Magnitude of God: Omnipotence and Righteousness, Psalm 139, Book 2

Al Sanders
THE MAGNITUDE OF GOD

OMNIPOTENCE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

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As we continue our studies in Psalm 139, we find the magnitude of God awesomely displayed throughout this Psalm. As you remember from Book I in this series, this Psalm divides neatly into four sections with six verses in each. These four stanzas correspond to four of God’s attributes. The first six verses speak of God’s omniscience, that is, that He is all-knowing and that nothing can escape His eye. The next series of six verses, 7-12, answers the question “Where can a person hide from God?” These verses answer by clearly displaying God’s omnipresence; He is everywhere present at the same time.

**God’s Omnipotence**

In the third stanza, verses 13-18, we are confronted with God’s omnipotence. Now, it’s interesting to realize that here the Psalmist could have talked about the creative handiwork of the Lord throughout the universe. In this world we see that He has formed things with such perfect order and they are held in proper balance by His almighty hand. We could also consider the fact that God’s omnipotent handiwork can be
seen even in the tiny atom. But instead of any of these things, the Psalmist deals with the subject of omnipotence from the standpoint of human creation—the remarkable aspect of our complete and complex bodies.

One of the large areas in the field of advertising today is packaging. People are paid vast sums of money to come up with designs which will attractively present the product to the public, not only in such a way as to enhance sales, but also in order to give perfect protection to that item as it's handled. But, despite the developments in this intriguing field, no one has really improved upon the packaging the Lord has shown us in so many beautiful ways.

For instance, consider a California sunsweet navel orange with that thick, beautiful peel which perfectly protects the precious fruit on the inside. Or, there is the banana that has its wrapping tightly formed around it from the time it grows on the tree until it reaches our kitchen table. But, even more than in these, God's packaging can be seen in human life. And here in verse 13 of Psalm 139 David observes, “For Thou hast possessed my reins; Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.”

**Perfect Ownership**

Let's look at that word “possessed,” which indicates the Lord's rightful ownership. It's not just a case of God observing our lives (for we know from the earlier passages in this chapter that He does that continually and constantly.) The thought here is that the Lord indwells us. This we realize is true if, by faith, we've received Jesus Christ as Savior. The Holy Spirit literally takes up residence within our bodies. We become the temples of God. But this is even far more than that. The idea signifies complete ownership in the sense that God is given the total pre-eminence in the possession of these human lives of ours. That’s perfect ownership!

My wife and I have been privileged to own a number of cars during our lives together, but I'm sure, looking back across these 28 years we've shared, we probably never thought we'd ever see the pink slip to some of the automobiles we were driving. In fact, for several of those years when we were first married, we couldn't even afford a car! Then, later, the auto always belonged to the bank or to the particular lending institution. God has the ownership, not by virtue of the pink slip, but because of the fact that He formed us; He made us; He created us. And when He did so it was in that perfect relationship which was ours at the time of birth.

And then the Psalmist proceeds to say, “The Lord possesses my reins.” Now in the Hebrew the idea behind “reins” is really the word “kidneys.” You see, the ancients believed that the kidneys actually contained the seat of man's desires and longings! His most hidden and vital portion was his reins or his kidneys. And in a sense it's true. The sensitivity to pain in this region might cause those not schooled in the field of human anatomy to think that this could indeed be the central source of man's difficulties. What's behind this particular idea is the fact that God has possessed the strongest sensibilities, the very driving powers and ambition of our lives.

Of course, we know that horses are guided with the reins. They're given an indicative speed thereby; they get the message to stop, go, change direction. The same is similarly true with God possessing the reins of our individual lives.

What are your driving powers? What are your strongest sensivities? Who possesses your reins; the reins for power, ambition, success, popularity? Those reins can also be misguided into immoral thoughts which can sometimes fill
our thoughts. It all boils down to who possesses your reins; there can be only two masters. It's not even a case of you or God doing it. It's really either Satan or God controlling the daily purposes and the strongest sensitivities of your existence.

A Beautiful Tapestry Of Life

David further explains, “Thou hast covered me in my mother's womb.” The word for covered means “to weave or to knit together.” What a perfect term for God's tapestry of the human life; weaving together the arteries, membranes, the muscles, the nerves, the veins, the capillaries—all of these things knit together. The fascinating part of it is that God has had a plan for each of us ever since birth, actually even before the foundations of this world. Just stop to consider that. You were in His mind and thoughts of love before the world was formed.

God has covered us or woven us perfectly. Remember the science of embryology was most likely unknown in David's day, and yet, here in vivid and delicate language he explains mankind's prenatal development. Because, you see, writing under the influence of the Holy Spirit, David had insight, not only into theology, but the laws of science as well. These two are very closely related to one another.

The only possible response to such a realization are the next four words: “I will praise Thee.” Look for a moment at the fact that there are personal pronouns at both ends! “I” and “Thee.” The verb is “praise” and the time or the tense in which this praise is to be given is all in the future. “Never mind your past efforts,” David urges us, while at the same time assuring his own heart, “I will praise Him.”

Webster states that to praise means to glorify or to magnify. Unfortunately, often the last thing most of us do is to praise the Lord. We need to memorize and practically apply these four words, “I will praise Thee.” In school, at the office, driving along the freeway, when you're mad, when you're sad, when you're tempted, when you're discouraged—at all times, the secret is, “I will praise Thee.”

“Fearfully And Wonderfully Made”

In the eighth chapter of this same book, the Psalmist confesses, “When I consider the heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou has ordained, What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that Thou visitest him?” (vs. 3, 4). Yes, David could say, “I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.” It's not a case here of self-deprecation on the part of the author, but it's what God has done in so admirably constructing these human bodies. Yet, we realize that they are constantly in danger of being dissolved because of innumerable problems and diseases. It's only when we realize that we're awesomely and wonderfully made that indeed we can say with the poet of old,

Our life contains a thousand strings, And dies if one be gone. Strange that a harp of a thousand strings should keep in tune so long.

Often we carry on with the mistaken idea that life is going to continue just the same as it is now. But it won't. Things will never ever be the same. Job was right when he observed, “My life is but a hand's breadth. My life is faster than a
weaver's shuttle.” What graphic pictures of how fragile our existence can be. In the New Testament, James points out the fact that our lives are but vapor, here for a moment and then gone in a second of time. Of course, keep in mind that from a spiritual standpoint, we're actually made for all eternity. These souls will live on and the bodies will be given their resurrected form, even like that of our blessed Savior's.

One of the greatest questions that theology has never been able to answer, nor has science for that matter, is how the soul is actually made a part of the body. Who knows but the Creator Himself? We simply read in Genesis 2:7: “The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

The Human Body—A True Marvel

Bishop Taylor Smith some years ago made this observation: “Power of thought is more wonderful than wireless telegraphy; the power of speech more wonderful than any instrument, any organ made by man; and the power of action by the hand the most wonderful tool in the workshop of the world. Take the red rivers, the arteries; the blue veins, the canals; or the nervous system, the telegraphic communication—these are all God's unspeakable gifts of love and light.” And what a beautiful commentary on the words of the Psalmist David, “I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.”

The word “marvelous” is often overworked, much like its synonym, “wonderful.” Marvelous should be reserved for the unspeakable glory of God's creation; for sights such as Niagara Falls, watching the tons of water cascading over that giant cataract; or the Alps on a clear day, seeing those snow-capped peaks of majesty in their pristine glory; or perhaps some of the great art treasures and paintings on display in such museums as the Louvre in Paris. The problem is that although the soul knows the marvelous works of God, so often the flesh is in control that we forget the Lord's handiwork. We're like the little boy in Sunday school who intently listened to his teacher as she was giving the lesson on the creation of God, taken from the book of Genesis. She concluded with a question for him, “Son, can you tell me who made you?” There was a noticeable pause for a few moments, and then the lad spoke up rather bravely, “Well, Ma'am, actually God made me so long, but then I just grew all the rest of the way.”

A Priceless Treasure

Consider the life of the flesh and how often it seeks to control the soul, all too frequently gaining the uppermost position so that our eyes are clouded and cannot see the marvelous works of God in the creation of mankind. Never overlook the tremendous value of the bodies of men and women. It's not always that we human beings value it very highly, however. In fact, I was interested to read recently in the Los Angeles Times where at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, Dr. Donald T. Forman has propounded some amazing statistics. After exhaustive tests he has discovered that the inorganic components of a person weighing 150 pounds are now worth $5.60. Now, that may not sound like a great deal to you, but keep in mind that back in 1969, the same person weighing 150 pounds was only worth $3.50. And if you can remember back as far as I can, to 1936, the individual was worth only 98 cents. Of course, I
repeat and stress the fact that those monetary values are only as far as the organic components are concerned.

Yet in God's omnipotent insight, our value is inestimable. He was even willing for His own Son to die for us. And we can never forget that tremendous truth, that our souls may know the fact that we are marvelously, wonderfully and fearfully made. Did you know, for instance, that the nervous system of man is controlled by a brain with three trillion nerve cells, of which 9.2 billion are in the cortex, or the covering of the brain alone? That completely staggers the mind.

I was interested to read a book by Dr. Alton F. Everest, titled, *Dust or Destiny*, from which a motion picture was made a number of years ago by the well-known and God-blessed Moody Institute of Science. Dr. Everest, to give us a basis of comparison, illustrated that if a man were to make an electronic equivalent to the human brain, it would require our largest building, something akin to the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., to house it, and all the electricity that could be generated at Niagara Falls to operate it! Yet, that's just the brain of one single individual.

Consider the ear as well. Suppose you played a single note on the piano. After that, you played the very next adjacent note. Now while we're only able to hear from the piano two different notes, the human ear is able to detect ten other tones between those two notes. A piano has 88 keys, while the keyboard of the inner ear has about 15,000.

**The Tireless Heart**

Think about the heart now. This is a muscle that does most of the heavy work in the body, causing the blood to surge throughout our frame every day that we draw breath. And we take it all so much for granted. Actually, it's a double pump system with two circulatory systems all in one. Visualize for a moment a figure eight in your mind's eye. Think about the heart as being at the junction of the figure eight—the lower part of this system is the circulation through the veins, arteries and capillaries of the body. The upper is the pulmonary circulation, with blood sent through the lungs, purified, and then made ready for the repeat round trip. And you know, that blood travels fast, too. It takes eight seconds for a round trip to the brain, and only 18 seconds for a round trip to the big toe.

On the average, the heart beats 72 times a minute, but with exertion it can go to as rapid a pace as 200 times a minute. At the normal rate the heart beats about 100,000 times a day. An estimate, based on the normal 72 times a minute rate, reveals it beats about 40 million times a year and, in a normal lifetime, about two or three billion times! And the amazing thing is that it does that without any lubrication or vacation. Unlike most of our automobiles, which often have to be recalled by the manufacturer, the human heart doesn't normally have those problems. Of course, we realize there are problems due to age, disease or some other circulatory reason. In the human embryo, the heart starts beating long before there even is a heart. And the heart pumps from five to six quarts of blood through the vessels each minute, more than 264 million quarts during a normal lifetime.

Now to get an idea of how much work the heart does, suppose you could take a single beat and convert the power that's generated from that into usable energy. Lift up your Bible a moment. It probably weighs a couple of pounds. One heartbeat could raise that a foot or more. Now that's a lot of concentrated power. Here's another illustration. If you could
take all the power generated by that heart in one day's time (over a hundred thousand beats) and concentrate it into one huge throb of vital power, it would be sufficient to throw an average small car of our day some six stories into the air. Now, that's absolutely amazing!

We know that all tissue has to rest at some time or other, but the question comes, how can the heart, which beats year in and year out, second in and second out, ever get any kind of a rest? The Lord has seen to that as well! Look at it this way. Each beat lasts approximately 1/8th of a second and the contractions take about 1/10th of a second, so that leaves about 1/16th of a second for the heart to be at complete rest. Now just trust me, if you figured that out mathematically, it would ultimately mean that the heart rests about six hours a day or 20 years of a lifetime.

**Evolution? Not A Chance**

Well, suffice it to say, David wasn't an evolutionist. He believed in the creative power of God and that the Lord created out of absolute nothing. Yes, marvelous and wonderful is the creation of our heavenly Father, but greater still is the marvel that He makes saints out of sinners. The glory of the first birth, being physical, can't even begin to be compared with the glory of the second birth in eternal salvation.

Is evolution anything to be concerned about? Quite frankly, it takes vastly more faith to believe in evolution than it does to believe in creation. Maybe you've heard this, but it is a practical illustration. The probability of evolution is vaguely compared to someone believing that an explosion in a type foundry resulted miraculously in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary. My friend, we are so wonderfully made and God's omnipotence is certainly shown clearly in the formation of these fascinating bodies of ours.

Verse 15 suggests, “My substance was not hidden from Thee, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth.” The word for “substance” here is “frame.” In fact, the New American Standard Bible uses the possible idea of “bones.” “My bones were not hidden from Thee.” Let me suggest the very obvious, that there's nothing more hidden than the development of the human fetus or embryo. There's no light in the womb and there are only the dark and narrow confines. The secret of God's labor is purposely not seen by man. As a matter of fact, much of the development of the inner man is still proceeding in secret. Only God can see what's taking place.

**God Knows Our Intricate Details**

In Hebrew, the word for “substance” represents that which makes up the smallest part, the least divisible particle. You see, God knows even that, although we certainly don't. Even science doesn't know it all, but the Lord does! Hence, “We are curiously wrought,” we're told in this passage. One translation puts it this way, “We are embroidered with great skill.”

My wife does a lot of work on needlepoint, as I'm sure many of you ladies do. And I'm absolutely amazed at how she can take those gorgeous colors and make such beautiful pictures come out. On one side, the pattern makes perfect sense, but on the other it's a confusing mass of jumbled colors. As we consider all the aspects of God's creative handiwork in His omnipotence, relating it for this moment to the human body, what tapestry can even begin to equal the
human fabric, hidden from others, revealed to none? That was evident in the series of photographs that were exposed of the human embryo in *LIFE* magazine some years ago. Actually, our living substance is only completely seen by God!

In verse 16 we have further information, “Thine eyes (that is, God’s eyes) did see my substance.” Here “substance” is a little different from the way it was used in the preceding verse. David says, “And in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.” Our family likes to go down to a place called The Pottery Shack in Laguna Beach. At specified hours you can watch the fellow there as he takes a worthless lump of unseemly clay and begins to shape it on the constantly turning wheel. When you first look at what he's doing, you'd think it was going to be an exercise in utter futility. But, the potter has in mind what his work of art is going to look like when it’s completed. And so does God when He looks at us. We ought to be profoundly glad for that! He sees all our imperfections, but He knows what He can make out of us through His Holy Spirit in this life as well as in the life to come.

I was in the Cleveland Airport not too long ago and saw a fascinating motto over one of the desks. First of all, in big, bold letters there were two beseeching words, *BE PATIENT*. Then underneath that the legend explained, *God isn’t through with me yet.* How very true this is. Paul knew it as he wrote to the church at Philippi, affirming, “He who hath begun a good work in you will perfect it (will work it out; will bring it to maturity) until the day of Jesus Christ.”

The term “substance” in verse 16 really has reference to the embryo. In Hebrew it pictures something that is tightly wound up like a ball that is to be unwrapped. I remember as children years ago every once in a while we’d find an old used golf ball. We’d rip off the outside covering only to find out that inside, it was totally wrapped up with what looked like an endless rubberband. Inside of that, of course, was the rubber core. This illustrates the word “substance” as it is used here in verse 16. It's a life that is to be unrolled; it's the immaterial part of man that is to be seen in its fullest development throughout every experience of our lives.

**Beauty Is Only Skin Deep**

A problem we need to confront is that so often we're greatly troubled by defects which may appear on the exterior, but our spirit isn't troubled by the deformities which come from within the soul. There are many people who buy artificial beauty from Grecian Formula 19, Miss Clairol, Maybelline or Revlon to supply natural beauty. In some cases that's not a bad idea at all. But still, we must realize that beauty is only skin deep. There are spiritual needs and imperfections which have to be met and cared for as well.

Verse 16 also has spiritual application to the Church, the body of Christ. If we carry over the picture, we understand that it is out of the sin and degradation of this earth that the Lord has seen all our imperfections. This Body, the Bride of Christ, is also wonderfully made, completely fashioned for that coming hour, the marriage supper of the Lamb, when we shall forevermore be with our glorious Lord.

**Where The Treasure Is, There Is The Heart**

Reflecting back on God’s omniscience, omnipresence and omnipotence, the Psalmist begins his conclusion in verse
17, "How precious also are Thy thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!" If you were to look around your home for all the things that you consider your valuables, what would you find? Some priceless bits of porcelain? Perhaps an antique piece of furniture handed down from a relative? Maybe a gold coin? What are the things that are precious to you?

I must confess that my wife and I are really hooked on auctions. We love to go, even though we may not buy anything. As a matter of fact, we went to one auction some weeks ago out in Hollywood at Bekins' warehouse. It was on a Saturday morning from 9 to 12. The precious items of a woman's entire lifetime were sold to the highest bidder, often bringing far less than she paid for them originally. It seemed rather sad.

The things that really count of course can't be exchanged for dollars. The precious things are truly the thoughts of God. This is why Paul wrote to the Roman church, "O, the depths of the riches, both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out" (Romans 11:33). David wasn't alarmed by the fact that God knew all about him. I wonder if we are?

The Psalmist is convinced, "O Lord, how great are Thy works, and Thy thoughts are very deep." Now let's just think for a moment about what occupies our individual mental processes day-by-day. What do you think about in a given 24-hour period? If we're honest I'm afraid most of us would have to say we have thoughts of pride, contempt, criticism, jealousy, hate, selfishness and, even at times, immorality. Moreover, if you took us at our very best moments, probably when in prayer, even then we'd have to agree that our thoughts are vastly limited in understanding God's truth and love.

Have you ever wondered what God thinks about? With His omniscience, I can assure you He thinks about you and about me. God has thoughts of love, tenderness, mercy and compassion. The Lord isn't willing that any should perish. Say, it would be absolutely inconceivable to imagine this world without a personal, thinking Redeemer! How precious are the thoughts of God! Can this be said of us as we ruminate, thinking about this thing and that? I know on occasion, when I wake up very tired in the morning, not having slept too well, my wife will ask me what the problem was. I might respond by commiserating, "Well, if I could just turn my mind off!" Have you ever felt that way? One of the best ways to turn your mind off is to turn it on to the thoughts of God, realizing all of His love, grace and compassion for us.

It's fascinating to me to realize that here in verse 17 we find the only place in this entire Psalm where exclamation points are used. I find that intriguing because it really refers back to verse two, where we find David's affirmation, "Thou knowest the smallest things in my life—when I sit down and when I get up; even before they happen, you know about them."

The gift of thinking rationally elevates us above the animals, the trees and the rest of God's creation. Again, the question is, just what do we think about? How do we use this gift? How do we reflect upon the omnipotence of the Lord?

Another aspect of God's omnipotence is displayed in verse 18, "If I should count them (that is, God's thoughts), they are more in number than the sand; when I awake, I am still with Thee." It's sometimes true that your last thoughts at night will become your first thoughts in the morning. So be certain that when you go to sleep you're thinking about things...
that are elevating and positive as far as spiritual and scriptural meaning are concerned.

Now here we're told that God created just so much sand. If you've been to the beach and have seen all the sand along the shore, you probably think that sand is in plentiful supply; it's an innumerable commodity and yet the Creator only made so much of it. I don't suppose there's anything we have more of than sand. Nothing seems lighter than a grain of it and nothing heavier than wet sand. But while God created only so much sand, there's absolutely no end to His thoughts for you and for me.

Five hundred years before Christ, the philosopher Pindar commented, "If all His glorious deeds my song would tell, the shore's stones I might recount as well." And he was right!

_Awakened To The Presence Of God_

Continuing, David confides, "When I am awake, I am still with Thee." There are people today who are asleep, perhaps not physically but certainly spiritually. They may be asleep because of depression, sin, pride or neglect. When these things happen you can certainly be sure that the Lord hasn't left us; He hasn't moved one iota. When we awake out of our spiritual coldness and lethargy, we'll find that God is still there waiting for us.

One of the best ways to fall asleep at night or to arouse ourselves in the morning is by being awakened to the presence of God. It's true, when we awake we may find the trouble is still with us, but how much better to find that God is also with us to meet our troubles.

There are some things we're all sure of. Hundreds of years ago, however, people weren't quite so sure of the geographical boundaries of the great continents of the world. Over in the British museum there's an interesting mariner's map which was used by British sea captains in exploring the area of North Africa. That map bears little resemblance to our maps of this day. In the vast areas of land there were cautionary legends written over the unknown areas, such as "Here be giants," "Here be fiery scorpions," "Here be dragons." In 1525 a born-again Christian navigator, Sir John Franklin, came across this map and scratched out those three fearful terms. Across them all he bravely inscribed the words, "Here be God!"

So how great is the sum of God's thoughts of love, compassion and tenderness on our behalf? Let us never overlook them as we commit ourselves to His faithful hand.

_God's Righteousness_

As we come to verse 19 we find an abrupt change. In the next six verses we have a perfect definition of God's righteousness. He is always just and fair at all times. Let's read verse 19 and you'll see what I mean, "Surely, Thou wilt slay the wicked, O God; depart from me therefore, ye bloody men." The question which immediately comes to my mind is, "Does this really fit in a Psalm of praise?" Most definitely I think it does because God, who sees all evil, will also, ultimately, slay all evil.

Our nation learned many lessons, both individually and governmentally, through the Watergate tragedy. It's a simple fact of life that some sins may go unpunished for lack of evidence or even for lack of desire and vigor in exposing them. When it comes to the sins of men our courts are so
capricious, but God is always righteous. The Lord will not always suffer His creation to be defaced by wickedness.

Is Hatred Justified?

A very fine Christian woman Bible teacher asked me not too long ago why I seemed to enjoy the book of Psalms so much. She was frank to point out, “I just never read or study them at all!” When I asked her why, she replied, “Because there seem to be so many things injected which don’t square with the New Testament principle of love. The writer will veer off into bloody thoughts.” She cited the Psalm 139 passage wondering, “Since in the New Testament Jesus tells us we are to love our enemies, why would David say, ‘O, God, slay the wicked?’”

That’s a very good question. In Romans 1:28 we get a graphic picture of the wickedness of men’s hearts. Of course, this entire section has much to say by way of commentary on the subject, but briefly note this one sentence: “And even as they (that is, those who have rejected the gospel of Jesus Christ) did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind to do those things which are not seemly.” So let’s look at this question for a moment. Why does David pray, “Surely Thou wilt slay the wicked”? Remember, that everything in the Bible isn’t necessarily a reflection of God’s will. The book of Ecclesiastes is a good example of that. Of course that book of Scripture is truly inspired, but it’s a commentary on life from man’s limited viewpoint. It honestly mirrors only finite human concepts.

The second thing is, David is concerned about the enemies of God, not his own personal enemies. There were those who had ridden roughshod over the grace and love God bestowed upon His creation. We’re always going to have trouble with people, but those with whom David had personality conflicts are not the object of his prayer.

Vengeance Is The Lord’s

You also see in David’s case, he’s not asking to do the slaying himself. He fully realized that vengeance belongs to God. The Psalmist wasn’t trying to get even. He simply points out that someday the wicked will be slain because of their rejection of God’s gift of love.

What a commentary of the times we find in verse 20. “For they speak against Thee wickedly, and Thine enemies take Thy name in vain.” I think of the sick so-called comedy programs on TV. Most of those performers, if they stop to think at all, wouldn’t consider themselves as enemies of God. Yet in their blasphemous mimicry of spiritual ideals they can’t be considered much more than those who are enemies of God. The Lord gave these enemies tongues and yet they used them to speak against Him, to take His name in vain. The Hebrew translates it, “They make sport of God.”

This world has become very amusement conscious. Now “to muse” means to think, but when you put an “a” in front of it, the negation simply means to not think. People don’t want to think today. They want to be entertained and they seem to like, and migrate toward, those who speak against God’s righteousness.

In reading verse 20, you have to be impressed with the fact that David is far more concerned about what these people do to God and His name than to what they could possibly
do to him. Whether he's speaking about the actual physical enemies of God or the tempting sins which come with regularity to all of us, makes little difference because we experience both. A young man told me the other day of experiencing the pain and suffering of waking up each morning with a heavy heart. He frankly wondered whether or not it was even worth getting up and going on. My friend, there are many enemies of God.

Each spring, Biola invites students, faculty and friends to go to Dodger Stadium and watch a baseball game. It's a special Biola night. One year, my whole family went. We happened to get the tickets which were just at the edge of the Biola seating group. Next to me was a woman who was already loaded with alcohol before she got there and who proceeded to drink obnoxiously the rest of the night. She was loud and profane. The people behind us were also smoking, drinking and cursing. It was very uncomfortable that evening and I didn't really enjoy it. I don't even remember who the Dodgers were playing or who won the game that night. Some people may want to live that way but we certainly didn't enjoy listening to their vile remarks. There are individuals who speak against God and who are enemies of the Lord. They take His name in vain. Listen, it will not always be so. God's wrath will someday be meted out on those who have willfully rejected His truth. May the Lord help us to understand our relationship to those in the world. We cannot be isolated from such things, but by the Holy Spirit we can be insulated from them. The Bible tells us that evil communications corrupt good manners and the actual translation is that evil companions ruin the testimony. Don't be corrupted by the times in which we're living, nor by society as it seeks to foist itself upon us with that which is considered to be good, but actually, in the sight of God, is vain and blasphemous.

David then asks a question in verse 21 which suggests that it is possible at times to hate something and yet not have that hate be considered by God as a sin. We remember Paul's exhortation: "Be angry and sin not." Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, David's two questions are these: "Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? And am not I grieved with those who rise up against Thee?" In the light of this, ask yourself, "Am I a good hater?" Before you answer that, let me underscore the fact that to hate someone for his own sake, or for any evil he or she may have done to us, would be entirely wrong. God's Word definitely speaks against such a practice. But, the more we love God, the more indignant we should grow with, especially if it is seen in our own lives.

It goes without saying that there's all too much hatred in the world today. Years ago, when Elvis Presley was so popular, there was a story making the rounds about a street corner peddler who sold two kinds of buttons. He set up his stand at a very busy pedestrian intersection, selling little lapel buttons that apparently carried a most interesting message. One of the buttons was blue with white letters, reading, "I love Elvis." They were 15¢ a piece. The other buttons, exactly the same size, but in red, bore the antagonistic lettering, "I hate Elvis." They sold for 25¢. When asked why the difference in the cost of two identically sized buttons, the man explained, "Well, it's the law of supply and demand! You see, there are only a few people who want to wear a button avowing love, while the majority of folks would rather hate. So I just raised the price on the hate buttons and get more money that way." That's quite a perceptive comment on the human race!
Again, to hate someone for his own sake, or for any evil that may have been done to us, is wrong in the sight of God. Hatred, after all, is what caused the first murder. It's often been likened to battery acid which, if spilled on your clothes, can work quickly and destructively. You may not see it at the moment the acid spills, but that chemical continues to work on the fabric until eventually the cloth wastes away in utter rot. Hatred actually does more damage to the container in which it's stored than to the person or the object on which it's poured.

A Righteous Indignation

David was a good hater. The example he sets is very practical. The Psalmist rightly hated only those who hated God. He was also extremely grieved at those who very humanly tried to rise up against God. Mr. Webster defines grief as “mental suffering from bereavement, remorse, a mishap or disaster.” I wonder, are we ever grieved because of the rampant evil and wickedness which surrounds us? Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers, “Awake to righteousness, and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.” You see, the things of the world, the flesh and the devil are all enemies of God. Too frequently we have a tendency to hate the sinner while at the same time respecting, even loving the sin. David, however, had things in proper perspective. He knew correctly that we are to hate the sin, but as God shows us, to love or to have compassion for the sinner.

When it came to transgressions, David wasn’t neutral in his feelings concerning evil. Verse 22 declares, “I hate them (that is, the sinfulness that is so rampant in the world) with perfect hatred.” Now, “perfect” here means mature or full. Then he goes on to say, “I count them mine enemies.” In other words, those who are against God are basically our enemies too, as we are believers in Christ. When it comes to the proper stance we’re to take on the subject of sinfulness, we can’t possibly afford to compromise, or even to simply take the middle ground, to be stand-offish and neutral.

I remember seeing a cartoon in *Peanuts* some time ago in which Linus was explaining his philosophy on life. He explained to Lucy that he was actually a fanatic. But with certain things, it really didn’t matter too much. Therefore, he described himself as being a “wissy-wassy fanatic.” I’m just afraid that there are too many Christians who would fall into that same category of simply being “wissy-wasy” when it comes to the things of God.

It may be that some of us are like those two women who thought they knew a great deal more about life than they really did. They got on the subject of capital punishment and the one asked the other, “Are you for it or against it?” The friend thought for a moment and then she avowed, “Well, I guess I’m for it, just as long as it isn’t too severe!” That sounds like the height of folly, doesn’t it? David looked upon the sinfulness of man as the Lord does—with a perfect hatred, hating their iniquity but loving God’s creation. This is far different than a hatred that’s born of a rebellious heart. That is repeatedly condemned in Scripture!

There’s another possible concept here, too. The subject of hatred being directed at those who are the enemies of God, could refer not only to individuals and their practices, but also to our own thoughts and the sins that flood our concepts. Sometimes we allow our minds to run in channels which are really contrary to the will of God. Do we count such solicitations to evil as also being the enemies of God? What kind of hatred do we have of those temptations to
which we seem to continually give in? Aristotle once affirmed, “Anybody can become angry; that’s easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose and in the right way, that’s not easy.” David knew it, but he had found the right way to be angry and not sin. Because you see, the man who can’t be angry at evil really, in the final analysis, lacks the enthusiasm for God and for good.

Misguided Hatred Hurts The Family Of God

Many years ago, my wife and I had the privilege of working at Winona Lake, Indiana for a brief time in the summer. I was the announcer for the Bible conferences which were carried daily over the Moody Bible Institute radio station, WMBI, coming directly from the conference grounds. That week, two of my favorite speakers were participating. They were giants in the faith in their day. One had a delightful brogue and enjoyed preaching with fascinating stories and illustrations. The other was a stimulating Bible scholar and expositional preacher, the likes of which I don’t know if we have today. He was fantastic. They’re both now home with the Lord.

Although the conference was more than a quarter of a century ago, I can still very vividly remember how bitterly those two men hated each other, perhaps for the successes that they had gained or, who knows, maybe for some other cause. It’s hard for most of us to accept someone else’s popularity, especially when it’s in our own field of endeavor. The sad thing is that this feud between two Christian leaders was common knowledge to the people on the grounds. They couldn’t help but see the bitterness that literally exuded from their lives. What a tragedy. Basically, their messages were complementary to one another. Both could have been so greatly used by the Lord if they could have only overlooked their bitter personality differences.

I remember one evening how the song leader handled a situation. He realized the gravity and the tension that existed between these two men, which by now had clearly been telegraphed to the people in the audience. So, he got up and encouraged everyone, “Now, folks, if you’ll turn to hymn number such-and-such, we can all sing together, ‘Love Lifted Me.’” Then, as the pianist started playing the introduction, the song leader went on to mumble (which got on the air although I’m not sure how many people in the audience were able to hear it over the piano introduction), “Here in the hymnal seems to be the only place where you’ll find love at Winona Lake this week!” It was truly an unfortunate situation of wrong hatred. So, let me ask you again, “How do you hate? Are you good at it in the sight of God? Do you hate the same things that the Lord hates?”

Search Me And Know Me

The final summary of Psalm 139 comes in verses 23 and 24. Let me read them together because they actually should be treated as a unit. Then we’ll break them down individually. David entreats the Lord, “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” First of all, as a word of caution, don’t ever pray this prayer unless you’re willing for God to do exactly what He desires to do and what you request! It may be costly; it could well be expensive, emotionally, spiritually and even physically, if you
ask the Lord to search you out and to remove those things which are displeasing and unseemly to Him. You see, the searching and the trying (which simply means to dig, pillage, rummage or go through every particle and parcel in one's life) actually requires an impartial jury. That's why you or I couldn't be the judge and jury of our own lives. It doesn't work that way! David realized he couldn't trust himself to do the searching. He was right.

The Psalmist was a man of supreme courage. Are we? Let's think back. When David was a young man, he executed a giant by the name of Goliath, using only a slingshot. When he was in his early years he killed both a lion and a bear with his own hands. Yet, when it comes to the situation of looking into his own heart, he found that the hardest thing of all to accomplish. He was right in wanting to know all his sins and having them brought out into the open. Most of us are just the opposite. We'd like to forget ours! That doesn't necessarily mean to confess them, but rather just to have somebody overlook them so that God can't see them. No, it's not an easy thing to do, to mean this prayer, "Search me, O God." Make no mistake. Before you take such a step, count the cost first! Realize at the same time that sin is worse than a terminal disease. We can't expect to find restoration for our souls, minds or bodies without experiencing the cleansing God wants to give to us. For an example, if you're ill, you go to a physician, trying to determine accurately the extent of the disease. You don't hold back on explaining to the doctor just exactly how you feel; you don't hesitate to recite every single ache and pain that just might possibly be significant for the diagnosis. This is why David is saying, "Rummage, pillage, dig through my life, Lord. Search me out and know in Your omniscience just exactly what my needs may be."

It was the Reformation theologian John Calvin, who commented on this verse, "That man (namely, the Psalmist David) has a rare confidence, who offers himself so boldly to the scrutiny of God's righteous judgment." And he was right. Would we be as willing?

We Can't Judge Against Our Standards

David plaintively asks, "See if there be." Do you suppose that God might find some unseemly thing in your life? I don't hesitate to say I know that there would be something in mine. And there's no way by which we can judge ourselves. It definitely has to be done by God. Don't try to accomplish it any other way. Too many of us are like the little boy who proudly announced to his playmate, "I'm six feet tall!" His friend laughed in scorn, "Of course you're not! How do you figure you're six feet tall?" Rather proudly the first lad pulled himself up to explain, "Well, I just simply took off my shoe and measured it up the side of my body. And it went six times, so that means I must be six feet tall!" His friend scoffed and rightly chided, "Don't you know, you can't measure yourself by yourself?"

And we can't, either. Nor can we even measure ourselves by our neighbor, or any other person, no matter how low or how high the standard, as much as we'd like to. We have to measure ourselves by the perfect standards God has established. In the final analysis, that's all that counts. All things are open and naked to Him with whom we have to do.

Now, very beautifully the chapter and verse ends where verse one began. The whole point is that our thoughts might be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. The word "try" means to cull out, to sift, to test, to weigh, to make a trial. David bravely requests, "See if there be any wicked way... and lead me in the way everlasting." To sum-
marize, this requires that we’re definitely willing to let God take from us those oft-besetting sins. Or, as Augustine of old prayed, “Take the sins from me, and even more, take me from the sins.”

You know, this is a beautiful way to start as well as to finish every day. The Apostle John reminds us, “My little children, these things write I unto you, that you sin not.” Then he goes on to say, “And if we do sin, make sure you understand that we have an advocate with the Father, even Jesus Christ the righteous.”

A Pain That Aspirin Won’t Cure

“See if there be any wicked way in me.” In the Hebrew, it’s not so much the idea of sinfulness, although that’s most certainly a part of it. But the translation is really the word “hurtful,” or “the way of pain.” On television, we see a lot of advertisements for Anacin, Bufferin, Bayer Aspirin and all of these headache remedies. But, I tell you the way of pain is not necessarily a physical problem that just gives us a headache to endure. The meaning behind this is that it pains God’s Holy Spirit when we sin and when we live in such continual degradation.

Make certain when you pray to be released from your sins, that you really want to be delivered from all of them. Don’t be like that carnal Christian who, during prayer meeting week-after-week-after-week, would always get up and pray something like this, “Oh Lord, clean all the cobwebs out of our lives. Oh Lord, clean all the cobwebs out of our lives.” You can imagine how this got to be so wearisome for everyone. Finally, one of the old deacons of the church took action. One particular night, when people were given the op-