

The Hound of Heaven

Psalm 139:1 *To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.*

O LORD, you have searched me and known me!

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar.

³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.

⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.

⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!

⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,

¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me.

¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night,"

¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.

¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.

¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.

¹⁹ Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!

²⁰ They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain.

²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you?

²² I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.

²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

Psalms 139

The Hound of Heaven

IT BEGINS,

I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him, down the arches of the years;

I fled Him, down the labyrinthine ways

Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears

I hid from Him, and under running laughter.

Up vistaed hopes I sped;

And shot, precipitated,

Adown Titanic glooms of chasmed fears,

From those strong Feet that followed, followed after.
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbed pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat—and a Voice beat
More instant than the Feet—
'All things betray thee, who betrayest Me'.

This is **Francis Thompson's** "The Hound of Heaven," a phrase name many have heard, but few know why. Twenty years after this poem was printed (1893), a short interpretive essay by **John O'Connor** explains the meaning it in his own poetic way. It begins with the title "Hound of Heaven," "The name is strange. It startles one at first. It is so bold, so new, so fearless. It does not attract, rather the reverse."¹

What is a hound dog (other than an Elvis song)? It is a hunting dog, bred to have all its senses keenly sharpened. Its ears hear the quietest bustle; its eyes see anything afoot; its nose smells the dullest scent; its feet are swift; its jaws are clamps. It exists for this purpose—to seek and, if necessary, kill its prey.

¹, **John Francis Xavier O'Connor** (1912). *A Study of Francis Thompson's Hound of Heaven* (New York: John Lane Company, 1912), 7.

To call God “the Hound of Heaven” is therefore to put a picture in your mind, one that quite frankly is already there in many people. **This God of the Bible is hot on the trail of his prey and his desire is to snuff out all who do not seek after him.** What do you suppose the natural inclination is of those who have such a picture framed inside their head? Why, it is to run from him in a million different directions. And this is exactly what men do.

I believe the chief hiding place Western culture has now found in its flight away from the Hound of Heaven is sexual sin and burying its consequences. Forgive me for the list I’m about to give you, but this point needs to be impressed upon you for **three reasons** I have in mind from today’s psalm. First, the list.

From the **institution of marriage** that is mocked and re-defined, to **TV shows** that now always have to have a gay couple, to the normalization of **adultery**, to no-consequence **promiscuous sex**, to the quickly emerging acceptance **polygamy**, to 60 year old men falling “**in love**” with 10 year old girls, to endless free **pornography**, to child **sex-trafficking**, to the seething, anger filled **demonstrations** for the cause of GLBTQ where women take off all their clothes wearing nothing but costumes of their own private parts on their

heads, to the insistence that I must be called by the **sexual pronoun** of my choosing (of which there are dozens) or you will be fired from your job, to **marrying inanimate objects** like the Eiffel Tower or the ocean, to sexual **harassment** so disgusting even the most unbelievers are outraged by it, to violent rage-filled **protests** over a women's right to murder her unwanted baby that was created by a couple's hedonistic desire to be free of all authority, to the brutal **snuffing out** of the tiniest of lives to the applause of celebrities, to the near **pervasive rape** of women by powerful men just to break into Hollywood, to **tweeting** for public official's families to be kidnapped and stuck in a cage with pedophiles simply because you disagree with their politics, to out-of-control **divorce** rates, to **fatherlessness** in the inner-cities, to businesses being **coerced** into letting men go into women's bathrooms, to the woman of the year being a man who got a sex change, to letting little boys who "**identify**" as girls participate in girl's sports, down down down this civilization falls into increasingly dark holes as it tries to hide from God; faster and faster its violent convulsions tear apart the very fabric of anything that is objectively good. This endlessly multiplying lists of violently self-destructive behaviors that arose from subjective morality and individual rights trumping all else is,

quite simply, ending life as we have known it. Yes, this is what it means to flee the Hound of Heaven. These are the holes people go to get away from him.

So why such a list? **First**, putting this evil in one place like this should impress upon you the terminal condition that we are in and the grave danger it presents. These things are in the news every day, but such a list teaches Godfearing people how far we've moved, how quickly it has happened, and how serious the condition is that we now find ourselves. Literally 10 years ago, this list would only be half as long. 30 years ago, $\frac{1}{4}$ as long. 50 years ago, maybe one or two things.

Second, such a list prepares us to talk about some things from the song today that get at the heart of the reasons why our culture now looks like this. **Third**, until this problem is discovered, and the evil is seen as the true blackness that it is, the Light from the song will seem pale and dull. But when darkness is truly understood, the light seems all the brighter. And in this way, the bright Sun that is our Psalm 139 can illumine the path of those wandering about in the darkest darkness.

So first, **the terminal condition**. How did it come to pass? I want to look at this from the perspective of the poem

and then move into the perspective of the psalm. O’Conor explains,

The poet begins with the idea of the soul fleeing from God ... and how it strives to hide from Him in sorrow and joy ... The human heart is not generous enough to give up all, and be satisfied with the love of God. It wishes other things besides God, and because God will have no other love in His place, it fears the love of God which demands this sacrifice, and it sacrifices God instead ... The soul is in fear of Him.²

Someone else (who I do not believe is a Christian) writes, “What is interesting in this poem is that instead of presenting the problem as one of us seeking God ... [it] turns the tables on us in saying that God ... is seeking us and we are running away...”³ To those who know the Scripture, such a thing shouldn’t seem surprising at all. That’s not a turn of the tables from its point of view, **but it certainly is from ours.** For in our natural state, we all like to think that when someone becomes a Christian, it is because they are seeking Him.

² Ibid., 15.

³ Tess Hughes, “The Hound of Heaven,” (Feb 12, 2014), <http://tesshughes.com/teachings/the-hound-of-heaven/2074/>.

I mean, we even name movements in the church “Seeker-Sensitive.” Some like to think that everyone is seeking God!

Instead, what we are seeking is anything but, because God is a hound and we are terrified scurrying little rabbits. We have already seen this in the psalms, “**The LORD looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one**” (**Ps 14:2-3; Ps 53:2-3; Rom 3:11-12**).

How well the poem describes the biblical truth. This truth explains exactly how we got here. It is the natural state of all human beings. You were not running towards God; you were running away from him. Our actions that we think are so enlightened and modern and free are nothing but dark, ancient sins of people enslaved to passions and lusts. The reason it is happening at such break-neck speed now is because we have now cast off law, which is the only thing apart from the Gospel that God gives to civilizations to keep them from becoming as bad as they could be.

We’ll return to the poem at the end of the sermon, but here I want us to move into the Psalm, a song which someone has said, “**There is no thought of escape from a Hound**

of Heaven.”⁴ Indeed, this is a critical lesson that everyone must learn, unbeliever *and* believer. And we must learn to tell others about if they are to have any hope in this life or the life hereafter.

Psalm 139: Basic Structure

Psalm 139 has some very well-known language. From its first verse, “O LORD, you have searched me and known me” to its seventh verse, “Where shall I go from your Spirit?” to its thirteenth verse, “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb,” this song is a wonder and a treasure. Indeed, its message is “too wonderful for me” (6) and yet “my soul knows it very well” (14).

The majority of its message teaches us about a believer delighting in the power and knowledge of his God. But it would be much easier to read it and preach it if only it had ended at vs. 18. Of this, someone has said it is “among the most beautiful psalms in the Psalter if it had finished at [here].”⁵ In fact, the last several verses are so disconcerting

⁴ Goulder, 243.

⁵ Goulder, citing E. Reuss, 238.

to some, that they insist it must have been added on much later. All they seem able to do is read the difference in message and conclude that **these have to be two different poems by two very different authors**. Such is the way sceptics think. For the first, longer section of the song is so happy and upbeat, while the end of it becomes an imprecation, “**Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? ... I hate them with complete hatred ... Oh that you would slay the wicked**” (vv. 21, 22, 20).

Psalm 139 continues **the last section of Davidic songs** (138-145). “**A Psalm of David**.” It also adds the superscription that we have not seen in 30 songs, “**To the choirmaster**,” which again in the LXX is always translated, “**For The End**.” In the minds of the Church Fathers, this meant that the song pointed beyond its original setting (or the setting of the post-exilic compiler of the psalter), to the latter-days. **We’ll talk about this more later**.

Making sense of the two different parts of the song is the key to its interpretation. There are two ways of seeing this. The first is to **look at its structure**. Many have seen the poem as a **chiasm** (see the end of the sermon for a couple of them). In this case, the reason this matters most is because such a structure proves that it really is one rather than two poems.

And if it is one poem rather than two, we have a very different interpretation of it.

What it says at the beginning returns at the end. Notice the parallel in vs. 1 and 23-24. “O LORD, you have searched me and known me” (1). “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” (23-24). This parallel alone is enough to show you that the song tells a complete story and that the difficult-to-hear (for many) ending is somehow related to the happiness in the rest of the song.

The second thing to look at is the basic structure of 1. An Invocation, 2. God as the focus, 3. David as the focus.⁶ We’ve just seen the invocation (vs. 1). This song is written to Yahweh. “O LORD...” In the invocation is a recognition of God’s omniscience. “You have searched me and known me!” As we have also seen, the ending parallels this, and as such adds the main point of the song, which in the words of one of the earliest extra-biblical writers we have on this psalm exhorts, “Since, therefore, all things are seen and heard, let us fear him and abandon the abominable lusts that

⁶ Dandi Moyers, “The Use of Parallelism in Psalm 139,” *Quartz Hill School of Theology*, <http://www.theology.edu/journal/volume4/Psalm139.htm>. There are other ways of thinking about the structure, but this is the simplest, and I think, the most helpful for a sermon.

spawn evil works, in order that we may be shielded by his mercy from the coming judgments” (1Clement 28:1). Can you hear in Clement’s sermon his urgent appeal to do the very opposite things found in that list we have above? That’s one of the reasons for the list, which of course we could have added many other lists to as well.

God as Focus (2-16)

This invocation in the song immediately gives way to a lengthy focus on David’s God. This is approximately vv. 2-16. As we move into this part of the song, the Psalmists are filled with reflections upon Job and Jonah and Jeremiah. But through reflections on them, our thoughts are filled with lofty doctrines such as omniscience (vv. 2-6); omnipresence (vv. 7-12), omnificence (13-16).

These three big words refer to God’s knowledge of everything, his being everywhere, and his ability to do anything, especially to create something. They are unique attributes that belong to one Being in the universe. Other beings know things, but not *everything*. They are somewhere, but not *everywhere*; they do things, but not *anything* they want. As such, these topics bring us into a kind of majestic,

worship-filled study of God. Once simply cannot study topics like this and truly know them and have any response but worship.

Omniscience

The first topic is **omniscience**. God knows everything. It begins, “**You know when I sit down [perhaps ‘settle down’] and when I rise up**” (2). That’s something that other people can know too, of course. Its focus in the poem is perhaps to get us oriented towards this being an “evening” song (Goulder). In other words, this is a kind of song that you say before going to bed.

It quickly takes us to places no one else can know. “**You discern my thoughts from afar**” (2). Who knows the thoughts of a man, let alone when they aren’t even near them? Maybe a married couple or twins. Maybe. But even then, not very well.

“**You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways**” (3). Now we have hit something that no one else can possibly know except the individual and God. So the movement of the lines go from possible to more impossible things until finally only God is left.

“Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether” (4). In this case, even the Psalmist doesn’t know what he is thinking; only God does.

Have you ever wondered if God hears your prayers in your head when you don’t say them aloud? Have you ever had the feeling that when you are thinking to yourself, you aren’t the only person listening? I don’t know that unbelievers have such thoughts. I don’t know how many Christians do. But our Psalm is answering them for you. God knows everything about you.

Just here, I want you to think about what knowledge of such knowledge might do to an unbeliever? Let’s assume that they came to a realization that God knew literally every thought they ever had. We’ll assume that they have a conscience and that they know right and wrong. How do you suppose such a thought might make them feel?

You actually don’t have to guess. John tells you. “People loved the darkness rather than the light because their works were evil. For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed” (John 3:19-20). We are right back to our list again.

A word that Bruce Waltke has here is “anxiety.” Great anxiety. It is the feeling of knowing that you are about to be

caught red-handed. Importantly, he uses this word not for unbelievers, *but for David*. David feels anxiety about such knowledge, and he is a believer. “You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me” (5). This is the language of Job: “He has walled up my way, so that I cannot pass, and he has set darkness upon my paths” (Job 19:8). This is language of feeling trapped. And if God’s hand comes upon him, what will happen? How much more would an unbeliever feel this and try with everything in their might to run away from those feelings?

Why would David feel anxiety? The Targum is interesting here. It adds some words in order to try and teach the Jews the meaning. It says, “*Before you are revealed my sitting down to occupy myself with the Law and my rising up to go to war.*” You can look upon this in more than one way. You can look upon it as the David who was obedient, or the David was *not* obedient. The Bathsheba incident begins, “*In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to war ... David remained at Jerusalem*” (2Sa 11:1). He had his eyes somewhere else, in fact, they were right there on our list above again.

David knows his own heart and thus confesses, “Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.” This thought really blows his mind. Added to this anxiety about the things God knows is the fact that no one else in all the universe is like this, and therefore it is impossible to truly understand either the knowledge itself or the ramifications of such knowledge. Yet, vv. 1-4 are not put in negative terms. It is as if David’s simultaneously treasures this knowledge from a Supreme Being. This vital piece of information is the very opposite thought that an unbeliever has ever had. And it behooves us to know why he is able to have it and more generally, that others beside him can have this quiet trust and confidence in the face of a doctrine that can be quite disconcerting.

Omnipresence

The second topic adds to the first. The omniscient God is also omnipresent. It begins with a Trinitarian focus on the Holy Spirit, someone David knew well (Ps 51:11). “Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?” (Ps 139:7). The hare running from the Hound of Heaven! The anxiety from vv. 5-6 has not yet departed. And

again, David is a believer! The realization that God knows everything is suddenly connected to the fact that this same God is everywhere, and so it won't help to run away, even if he tried. All people have to come to this understanding of God, if they are to be prevented from perishing in their sins. And at the moment they first hear it, it can be quite an **anxiety-inducing thing**, one such that unless the Hound is out for a different purpose, you can never expect will be taken well.

But David's anxiety seems to move to quiet confidence again as he repeats what he did with omniscience by adding line upon line to get the point across. **"If I ascend to heaven, you are there!"** (8). That's a good thought! Yes, God is in heaven.

"If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!" (8b). This half of the verse is important to consider. Sheol is **the place of the dead**. In the OT, all dead people go there. So, is David thinking merely about dying? Is this just figurative? The LXX translation renders Sheol as it always does—*hades*, hell! If I make my bed in hell, you are there! God is in hell!

Many people think that hell is the one place God isn't. But God is omnipresent. He is everywhere, including hell

(be it the good side of Abraham's bosom or the side of judgment, it doesn't matter). Thus, when a person goes to hell they do not escape the all-knowing eye of the LORD. The feelings this can cause are anything from **anxiety** to just **re-signing oneself** because there's nothing they can do about it anyway. AC-DC's "I'm on the highway to hell" can basically be summed up with two words: *Oh well*.

But for the Christian, this wonderful knowledge is actually **comforting** in the midst of the broader troubling idea. Why? Because of the knowledge of who this God is. "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" (9-10). Here, the "Right Hand" returns again, and this is indeed **Christ**, the Right Hand Captain of the Armies of Heaven.

This is an image of grave power. It is a power that **Jonah** felt when he tried this very thing only to find himself aboard a boat full of angry sea-hands who demanded to know which person had offended God. But it is not unruly, unmitigated arbitrary power. It is the power of someone who can go to the farthest recesses of the ocean, take a man by the hand, and lead him and hold him. This is also the lesson of Jonah who thought he was a dead-man until God sent a fish

to swallow him yet keep him alive. God's providences are secret, dangerous, unsearchable, and yet for the Christian, **a veritable resurrection from the dead**. And this is what Jonah and the Right Hand teach us, that the unknowability and unpredictability and yet nearness and intimacy of God reach us in Jesus Christ—who died for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Thinking about God's attributes apart from Christ only leads to disaster, for how else can we see the goodness present in them? This is why it doesn't help to be a mere theist. For what if such a God is evil?

Omnificence

Into this, we have God's **omnificence**. That is, his supreme power and ability to do whatever he wants, especially shown forth in creation. “If I say, ‘Surely the darkness shall over me, and the light about me be night, even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you’” (Ps 139:11-12). The thought here returns to death and Sheol, but the image of darkness causes our minds to return to the time before creation, when the Spirit of God was hovering over the dark brooding deep, to the moment before God said, “**Let there be light.**”

To such a God as this, a God who *is* Light, such a condition is irrelevant. He created the lights for our sake, not his. The darkness of this known universe was bathed in the eternal light of his Being and Essence. And darkness is a very simple thing for him to overcome. All he needs do is sent forth his Word! The Targum is again thinking the same thoughts with us, “**Even the darkness does not obscure from your Memra**” (12).

What does that Word do? That Word creates. “**And God said, ‘Let there be light...’**” Here, David moves a few days later into the creation, when God said, “**Let us make man in our image, after our likeness ... so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them**” (Gen 1:26-27).

But he gets personal. This isn't about Adam and Eve, but David and you and me. “**For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one**

of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them” (13-16).

This is some of the most important reflecting upon creation in all of Scripture, especially in such wicked days as these. What Scripture? Consider Jeremiah, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations” (Jer 1:5).

I’ve been talking about the anxiety that comes with such knowledge of God, especially when you are a sinner. We’ve seen this tremendous list of sexual sins and even greater evils that result from them. This wickedness, in all of its perverted forms and iterations, is at its heart, a rejection of everything in these four verses. And while that ought to make you mad and probably makes you grieve because of what is happening in our day, more than anything is out to make you feel pity and to weep that men have rejected such a God as this.

What do I mean? First, [the rejections](#). You formed me in the inward parts. Nope. That one’s out. You knitted me together in my mother’s womb. Nope, that’s gone too. There is no “me” in the mother’s womb, only “her body” and a “blob of tissues.” So, [vs. 14](#) is out. And since the next

three verses presuppose this, they are out too. God does see any unformed substance; he doesn't write our days in a book; he doesn't know or care about our frame; he didn't make male and female, we are not wonderful creations, but accidents and freaks of nature who determine our own meaning and purpose and sexual orientation. To continue rejecting the inevitable truth of this Hound that is always following us, we have come to the point where now we even reject basic biology. Born with certain body parts and not others? Who cares. That's meaningless too.

At the heart, this is a denial of everything that it means to be human. And this is a pitiable state to be in. It is a denial of being made in his image. It is a denial of him caring for us, any of us. It is denial of his omniscience, his omnipresence, and his omnipotence. It is a denial of objective truth. It is a denial of basic binaries: right and wrong, good and evil, male and female. These, my friends, are the thoughts of demons, not humans. And it is why we must take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ. For we are showing in our day that mankind is capable of denying literally everything that they see and know is true about this world. Imagine what an eternity of thinking and living like this in hell would be like!

Indeed, they do it to their own destruction. This is why you must **weep**. For this knowledge of God is the root thing that gives the psalmist hope in the midst of a knowledge that he cannot escape about God—a knowledge that makes even him anxious.

That's the thing, isn't it? All people know this God. They all have a conscience. They all know right from wrong. They try mightily to sever this knowledge, but inevitably, like the Hound of Heaven himself, they cannot escape it. And it terrifies them. But without the knowledge that **he made everyone fearfully and wonderfully**, that he made them **purposefully and lovingly**, that he did this knowing all things and with all power and seeing everything perfectly as he was doing it, such knowledge only causes people to flee the Hound.

David as Focus (17-24)

At this point in the song, the focus shifts from God's knowledge of David to **David's knowledge of God**. In other words, he takes basic theology and appropriates it to himself. He does sit up there in the ivory towers of the theologians, but he figures out how this matters to him.

Notice what he does first. “How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you” (17-18). This is a riff off of earlier melodies, and they reinforce God’s comprehensive knowledge of just one man. God knows more things about him than all the sand on the beaches of the world. But rather than inducing sheer terror or causing him to run, these doctrines bring him pleasure and they are a treasure. This can only be because he knows the whole council of God, both the power *and the grace*, both the Creator *and the Redeemer*. If he only knew the former, he would cower in fear. If he only knew the latter, he wouldn’t know godly fear. What do I mean this time?

“Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!” (19). Here is that sudden change in the poem I mentioned. Where in the world did this come from? A moment ago, I said the sin happening in our world ought to make you mad. This is called the fear of the LORD, godly fear, righteous indignation, and it rests upon a certain knowledge of right and wrong, good and evil, God and his ways.

David has this fear now. He is thinking God’s thoughts according to justice. We’ve seen many occasions in his life

throughout the psalms that could account for such words, and he was constantly hunted down, not by the Hound of Heaven, but by **the hounds of hell**, his enemies

What does he hate them for? First, they are **men of blood**. Their violence, hatred, and viciousness cause them to hurt others, even killing them, taking life because life is cheap. Consider the act we mentioned earlier regarding taking the tiniest, most fragile of all humans—those in the womb. Next, consider the modern holocaust of infants in light of the Jewish mindset regarding the same.

First, the Scripture. “**When men strive together and hit a pregnant woman, so that her children come out, but there is no harm, the one who hit her shall surely be fined, as the woman's husband shall impose on him, and he shall pay as the judges determine. But if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe**” (**Ex 21:22-25**). It is interesting that the famous “**eye for an eye**” (*Lex Talionis*) law comes in the context of an unplanned abortion caused by physical harm!

Thus, Philo the Jew said, “**It is ordained in the laws themselves that ... no one shall cause the offspring of women to be abortive by means of miscarriage, or by any**

other contrivance.”⁷ Pseudo-Phocylides says, “Do not let a woman destroy the unborn babe in her belly, nor after its birth throw it before the dogs and the vultures as prey. Do not lay your hand upon your wife when she is pregnant” (184-86). And 1Enoch says that the wicked Watcher Kasadya (reflecting the Aramaic “Chaldaean” meaning “astrologer”) taught, among other evil things, “the smiting of the embryo in the womb so that it may be crushed” (1En 69:12).⁸

The difference between these Jewish teachings and the modern reversal? One trusts in God, believes he is sovereign, and respects all human life, especially that made in his image. The other denies God, spits in his face, devalues human life, and deliberately tries to efface the image of God in man as they run from the Hound of Heaven. There is a reason for righteous indignation, because we are literally destroying ourselves while casting off God, because we are forsaking

⁷ Philo, *Hypothetica* 7.7, in Charles Duke Yonge with Philo of Alexandria, *The Works of Philo: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1995), 744.

⁸ **Going Deeper.** There is reason to see this latter addition to the original “Book of the Watchers (1En 1-36) as a parallel to a very similar idea in ch. 7:1-2 where the fallen Watchers “taught [women] magical medicine, incantations, the cutting of roots, and about plants. And the women became pregnant and gave birth to great giants.” In other words, it almost appears like in Enoch the first abortions were taught by the Watchers themselves in order to keep the Nephilim from being born. If true, that’s some twisted history right there.

the chief end for which we were created—the glory and enjoyment of him forever.

In this fashion, the psalmist hates them because second because **they speak against God with malicious intent** (20). Specifically, they **take God's Name in vain**. This is a blaspheming of Jesus Christ, the only Name that men ever do take in vain, for you know they don't take Buddha or Muhammad or Thor in vain. Only Jesus, the only one who is the exact image of the Father. The one who never sinned, who cared and helped and healed and taught, who died for their sins ... this is the one they take in vain. Astonishing, isn't it?

Finally, **“Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies”** (21-22). At the end of the day the hatred stems not because they hate me, but **because they hate God**—by killing those he has made, by speaking against him maliciously, by taking his name in vain, and by rising up against him in defiance. He considers them his enemies, because they are God's enemies, and he wants to be on the side of the Right Hand, otherwise he knows he is doomed on that final day when he will come to judge the living and the dead.

With this, I wish to return to the Hound of Heaven poem and then finish with the Psalm. We began by thinking about how it is that the Hound is thought about by unbelievers and how, therefore, they run far and fast from God headfirst into sin, sin that multiplies like rabbits, only making the chase that much easier for the Hound. We've thought about the fear and terror this induces in the heart of an unbeliever, for it even brings about anxiety in God's people because they continue to sin.

We've seen that David does in fact have a different attitude, and we've seen how this is because he knows God to be intimate in his creation, present in his suffering, powerful in his weakness. But this is just the thing about the Hound of Heaven Poem. For though the image of the hound brings terror, and though the hound is relentless in his pursuit, “*As the hound follows the hare, never ceasing in its running, ever drawing nearer in the chase, with unhurrying and unperturbed pace, so does God follow the fleeing soul by His Divine grace*” [emphasis mine].⁹ The poem isn't about a Hound seeking to destroy, but to save. That's the twist!

⁹ O'Connor, 7.

Until a person has died and gone to hell, the Gospel teaches us that **Jesus Christ came to seek and save that which was lost**. Though we do not seek him, *he seeks us* and he is relentless in his pursuit until he finds us, confronts us, and changes us ... with his love. This is what David understood. There was no where he could go that would take him from the steadfast love of the LORD. Even when he was rebelling, this relentless Hound of Heaven was chasing after the lost sheep in order to bring him back to the fold. It is when you see the love of God in Christ and realize that the Hound is not out to crush you or eat you, but to save you that suddenly, all of these anxieties that make you fear God because you know they are true about him (and you) fade away into comfort, trust, and they become precious and valuable beyond gold or silver.

That's the twist of the poem which rests upon the twist of the Bible, the fact that **there is good news for those who do not deserve it**, because the God who created us in these ways is utterly unlike you and I, which is even more good news!

Returning to the end of the Psalm, we find another application, which is as Clement told us about earlier. **“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” (23-24). There are two ways this must apply. First, it is a warning for you to keep yourselves pure from the things in our great list above, and all the other wicked things that you find yourself surrounded by in this present evil age.

But second, remember that these are word “for the End” and that they ultimately take you beyond David by leading you to someone who would come after. Whether unbeliever or believer, this applies to all, for we never outgrow our need for the Savior. One more time, the Targum gets at this idea of the future when it says, “If I should count them in this world, they would be more than the sand; I shall awake in the world to come, and I shall still be with you” (Ps 139:18). The world and the world to come. That’s its addition.

In Christ, the world to come has come. These are the last days and God has spoken to us by his Son. He prayed this prayer to his Father and no deceit was found in his mouth. God tried him and knew his thoughts. There was no grievous way in him and so God raised him from the dead and lead him in the way everlasting.

This, and not your own righteousness, is your hope. And it is the Song of the End’s hope as well. So, trust in

Christ and his righteousness. Know that his thoughts were tried, that he was found blameless. And that these things happened so that Christ could become a perfect sacrifice that takes away the guilt of your own wicked sacrifices that you offer up each time you sin against God. Atonement is found here, at the cross. And life is found on the other side, in his resurrection, when you trust that Christ alone knows you, sees you, made you, died for you, and offers you life through his Name.

Pray to his Father for the forgiveness of your sins. Seek first the Kingdom of God. Pray for the many lost people in our generation who know nothing of this good news. Then, find ways to go out and tell them about the Hound of Heaven.

<p><i>To the choirmaster. A Psalm of David.</i> O LORD, you have searched me and known me! ² You know when I sit down and when I rise up;</p> <p>you discern my thoughts from afar.</p> <p>³ You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.</p> <p>⁴ Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.</p> <p>⁵ You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.</p> <p>⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.</p> <p>⁷ Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence? ⁸ If I ascend to heaven, you are there! If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there! ⁹ If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, ¹⁰ even there your hand shall lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. ¹¹ If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," ¹² even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you. ¹³ For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. ¹⁶ Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them. ¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! ¹⁸ If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you. ¹⁹ Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me! ²⁰ They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain. ²¹ Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? ²² I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies. ²³ Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! ²⁴ And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!</p>	<p>"For the end, a Psalm of David. O Lord, thou hast proved me, and known me. ² Thou knowest my down-sitting and mine up-rising:</p> <p>thou understandest my thoughts long before. ³ Thou hast traced my path and my bed, and hast foreseen all my ways.</p> <p>⁴ For there is no unrighteous word in my tongue: behold, O Lord, thou hast known all things, ⁵ the last and the first: thou hast fashioned me, and laid thine hand upon me. ⁶ The knowledge of thee is too wonderful for me; it is very difficult, I cannot attain to it. ⁷ Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? and whither shall I flee from thy presence? ⁸ If I should go up to heaven, thou art there: if I should go down to hell, thou art present. ⁹ If I should spread my wings to fly straight forward, and sojourn at the extremity of the sea, <i>it would be vain,</i> ¹⁰ for even there thy hand would guide me, and thy right hand would hold me. ¹¹ When I said, Surely the darkness will cover me; even the night was light in my luxury. ¹² For darkness will not be darkness with thee; but night will be light as day: as its darkness, so shall its light <i>be to thee.</i> ¹³ For thou, O Lord, hast possessed my reins; thou hast helped me from my mother's womb. ¹⁴ I will give thee thanks; for thou art fearfully wondrous; wondrous are thy works; and my soul knows <i>it well.</i> ¹⁵ My bones, which thou madest in secret were not hidden from thee, nor my substance, in the lowest parts of the earth. ¹⁶ Thine eyes saw my unwrought <i>substance,</i> and all <i>men</i> shall be written in thy book; they shall be formed by day, though <i>there should for a time</i> be no one among them. ¹⁷ But thy friends, O God, have been greatly honoured by me; their rule has been greatly strengthened. ¹⁸ I will number them, and they shall be multiplied beyond the sand; I awake, and am still with thee. ¹⁹ Oh that thou wouldest slay the wicked, O God; depart from me, ye men of blood. ²⁰ For thou wilt say concerning <i>their</i> thought, <i>that</i> they shall take thy cities in vain. ²¹ Have I not hated them, O Lord, that hate thee? and wasted away because of thine enemies? ²² I have hated them with perfect hatred; they were counted my enemies. ²³ Prove me, O God, and know my heart; examine me, and know my paths; ²⁴ and see if <i>there is any way</i> of iniquity in me, and lead me in an everlasting way."</p>	<p>1. To the singer. By David. A psalm. O LORD, you have searched me and known (me). 2. Before you are revealed my sitting down to occupy myself with the Law and my rising up to go to war; you understand my <i>attachment to your assembly from a distant people.</i> 3. But now when I walk in the way and when I lie down to occupy myself with the Law, you have become a stranger; and you have arranged all my ways. 4. Even when there is no speech on my tongue, behold you, O LORD, know <i>the thought of my heart,</i> all of it. 5. You press me in behind and before, and let loose upon me <i>the stroke of your hand.</i> 6. It is hidden from me, so that I cannot know it; it is mighty, I cannot attain it 7. Where shall I go from <i>before your raging?</i> Or where shall I flee from before you? 8. If I ascend to heaven, you are there; or if I make my bed in Sheol, behold, there is your Memra. 9. If I take the wings of the dawn (and) dwell at the ends of the sea, 10. even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. 11. If I say, "Surely the darkness <i>obscures me,</i> and the night is <i>dark</i> for me," 12. even the darkness does not obscure from your Memra, and the night gives light like the day; the darkness and the light are alike. 13. For you did create my kidneys; you weaved me in the womb of my mother. 14. I will praise you, for I <i>have declared</i> fearful things; your deeds are wonderful, and my soul knows (it) very well. 15. My bone was not hidden from you when I was made in secret, embroidered <i>in the womb of my mother.</i> 16. Your eyes saw my <i>body;</i> and in your book of remembrance <i>all my days</i> were written <i>in the days when the world was created at the beginning; all creatures were created, and he chose for himself one day</i> among them. 17. How precious also to me are your friends, <i>the righteous,</i> O God! How strong are their chiefs! 18. If I should count them <i>in this world,</i> they would be more than the sand; I shall awake <i>in the world to come,</i> and I shall still be with you. 19. O that you would slay the wicked, O God, and that men <i>who deserve the sentence of death</i> would turn away from me, 20. those who <i>swear by your name deceitfully,</i> (who) <i>take oaths in vain,</i> your enemies! 21. Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And <i>when they rise up against you I am stirred up.</i> 22. I hate them with a perfect hatred; they have become enemies to me. 23. Search me, O God, and know my thoughts; try me and know my dedications. 24. And see if there is the way of idols within me, and lead me in the way of <i>the upright of eternity.</i></p>
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Psalm 139 Chiasm (William Higgins)

- A.** Searched and known (v. 1): O LORD, you have searched me and known me!
- B.** David's thoughts and ways (vs. 2-3): You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from afar. You search out my path and my lying down and are acquainted with all my ways.
- C.** His words (v. 4): Even before a word is on my tongue, behold, O LORD, you know it altogether.
- D.** God acts toward him and is close to him (v. 5): You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
- E.** God's knowledge is too high to reach (v.6): Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain it.
- F.** God can see and know him in any place he might go (vs. 7-12): Where shall I go from your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from your presence?
- a.** If I ascend to heaven, you are there!
- b.** If I make my bed in Sheol, you are there!
- c.** 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.
- d.** If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me, and the light about me be night," even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is bright as the day, for darkness is as light with you.
- F¹.** God knows him from forming him and his days (vs. 13-16):
- a.** For you formed my inward parts;
- b.** you knitted me together in my mother's womb.
- c.** I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.
- c¹.** Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well.
- b¹.** My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- a¹.** Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.
- E¹.** God's thoughts are too many to count (vs. 17-18): How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I would count them, they are more than the sand. I awake, and I am still with you.
- D¹.** May God act toward the wicked so that they are far away from him (v. 19): Oh that you would slay the wicked, O God! O men of blood, depart from me!
- C¹.** The words of the wicked (v. 20): They speak against you with malicious intent; your enemies take your name in vain!
- B¹.** David's thoughts and ways – his loyalty to God (vs. 21-22): Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD? And do I not loathe those who rise up against you? I hate them with complete hatred; I count them my enemies.
- A¹.** Search and know (vs. 23-24): 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!

Parallels:

- A.** "searched" and "known," forms a bookend or inclusion with A 1 "search" and "know"
- B.** a focus on the David's thoughts and ways (God knows them); it has several "you" statements
- B¹.** a focus on the David's thoughts and ways (he expresses his loyalty to God); it has several "I" statements
- C.** the words of David; it has the name "Yahweh"
- C¹.** the words of the wicked; it alludes to the name "Yahweh" via Exodus 20:7 - the third commandment on taking Yahweh's name in vain
- D.** God's action in relation to David and the closeness of God to him
- D¹.** a request for God to act in relation to the wicked and the desired distance of the wicked from him
- E.** God's knowledge transcends – it is too high to reach
- E¹.** God's thoughts transcends – it is too many to count
- F.** God knows David because he can see and know him wherever he might go; God knows him geographically considered
- F¹.** God knows David because he formed him and his days; God knows him chronologically considered
- Within F.** - two questions and four hypothetical situations; a. heaven and c. may have some parallel in the connection between heaven and traveling through the sky; b. and d. may have some parallel in that Sheol is a/the place of darkness
- Within F¹.** - a. and a. 1 have a word for "formed" which makes a bookend or inclusion for this subsection; b. and b.1 both talk of God as weaver; c. and c. 1 both speak of God's wonder in making the writer

Ps139:1-24

- P(139:1a) 139:1 For the leader. A psalm of David. (139:1)
- A(139:1b-6) 139:1 I LORD, you have probed me, you know me
- B(139:7-10) 139:7 Where can I hide from your spirit?
- C(139:11-12) 139:11 If I say, "Surely darkness shall hide me, and night shall be my light"
- D(139:13-16) 139:13 You formed my inmost being; you knit me in my mother's womb.
- C'(139:17-18) 139:17 How precious to me are your designs, O God; how vast the sum of them!
- B'(139:19-22) 139:19 O God, and the bloodthirsty would depart from me!
- A'(139:23-24) 139:23 Probe me, God, know my heart
- A: To probe. B: To avoid. C: Greatness of the LORD. D: The LORD formed.