

Psalm 139: The Glory of God vs. the Glory of Man

Humans throughout the world, and especially in America, hold on to the belief that we can improve our lives, make ourselves happy, and even achieve perfection. This desire and belief is rooted in the original sin: we want to be like God, determining good and evil for ourselves. In Psalm 139 David sings the praises of God, magnifying Him as the only one that can give us our greatest satisfaction and happiness. David praises his omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence, then closes with a plea for God to know his heart and show how he can better know and follow Him.

Verses 1-6: God's Omniscience

"You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar."

-Psalm 139:2

In short, the theme of these verses is that God knows everything, and he has known it for eternity. He knows every aspect of our past, present, and future. He doesn't just know a small piece of our history, or a certain spin on it, he knows it all. God also knows our motivations and actions. He knows the things we do and he knows why we do those things. You are not saved by works, but faith. Finally, God has an active stake in this knowledge. He has planned our days, guided our ways, and protected our path. David's prayer shows that we cannot manipulate who we are or how we're known to God, and that instead of placing our hope in how others view us or know us, we should put our trust and faith in the one that knows us completely.

Verses 7-12: God's Omnipresence

"If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me."

-Psalm 139:9-10

That God knows us completely can be a frightening thing. When someone knows the dirty parts of our lives, our tendency is to avoid and get away from those people. But in these verses we see that, despite this desire on David's part, there is no escaping God. We cannot escape Him in other religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, or Islam. We cannot escape through Oprah's guru, the spirits of the wind and mother earth, or in fantasy and video games. We cannot physically escape God either. No matter where you travel, or how often you run away when brothers and sisters in Christ confront you, God will find you, and He will confront you again. Last, David shows that we cannot hide from God. It does not matter where you sin, if it is at night, on the internet, or in the dark. *"Even the darkness is not dark to you, the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you."* However, this inescapability is only frightening if we trust in ourselves for salvation. When we understand God's saving **power** in our lives, this attribute of God is incredibly comforting.

Verses 13-18: God's Omnipotence

"I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well."

-Psalm 139:14

After praising God's omniscience and omnipresence, David now praises His omnipotence, focusing particularly on the power of God in the creation of men. He speaks of God being totally involved in making every aspect of our physical and spiritual being. The words he uses evoke the sense of an artist molding clay or creating a timeless classic. There is a reverence and awe present in the process of creation as God controls his work from start to finish. And yet, instead of trusting God, his creator, mankind only trusts himself. Society sets its own standards of beauty, telling women that to be pretty they must be thin as a rail and making sure that men know their role is to chase women, drink beer, and play video games. We have entire systems that inherently discriminate against people because of their race or gender. Millions of people are still bonded slaves or are trafficked across borders and oceans for sex. Every year millions of infants are murdered worldwide in the name of "choice". We only treat each other with reverence and see the beauty in God's creation when it is convenient. David describes God's work as "precious", "wonderful", and "intricate." We should have the same attitude all the time.

Verses 19-24: Our Response

"Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

-Psalm 139:23-24

How does David respond? He responds by aligning himself with God. We are called to thirst for the glory of God and for his justice to rain down. But as we align ourselves with God, we will find that this thirst for justice is most righteous when it is turned on ourselves. The reality is that if we really ask for God to search us, we will find that we are the men of blood that take God's name in vain to whom David refers. The only thing that prevents the wrath of God from justly pouring down on us is the fact that Jesus stepped in and took that anger, justice, and wrath for us. After examining the unfathomable knowledge, inescapable presence, and unattainable power of God, we see that the combination of his perfect love, perfect justice, perfect mercy, and perfect righteousness is truly His greatest attribute. The only response we can have is David's. To turn to God in faith and ask him: *"Search me, O God, and know my heart!"*