashion.

"*How great is the sum of them!*" When we remember that God thought upon us from old eternity, continues to think upon us every moment, and will think of us when time shall be no more, we may well exclaim, "How great is the sum!" Thoughts such as are natural to the Creator, the Preserver, the Redeemer, the Father, the Friend, are evermore flowing from the heart of the Lord. Thoughts of our pardon, renewal, upholding, supplying, educating, perfecting, and a thousand more kinds perpetually well up in the mind of the Most High. It should fill us with adoring wonder and reverent surprise that the infinite mind of God should turn so many thoughts towards us, who are so insignificant and so unworthy!

What a contrast is all this to the notion of those who deny the existence of a personal, conscious God! Imagine a world without a thinking, personal God! Conceive of a grim providence of machinery!—a fatherhood of law! Such philosophy is hard and cold. As well might a man pillow his head upon a razor edge as seek rest in such a fancy. But a God always thinking of us makes a happy world, a rich life, a heavenly hereafter.

Verse 18

"*If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand.*" This figure shows the thoughts of God to be altogether innumerable; for nothing can surpass in number the grains of sand that belt the main ocean and all the minor seas. The task of counting God's thoughts of love would be a never-ending one. If we should attempt the reckoning, we must necessarily fail, for the infinite falls not within the line of our feeble intellect. Even could we count the sands on the seashore, we should not then be able to number God's thoughts, for they are "more in number than the sand." This is not the hyperbole of poetry, but the solid fact of inspired statement; God thinks upon us infinitely. There is a limit to the act of creation, but not to the might of divine love.

"*When I awake, I am still with thee.*" Thy thoughts of love are so many that my mind never gets away from them; they surround me at all hours. I go to my bed, and God is my last thought; and when I wake I find my mind still hovering about His palace gates. God is ever with me, and I am ever with Him. This is life indeed. If during sleep my mind wanders away into dreams, yet it only wanders upon holy ground, and the moment I wake my heart is back with its Lord. The psalmist does not say, "When I awake, I return to thee," but, "I am *still with* thee"; as if his meditations were continuous, and his communion unbroken. Soon we shall lie down to sleep for the last time; God grant that when the trumpet of the archangel shall waken us we may find ourselves still with Him.

Verse 19

"*Surely thou wilt slay the wicked, O God.*" There can be no doubt upon that head, for thou hast seen all their transgressions, which indeed have been done in Thy presence. And Thou hast long enough endured their provocations, which have been so openly manifest before Thee. Crimes committed before the face of the Judge are not likely to go unpunished. If the eye of God is grieved with the presence of evil, it is but natural to expect that He will remove the offending object. God who sees all evil will slay all evil. With earthly sovereigns sin may go unpunished for lack of evidence, or the law may be left without execution from lack of vigour in the judge; but this cannot happen in the case of God, the living God. He beareth not the sword in vain (Rom 13:4). Such is His love of holiness and hatred of wrong, that He will carry on war to the death with those whose hearts and lives are wicked. God will not always suffer His lovely creation to be defaced and defiled by the presence of wickedness; if anything is sure, this is sure: that He will ease Him of His adversaries.

"*Depart from me therefore, ye bloody men.*" Men who delight in cruelty and war are not fit companions for those who walk with God. David chases the men of blood from his court, for he is weary of those of whom God is weary. He seems to say—If God will not let you live with Him, I will not have you live with me. You would destroy others, and therefore I want you not in my society. You will be destroyed yourselves; I desire you not in my service. Depart from me, for you depart from God. As we delight to have the holy God always near us, so would we eagerly desire to have wicked men removed as far as possible from us.

We tremble in the society of the ungodly lest their doom should fall upon them suddenly, and we should see them lie dead at our feet. We do not wish to have our place of intercourse turned into a gallows of execution, therefore let the condemned be removed out of our company.

Verse 20

"*For they speak against thee wickedly.*" Why should I bear their company when their talk sickens me? They vent their treasons and blasphemies as often as they please, doing so without the slightest excuse or provocation. Let them therefore be gone, where they may find a more congenial associate than I can be. When men speak against God, they will be sure to speak against us, if they find it serve their turn; hence godless men are not the stuff out of which true friends can ever be made. God gave these men their tongues, and they turn them against their Benefactor, wickedly, from sheer malice, and with great perverseness.

"*And thine enemies take thy name in vain.*" This is their sport: to insult Jehovah's glorious name is their amusement. To blaspheme the name of the Lord is a gratuitous wickedness in which there can be no pleasure, and from which there can be no profit. This is a sure mark of the "enemies" of the Lord, that they have the impudence to assail His honour, and treat His glory with irreverence. How can God do other than slay them? How can we do other than withdraw from every sort of association with them?

What a wonder of sin it is that men should rail against so good a Being as the Lord our God! The impudence of those who talk wickedly is a singular fact, and it is the more singular when we reflect that the Lord against whom they speak is all around them, and lays to heart every dishonour that they render to His holy name. We ought not to wonder that men slander and deride us, for they do the same with the Most High God.

Verse 21

"*Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate thee*?" He was a good hater, for he hated only those who hated good. Of this hatred he is not ashamed, but he sets it forth as a virtue to which he would have the Lord bear testimony. To love all men with benevolence is our duty; but to love any wicked man with complacency would be a crime. To hate a man for his own sake, or for any evil done to us, would be wrong; but to hate a man because he is the foe of all goodness and the enemy of all righteousness, is nothing more nor less than an obligation. The more we love God the more indignant shall we grow with those who refuse Him their affection. "If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ let him be Anathema Maranatha" (1Co 16:22). Truly, "jealousy is cruel as the grave" (Song 8:6). The loyal subject must not be friendly to the traitor.

"*And am not I grieved with those that rise up against thee*?" He appeals to heaven that he took no pleasure in those who rebelled against the Lord; but, on the contrary, he was made to mourn by a sight of their ill behaviour. Since God is everywhere, He knows our feelings towards the profane and ungodly, and He knows that so far from approving such characters, the very sight of them is grievous to our eyes.

Verse 22

“*I hate them with perfect hatred*.” He does not leave it a matter of question; he does not occupy a neutral position. His hatred to bad, vicious, blasphemous men is intense, complete, energetic. He is as whole-hearted in his hate of wickedness as in his love of goodness.

“*I count them mine enemies*.” He makes a personal matter of it. They may have done him no ill, but if they are doing despite to God, to His laws, and to the great principles of truth and righteousness, David proclaims war against them. Wickedness passes men into favour with unrighteous spirits, but it excludes them from the communion of the just. We pull up the drawbridge and man the walls when a man of Belial[3] goes by our castle. His character is a *casus belli*;[4] we cannot do otherwise than contend with those who contend with God.

Verse 23

“*Search me, O God, and know my heart*.” David is no accomplice with traitors. He has disowned them in set form, and now he appeals to God that he does not harbour a trace of fellowship with them. He will have God Himself search him, and search him thoroughly, till every point of his being is known, and read, and understood—for he is sure that even by such an investigation there will be found in him no complicity with wicked men. He challenges the fullest investigation, the innermost search; he had need be a true man who can put himself deliberately into such a crucible. Yet we may each one desire such searching; for it would be a terrible calamity to us for sin to remain in our hearts unknown and undiscovered.

“*Try me, and know my thoughts*.” Exercise any and every test upon me. By fire and by water let me be examined. Read not alone the desires of my heart, but the fugitive thoughts of my head. Know with all penetrating knowledge all that is or has been in the chambers of my mind. What a mercy that there is one Being who can know us to perfection! He is intimately at home with us. He is graciously inclined towards us, and is willing to bend His omniscience to serve the end of our sanctification. Let us pray as David did, and let us be as honest as he. We cannot hide our sin. Salvation lies the other way, in a plain discovery of evil, and an effectual severance from it.

Verse 24

"*And see if there be any wicked way in me*." See whether there be in my heart, or in my life, any evil habit unknown to myself. If there be such an evil way, take me from it, take it from me. No matter how dear the wrong may have become, nor how deeply prejudiced I may have been in its favour, be pleased to deliver me therefrom altogether, effectually, and at once, that I may tolerate nothing that is contrary to Thy mind. As I hate the wicked in their way, so would I hate every wicked way in myself.

"*And lead me in the way everlasting*." If Thou hast introduced me already to the good old way, be pleased to keep me in it, and conduct me further and further along it. It is a way that Thou hast set up of old; it is based upon everlasting principles; and it is the way in which immortal spirits will gladly run forever and ever. There will be no end to it world without end. It lasts forever, and they who are in it last forever. Conduct me into it, O Lord, and conduct me throughout the whole length of it. By Thy providence, by Thy word, by Thy grace, and by Thy Spirit, lead me evermore.

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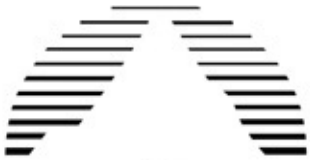

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[1] **wants** – lacks.
[2] **words in italics** – in the King James Version, all words that do not appear in the original Hebrew or Greek are set in italics, so the reader knows they were not part of the original inspired words of God, but were inserted by the translators to fill in the meaning. Quoted verses in this booklet have these italics removed; italics used here reflect the author's emphasis. Here is the original printing in the KJV: "Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in thy book all *my* members were written, *which* in continuance were fashioned, when *as yet there was* none of them" (139:16).
[3] **Belial** – Hebrew word meaning "worthless," applied to men considered worthless.
[4] ***casus belli*** – an event which proves a war.