

PSALM 139 vs 1

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Charles Spurgeon wrote: One of the most notable of the sacred hymns. It sings the omniscience and omnipresence of God, inferring from these the overthrow of the powers of wickedness, since He who sees and hears the abominable deeds and words of the rebellious will surely deal with them according to His justice.

This holy song casts a clear light even to the uttermost parts of the sea, and warns us against that practical atheism which ignores the presence of God, and so makes shipwreck of the soul.



For the choir director. A Psalm of David,

¹ O LORD, You search and know me / here the poet inverts his gaze, from the blaze of suns, to the strange atoms composing his own frame. He stands shuddering over the precipice of himself. How between mystery and mystery his mind, his wonder, his very reason, seem to rock like a little boat between the sea and sky; when he throws himself, with childlike hast and confidence, into the arms of that Fatherly Spirit, and murmurs, "How precious are Your thoughts unto me, O God – George Gilfillan, 1813-1878.

² You know when I sit down and when I rise up You understand my thought afar off. / the prophet says, He awakens me morning by morning,

³ You inspect my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.

⁴ Before there is a word on my tongue, lo / mark this, O LORD, You know it all.

⁵ You surround me back and front, and laid Your hand upon me / what would you say if, wherever you turned, whatever you were doing, whatever thinking, whether in public or private, with a confidential friend telling your secrets, or alone in them – if, I say, you saw an eye... constantly fixed on you, from whose watching, though you strove ever so much, you could never escape – De Vere.

⁶ Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too lofty, I cannot reach it.

⁷ Where can I go from Your spirit? or where can I run from Your presence? / a heathen philosopher once asked, "Where is God?" The Christian answered, "Let me first ask you, Where is He not?" – John Arrowsmith, 1602-1659.

⁸ If I ascend to heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, You are there.

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9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the farthest parts of the sea / the sunbeams of morning; if I should fly as far and as swift as light, even in an instant, to the utmost parts of the sea – Ezekiel Hopkins; when we think that we fly from God, in running out of one place into another, we do but run from one hand to the other, for there is no place that God is not, and wherever a rebellious sinner runs, the hand of God will meet him, to cross him and hinder his hoped-for good success – Henry Smith;

10 even there Your hand leads me, and Your right hand holds me / He said, I am with you always.

11 If I say, Surely the darkness will overwhelm me; and the light around me will be night;

12 yes, even the darkness is not dark to You; but the night is as bright as the day: darkness and light are both the same to You.

13 For You formed my mind: You created me in my mother's womb / we in the 21st century are mystified about the complexity of life.

14 I thank You; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are Your works; and my soul knows it very well.

15 My frame was not hid from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully formed in the depths of the earth.

16 My being yet unformed, You saw; and in Your book were written all the days fashioned for me, when not one of them was.

17 How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! how vast is the sum of them! / how cold and poor are our warmest thoughts toward God! How unspeakably loving and graciously rich are His thoughts toward us – A.R. Fausset.

18 If I should count them, they would outnumber the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.

19 O that You would slay the wicked, O God: so depart from me, you bloody men / not only are they men of blood, homicidal, who shed human blood, but all other wicked and evil doers, who injure, or seek to injure others, or who slay their own souls by sin, or others by some scandal – whoso hates his brother is a homicide – Robert Bellarmine.

20 For they speak against You wickedly, and Your enemies take Your name in vain / next to God's glory is the good of ourselves and others; and so to take God's name without reference to this end, if we do not promote the good of others or ourselves, it is in vain, which is why Paul says, **I have not run, nor labored in vain.**



21 Do I not hate them, O LORD, who hate You? am I not grieved for those who rise up against You? / it is said that Adam Smith dislike nothing more than that moral apathy – that obtuseness of moral perception – which prevents man from not only seeing clearly, but feeling strongly, the broad distinction between virtue and vice.

22 I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them my enemies / not as some who can selectively hate some sin, but cling to some other; as many can hate pride, but love coveting and greed, or some other darling sin; **grieved** explains the meaning of the word: **hate**. The simple future in the first clause contains several distinct shades of meaning. Do I not, may I not, must I not, hate those hating You? Hate them, not as man hates, but as God hates – Joseph Addison Alexander.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts / as this song began, so it concludes: Search me, and know my heart; try me, assay me, analyze me like gold being tested, is it pure gold? or fool's gold? David says, Show me O God what I am really made of. Notice in the Psalmist's appeal, here is a man determined to explore the recesses of his own heart. Did Buonaparte, did Nelson, did Wellington, ever propose to do this? Were all the renowned heroes of past or present, I would ask them all if they ever had courage to enter into their own hearts. David was a man of courage. He wished to know his failures, that he might be delivered from them. He presents his prayer to God himself, the only Being in the universe who knows him – who pursues him in His own light. David desires to be tried by the only competent Judge, to have every evil removed – William Howells, 1832:

24 and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in Your everlasting way.

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