

Sovereignty, Election, And Grace (Part 2)

God's Sovereignty and Our Spiritual Creation

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In the previous sermon that I gave in this series we were addressing grace and works as seen from within the larger subject of God's sovereignty. We saw that we are indeed saved by grace through faith, but that works (though they do not save one) are required, and all of those who will be saved will be doing works. In fact, doing works that God has ordained is the very purpose for salvation.

II Corinthians 5:17 clearly states the following:

II Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a *new* creation.

It's that *new* creation aspect that I want us to think about as we begin this. Ephesians 2:10 tells us this:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained that we should walk in them.

We are **God's** workmanship. This is very important to understand. The new creation begins whenever God brings us into a very vital and dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ, and we begin to become worked with in a way that we should be very much aware of.

One of the major purposes of all of the sovereignty sermons that I have given is to provide us with evidence that God is out in front of us, creating. He is paving the way so as to enable us to do whatever He wants us to do. We are created **unto good works**. I am saying that God is out in front of us, making it possible by His grace so that we are enabled to do what He wants us to do.

No created thing creates itself. I want you to think of this in a spiritual sense for just a little bit, and I want you to connect this to something that we are all familiar with, and that is **evolution** in the natural world. The evolutionist is saying, in effect, that all of the plants, animals, insects and everything created themselves by adapting to the new environment. We all see that as an utter impossibility.

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We have to understand then, in like manner, **we do not create ourselves in Christ Jesus**. Our works play a very small role, which we will get into in a little bit, but it is **God** who is the Creator. If we somehow think that our works play a major, major role, then we are in effect guilty of believing in **spiritual evolution**, where we are creating ourselves. But we are a **new** creation, created **in** Christ Jesus, and we are **God's** workmanship. He is the Creator. He is the manufacturer.

Why does the manufacturer put what he is manufacturing into tests, if I can put it that way? We will call them (thinking of it in a manufacturing area) as really nothing more than *quality control* operation so that the manufacturer (God) can see whether what He is manufacturing (creating you and me in His image) is capable of responding to what He wants it to do; that is, the works that He is creating us for.

When you begin to put these thoughts together, that God is out in front, creating what He has previously designed to be in His image, He is enabling us, just like any manufacturer would do, to do what He wants us to do. And then He gives us a quality-control test, and we are to respond, showing Him that we are capable of doing what He is creating for us to do. Therefore we have no excuse for not disciplining ourselves, for not controlling ourselves, because He has previously enabled us to do what He wants us to do. He is not requiring of us that we do the impossible. We cannot manufacture ourselves, and we cannot do the works He wants us to do unless He has previously enabled us to do it, anymore than any manufactured item can do anything that it is not designed to do and that the manufacturer has not put into that manufactured thing to do.

We saw three broad general examples of what God does to enable us. We saw in Ephesians 2:8 that we are saved by grace through faith, but that this faith is God's gift. Therefore we should have enough faith to enable us to do the things that God is requiring of us individually. He does not require more of us than we can possibly deliver. That's His promise. We saw in II Corinthians 2:18-21 that it is God who paves the way to reconciliation with Jesus Christ and Himself **through** Jesus Christ that God supplies. We saw in John 3:3 that we have to be *born from above*. You don't know of any living thing that begets itself. We have to be born from above so that the new creation by the Creator can proceed.

How many other elements does God supply in order to make us into His image? If we can just say it generally, He supplies **everything**. That's what a manufacturer has to do in order to have the product that he manufacturers perform as He wants it to perform. All of these things that God does are **gifts** (what the Bible would call **grace**) that make it possible for His creation to proceed toward the fulfilling of His purpose.

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Please do not misunderstand. I am in no way denigrating the difficulty of our responses. God is able to create in such a way as to not take away our responsibility. Those responsibilities are indeed pressure-packed at times and require a great deal of self-discipline, endurance, and sacrifices. In the overall picture of what is required of us, this is very small in comparison to what God does to make the entire creative process possible so that it can succeed. That creative process is the building of character in God's image. Again, as we saw in that last sermon, character includes a great number of qualities *besides* morality.

We then began investigating verses that show God taking the initiative in producing the event that will fulfill His purpose. These verses show God as not merely responding to our choices, but as being the primary **cause** of the event that we might consider, from our perspective, as being either good or bad. God creates good, and He creates evil (or calamity). God creates light, and God creates darkness. Isaiah 45:7 gives this example. "I form the light, and create darkness."

The series of verses I used toward the end of that sermon all tended to cover what we would normally consider to be God-affecting-large-scale operations. We might say things like war, famine, disease epidemics, floods, and so forth; political changes, economic changes. But now, as we begin this sermon, we're going to look at some contexts that are directly aimed at what we might consider to be small **personal** situations that God addresses.

Let's go to Exodus 4:11-12. This is in the larger context in which God has confronted Moses with his responsibility, and Moses is balking because he feels timid about it. He doesn't feel that he is equipped to do the job. God's response to Moses is very interesting to you and me.

Exodus 4:11-12 And the LORD said unto him, Who has made man's mouth? [We all know that Moses complained that he was not an eloquent person] or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD? Now therefore go, and I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you shall say.

We'll get back to this thought in just a bit, but I want you to turn to John 9:3. We are at the beginning of a context in which Jesus heals a blind man, and we find the disciples questioning about whose sin made this man blind.

John 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither has this man sinned, nor his parents: but

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that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

The reality is that the man was blind. Turn now to Matthew 10:19-20. In this context, Jesus is addressing the twelve, because He is about to send them out on what we might call "a practice run."

Matthew 10:19-20 But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what you shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what you shall speak. For it is not you that speaks, but the Spirit of your Father which speaks in you.

In our thoughts, let's go back to Moses—first in that situation in Exodus 4 to get a little more background. God not only initiated the calling of Moses, but He also initiated his birth and the preservation of his life. In addition to that, it was God who gifted him with the mind that he had to enable him to take advantage of the magnificent education he received, but God also left Moses with a flaw in his speaking ability.

We might question why that occurred, and we can say that maybe God wanted Moses to be humbled in some regard. It was this that gave rise to the startling statement in Exodus 4:10-11 regarding God's involvement in providing some people with *other* deficiencies. John 9:3 is a confirmation from Jesus that indeed this does occur. It was God who made that man in John 9:3 to be born blind. Nobody sinned. God caused the man to be born blind. This is admitted very plainly by God in Exodus 4:11, which says: "Who has made man's mouth? or who makes the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD?"

I have no idea of the percentage of people born that God directly afflicts in this manner with what we might call "evil" or "calamity." I have no idea where things we might consider as *natural* occurrences—like genetic complications between a husband or a wife or whatever—begin or end, or when God's direct involvement begins or ends. The fact of the matter is that these verses authenticate, at least in some cases, God's direct involvement, and therefore the responsibility falls upon God for them being that way. On the other hand, Matthew 10:19-20 is a corroboration from Jesus' life that others besides Moses are recipients of what God promised Moses.

Let's understand that God's promise to Moses in Exodus 4, when He says "I will be with you," is not that Moses would suddenly become fluent in some pressure-packed situation. Rather what God is saying is that He would inspire Moses' words, and those

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words would be sufficient regardless of how the stammering tongue of Moses stammered them out. In other words, the promise is not that He would turn Moses into a silver-tongued orator. We need to understand that in the effectual outworking of the promise, it is God's **presence** and His control of the situation that is the miraculous element in the promise.

Let's go back into the New Testament again, this time to Acts 2:4-8 (a place with which we are all reasonably familiar) where we have a mass occurrence of this very feature on the day of Pentecost.

Acts 2:4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

What this means to me, since the plural pronouns are used here along with the plural tongues, is that each of those given the gift of speaking was in a different language—"as *the Spirit gave them utterance.*"

Acts 2:5-6 And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded [confused] because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

Remember, we already have each disciple speaking in a different tongue. But regardless of what was the native language of those who were visiting in Jerusalem in order to keep the day of Pentecost, they heard all of these different languages in their own language.

Acts 2:7-8 And they were all amazed and marveled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, where we were born?

I don't know how many different languages God had the disciples speaking in, but regardless of the native language of the hearers, they heard all of them speaking in their own language.

It is clearly seen here that God not only affected the Christian speaking, but also the **hearers'** minds, and He was using His sovereign grace to affect the outcome of His

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purpose in their lives. God stimulated the hearers to faith, surrender, repentance, and conversion. We can all see that because we can see what happened in the rest of the chapter.

Let's go to Acts 7:22. Please understand I am trying to emphasize here what **God** did. The conversion of those people came about as a result of what God did to enable them to be converted. In Acts 7:22 we're back to Moses again. In this case Stephen is the speaker. What we have here seems to be a contradiction to what I just said that God did not make Moses an eloquent man when it says here:

Acts 7:22 And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Combined with what we just saw there in Acts 2, perhaps now we can understand when it says that "Moses was mighty in words and in deeds," (and yet by Moses' own declaration he was not an eloquent man), it was what was **added** by God—added by His grace—that caused these ordinary words coming out of Moses' mouth to have such an impact on the minds of those who were listening or reading. I say "reading," because now we're reading Moses' words.

These verses provide very strong evidence that God is intimately involved not only in directly affecting the birth conditions of, at the very least, some people, but also with all those He calls to do a work on His behalf. They are also going to be gifted in special ways to enable them to do the responsibility required. Brethren, this includes you and me.

The entire body of Christ has a work to do, and we are all cells (parts) of that body. Each cell in our body is designed by the Creator to carry out a function. We too, as cells in the spiritual body of Christ, are designed, are being designed, are in the process of being designed by the Creator to carry out a function.

Our special work is to get prepared for the Kingdom of God and to do any other work that He has assigned corporately (meaning as a body, as a group, as a church), and to carry out any function individually **within** that body as well. Brethren, our plate is full of responsibilities. These are the kind of things (again in generality and not specifically here) that God says He is creating us to do—to do these good works.

With that foundation let's go to Psalm 139:1-24. We're going to read through the whole Psalm first.

Psalm 139:1-24 O LORD, you have searched me, and known me. You know my downsitting and my uprising, you understand my thought afar off. You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, you know it altogether. You have beset me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. Whither shall I go from your spirit? Or whither shall I flee from your presence? If I ascend up into heaven, you are there: if I make my bed in hell [in the grave], behold, you are there. If I take the wings of the morning and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall your hand lead me, and your right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me, Yes, the darkness hides not from you; but the night shines as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to you. For you have possessed my reins: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you. Surely you will slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore, you bloody men. For they speak against you wickedly, and your enemies take your name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate you? And am not I grieved with those that rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them my enemies. 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.

This Psalm is ascribed to David. It is a meditation written largely in the present tense, as he was at that time undergoing a very dangerous life-threatening trial. Verses 19 through 22 confirm this when he says, "Surely you will slay the wicked, O God: depart from me therefore you bloody men." These are violent people he is facing here. "For they speak against you wickedly, and your enemies take your name in vain. Do not I hate them, O LORD, that hate you, and am not I grieved with those that rise up against you? I hate them with perfect hatred: I count them my enemies."

David is facing powerful and villainous foes apparently because he has taken a stand

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for doing things in a godly way, and these powerful people were pressuring him to do something he most certainly did not want to do. I get the sense that this was not a military battle, but probably a very high-stakes political one. I am pretty sure David felt it was of such magnitude that his very life was in danger, that these people would assassinate him, or have him assassinated, just get him out of the way.

No person who really loved God would be planning the kind of things that they were planning. Because they hate God and His way (Romans 8:7) they, in turn, hate David because he wants to do things in an upright and honest manner. As he writes this Psalm he does not yet know what will become of him, but his response is to flee to God in faith. His resolve is set, and he was not going to back down, and so there in God's powerful presence out comes this prayerful meditation in which he is taking stock of his life. He is asking, "What do I have going for me? These people seem to have all of the power. They've got the upper hand," and so David is asking, "What can I count on right now?" because the battle is imminent. This Psalm contains the answers to his question, and I will give you the answers. Listen carefully to these adverbs because they become a key to understanding this Psalm.

David finds assurance in the truth that God knows him **searchingly**.

That God is with him **universally**, meaning that wherever David is, God is also there. So whether he goes to heaven or down in the grave, God is there.

God is with him **sovereignly**. (God is **with** him, and created him **sovereignly**.)

We'll see a lot of this. God is using His dominion, His authority **directly** in David's behalf; not just generally, but **directly** in David's behalf.

The Psalm is divided into four paragraphs of six verses each. Verses 1 through 6 affirm God's intimate knowledge of David. Verses 7 through 12 affirm God's all-the-time-in-every-circumstance presence with David. Verses 13 through 18 affirm God's creation of David. Verses 19 through 24 show David's open-hearted dedication to God.

We're going to go back to verse 1 and read to verse 6, and we're going to tear this apart verse by verse. At least we're going to go through twelve verses. We're going to skip two sections at least in detail because they don't apply as directly to the subject of this sermon as the other parts do.

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Psalm 139:1-6 O LORD, you have searched me, and know me. You know my downsitting and my uprising, you understand my thought afar off. You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O LORD, you know it altogether. You have beset me behind and before, and laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it.

Focus on verse 1, because the key word for this section is the word "search" or "searched." We're going to go now to Job 28:1-3 because when Job wrote he used the same word David used in verse 1 of Psalm 139 that is translated "searched."

Job 28:1-3 Surely there is a vein for the silver, and a place for gold where they fine it. Iron is taken out of the earth, and brass is molten out of the stone. He sets an end to darkness, and **searches** out all perfection: the stones of darkness [things down in the mines] and the shadow of death.

Here the word "searched" is used of miners digging into the earth. What we are looking at here are places in which this term is used in a somewhat different way from the way it is used in Psalm 139:1, so we get a pretty good understanding of what this word means. Here the word "search" means "to dig into" as a miner digs for ore, or as a miner digs for precious stones.

Now we're going to go to Judges 18:1-2.

Judges 18:1-2 In those day there was no king in Israel: and in those days the tribe of the Danites sought them an inheritance to dwell in; for unto that day all their inheritance had not fallen unto them among the tribes of Israel. And the children of Dan sent of their family five men from their coasts, men of valour, from Zorah, and from Eshtaol, to spy out the land, and to **search** it: and they said unto them, Go, search the land: who when they came to mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, they lodged there.

Here we have the same word "search," and it is used in the sense of *exploration*, like men would explore a land, looking into every nook and cranny so that they have a good picture of, in this case, as to where they might be able to settle that would be suitable for them.

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Now we're going to go to Proverbs 25:2.

Proverbs 25:2 It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.

Here the word "search" is used of kings questioning, inquiring into the depths of a problem. We can see that this word used in Psalm 139:1 has the sense of *digging* into something deeply, as a miner would, and as *exploring* a land as explorers would do to see if things would work well there, and also the *questioning* that needs to be done as well. It all gives us a picture then in Psalm 139:1 that God's knowledge of David is in no way casual. God knows him **searchingly**. He doesn't just glance at David. He looks into his inner thoughts. He goes where David goes, always exploring the mind of David, and the conduct of David as well, and He questions these things.

David declares that God has searched into him, and thoroughly knows him. Remember what David is doing in Psalm 139? He is adding up something that is **good** for him—what his weapons are to meet this battle that he is going to go into, and what he can count on. God knows David backwards, frontwards, from the back of his head to the soles of his feet; his left side, his right side, inside, outside. Every aspect of David is thoroughly known by God. Absolutely nothing is hidden from God's searching eyes.

What is so interesting is that David does not in any way feel that he is enslaved, or in any way threatened by God looking into him. In fact, in verse 23 of this same Psalm he says, "Search me, O God. Look further. Look deeper. Explore me. Ask what You need to ask. Search me, O God, and know my heart. Test me. Try me, and know my thoughts." David is actually welcoming even further scrutiny into himself by God.

None of this does us any good unless we see ourselves in David's place. The first thing we're going to do is go back to the New Testament and just look at enough verses so that it gives us a bit of insight into this God that we have to give answer to. We're going to go back to a place where this same sense of God knowing us is communicated very clearly. Let's go to Revelation 2 and 3 to the letters to the churches.

Remember, I think it's very clear that what is given in Revelation 2 and 3 is an end time prophecy. Here we have a description of seven congregations, perhaps seven groups, into which all of the people of God in some way fit in the period of time that we are living in right now, just before the return of Jesus Christ. Let's begin in Revelation 2:2. Listen to what He says. It is short. It is brief, but it is clear, considered in the light of Psalm 139:1.

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Revelation 2:2 I **know** your works. [Said to the Ephesus church.]

Is God going to give us any less scrutiny than He gave David? We'll see.

Revelation 2:9 I know **your** works. [Said to the Smyrna church.]

Revelation 2:13 I **know your works**. [Said to the Pergamos church]

Revelation 2:19 I **know** your works. [Said to the Thyatira church.]

Revelation 3:1 And unto the angel of the church in Sardis write: These things says he that has the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars; **I know your works**.

Revelation 3:8 I know **your** works. [Said to the Philadelphia church.]

Revelation 3:15 I know your works. [Said to the Laodicean church.]

From here we're going to go to Acts 1:24, just before we get to the occasion at Pentecost.

Acts 1:24 And they prayed, and said, You, Lord, which know the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two you have chosen.

There is an interesting thing about this verse and the use of "knowing" here, and it is also compared with Acts 15:8.

Acts 15:8 And God, which knows the hearts

In these two occasions, that word which is translated "know" can actually be used as a formal name, and it means "*the heart-knower.*" "*God, the heart-knower.*"

Hebrews 4:13 Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

Brethren, we have to understand that what was true for David is also true for us. We're going to go back now to Psalm 139.

Psalm 139:2 You know my downsitting and my uprising, you understand my thought afar off.

David acknowledges in this verse that all of his outward behavior is exposed before God. In the second phrase of that verse David admits that God's knowledge extends even to our inner life, our secret thoughts, our motives and our desires. God knows it all regardless of how far He may seem to be from us.

What is so interesting is that this thought David expressed in verse 2 applied to time as well as space, because in the second phrase the word "before" is used. That means that before David said the word "before," God already knew that he was going to say it. God already knew what David was going to say before David himself was aware of what his next feeling or mood would be, or where his train of thought was leading. God already knew! That may seem astounding to you, but we have a small bit of this ability ourselves. How many times have I heard a parent say, "*I knew what you were going to do. It was written all over your face!*" I want you to consider—even though we have a little bit of that perception within us—how acute it is in God.

Collect your thoughts on this again. There is nothing that can be hidden from Him, and it is good that we begin to realize this and have this same feeling toward God that David did, where he welcomed it. It gave him comfort and a feeling of strength. Do you understand why? It was because David knew that just as surely as God knew this about him, God also knew this about his enemies as well. God was way ahead of David's enemies, and He knew everything they were going to do. Nobody ever gets in front of God. Nobody! No matter how clever, they can't out-think Him. God is already way ahead of them. He already knows what He is going to do before they become aware of these things in their minds. That is a strength for those who know God, and know that everything He thinks and does is done in love for our good. I wonder how many times that kept David from doing dumb stupid things because he knew it was written all over him to God, that nothing could be hidden from Him, and so, "*Why should I do it?*" kind of thing. Brethren, how is that for paying attention to your kid?

I got a little bit ahead of myself in my notes because I kind of applied that to verse 2, but actually what I told you was in verse 4 where he says, "For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, you know it altogether." Nobody ever throws God off balance.

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Nobody ever gets out ahead of Him, because God is always acting ahead of men. No matter what they think, they never stop to think that they're trying to use their powers against God. That is a protection for us because God is on our side.

In Psalm 139:5 the King James uses a word that is a correct translation, but it is a little bit weak for us because it doesn't connote to you and me maybe the same thing it did in 1611. It's the word "beset." Some modern translations will use the word "hemmed." I want you to look at I Chronicles 20:1 where a better more understandable word is used in terms of transmitting the sense of strength that is here.

I Chronicles 20:1 And it came to pass, that after the year was expired, at the time that kings go out to battle, Joab led forth the power of the army, and wasted the country of the children of Ammon, and came and **besieged** Rabbah.

There's that word—"besieged." Here you get the strength of the word, because you can picture an entire army besieging, circling, encompassing a city so that nobody gets in and nobody gets out. It is completely enclosed within this ring of armed men. That's what David is saying in Psalm 139:5.

Psalm 139:5 You have **besieged** me behind and before; and laid your hand upon me.

Again this continues to draw a picture of David being the recipient of the unrelenting attention of God's eyes, and God has David completely under His control. All that David can do, when he considers his options, logically, honestly, and righteously, is to yield. Some might think that this is unfair, that it is enslaving and constricting, but David is actually comforted by this because he actually knows that his enemies can't touch him because God is all around David, not only besieging him, but **protecting** him, and nobody is going to get through the besieging of David unless God allows it. David trusts God's judgment. There is nothing unusual about David's feelings here.

A psychologist, researching things of this sort, once came to the conclusion that children in elementary school would feel freer out in the school's play yard if it had no fences. So they ordered the fences to be torn down so that everything would be open, and then the children would feel free and at liberty in school. But they found out that just the opposite was true, and the fences had to be restored because the fences (the boundaries) were comforting to the children, and to have them taken down was frightening.

The fences gave the children a sense of security. They knew where the boundaries were, and the fences protected them from the dangers that they felt from the street. That's exactly the way David is feeling here. Being besieged by God, instead of being enslaved, is good. Who in the world is going to break through God's defenses? In verse 6 David concludes this paragraph in relief, in joy. He says, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me."

David's meditation has brought to him a reassurance that no conceivable extremity of distress could possibly push him out beyond the range of God's watchful care. So the major thought in the first paragraph is: nothing surprises God, and there is great comfort in that. David cannot move ahead of God in thought, nor can events, because God is already there. And so in verse 6 David sort of collapses in a sort of glad defeat, overwhelmed by this inescapable and loving God. Everywhere David turns, every thought he thinks, every fear he dreads, guess who's already there? God is already there. David encounters God, and he is besieged by God's loving presence and attention, and he takes comfort and is encouraged, and joyfully surrenders to God's will.

In understanding this paragraph, how can we limit God's choices or impose conditions upon Him who is already way out in front of us? Is He in any way restricted to merely respond to the choices that we might make? Hardly. And even if we make the wrong choice, we can be sure that He is already moving to take that into account. Can He not work circumstances in any event so that we'll still be free to exercise our right to choose, and at the same time, through the processes of our reasoning and judging the situation, lead us to choose to make the right decision without Him making the choice for us? Absolutely! That's what every good teacher does.

We're going to jump now to the third paragraph beginning in verse 13 as we continue, because His sovereignty is not so clearly the subject in the second paragraph.

Psalm 139:13-18 For you have possessed my reins: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you: for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvellous are your works, and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them. How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you.

We're going to begin in verse 13 where it says "covered" in the King James.

Psalm 139:13 For you have possessed my reins: you have **covered** me in my mother's womb.

The word "covered" is also used as "knit"—to be put together. We're going to jump from that to the emphatic word in this phrase. The Greeks and the Hebrews both had a way of writing that drew attention to the word that the author wanted attention drawn to. The emphatic word in this is the second word—"you." "*You made me*," David said. A little bit later in verse 14—"Marvelous are **Your** works." Again, the word "**Your**" is the one emphasized in the Hebrew. This is the beginning of a number of startling thought-provoking statements with very intriguing possibilities, possibly wide ramifications for us, because David removes his being born beyond merely natural processes to God **directly** taking a hand in David's formation in the womb. I want you to think about this.

We began in Exodus 4, and did we not see God saying, in the first person, "*I make people blind.*" "*I make people dumb.*" "*I make the tongue,*" . . . and so forth. It is that same sense where David is putting it here in this Psalm and saying God had a direct hand in his complete process there in the womb. David is not saying that the natural processes did not take place. What he is doing is adding that before, behind, in and through the natural processes of fetal development, is the sovereign and gracious God. He was there the whole time.

That fits right into the earlier paragraph where after David is born and he has God's spirit and everything, that wherever David goes, God is already there, he is now putting it right back down into the womb from the time of conception. This same thought is applied elsewhere in regard to Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Jesus. The Apostle Paul also alludes to it in relation to himself. We know that these people then are being sanctified from the womb. There is a possibility that we need to consider here. If this applied to David, who—like the others—besides Jesus (I'm talking about Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and Paul), will surely be numbered among the 144,000 of Revelation 7, does it apply to **ALL** who will be part of that group? I mean **all** who will be part of the 144,000—the entire Bride of Christ? I don't know the answer, but I think that it sure raises the possibility.

Let's look at Romans 9:22-23. I'll just read this verse and ask a question.

Romans 9:22 What if God, willing to show his wrath, and to make his power

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known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath **fitted** to destruction.

My Bible has a marginal note on the word "fitted." It is translated as "**prepared** to destruction."

Romans 9:23 And that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had **afore** prepared unto glory.

Regarding the *vessels of mercy*, it inserts the word "**afore**"—**before**. "**Before** prepared unto glory." Here comes the question I promised you. How far or long **before** prepared? Is it like John the Baptist? Is it like Jeremiah? Is it like Paul? Is it like David, who is now alluding that God was present in his formation right from the get-go in the womb? I don't know.

Have you ever ordered an automobile from the factory? I have done it several times in my life. I put the order in. They write everything down. They send the order to the factory, and then in the factory they make the automobile to your specifications. One particular automobile is made to your specifications.

I remember one time in particular that I wanted something on the automobile, and I was told they don't make it that way. I asked them if it was possible that I could get it made that way. They made some phone calls, and they told me, "*Yes, we can make it that way.*" And they did. It didn't cost any more. All it took was the time and the administration of whatever it was to make it that way. That particular automobile was sanctified. It was set apart on the assembly line, especially, specifically for me.

Cannot God, who is our Creator, or manufacturer, do in principle the same thing with us? If He wants somebody with particular characteristics to carry out responsibilities both in this life and in the world to come, can He not take a direct hand in creating him with those characteristics?

What I have just said fits into the central theme of Psalm 139, and that is the comfort, encouragement, and assurance David experiences derived from the knowledge of God's involvement—His guiding presence within all the affairs of David's life regardless of when or where.

In verse 15 of Psalm 139 your Bible may say "frame." My King James says "substance."

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Neither frame nor substance is mistranslated. It's only a bit weak on the description. Let's go to Proverbs 23:16.

Proverbs 23:16 Yes, my *reins* shall rejoice, when your lips speak right things.

The word "reins" in Proverbs 23:16 is the same word translated in Psalm 139:15 as "substance" or "frame." If you have a modern translation your Bible may say "*inmost being*." Start putting all these things together. What are reins? My dictionary says that reins refers to something that guides or controls. We are most familiar with it in terms of the reins on a horse. You use the reins on a horse to guide or control the horse. We're not talking here about a horse. We're talking about a human being. In Psalm 73:21 we have this word again.

Psalm 73:21 Thus my heart was grieved, and I was pricked in my reins.

There you have that word reins right in a King James version. That's what that word can be translated as. What is so interesting here is that my Bible has a little number there, and it refers me to the margin on that phrase. It says "*In my mind*." "*He was pricked in his mind*." Some modern versions will instead say "*In my spirit*." This word *reins* has broad application. It indicates something that is internal: "*inmost being*," "*in my spirit*," "*in my mind*." It is internal and invisible, but which supplies guidance and control. When David says "*My substance*," it can mean "*My reins*," "*My inmost being*," "*My spirit was not hid from You*."

What David is saying here in verse 15 is different from what he said in verses 13 and 14. In those two verses, David is saying that God crafted him physically. In verse 15 David is saying that God crafted his ability to think, to perceive, and to feel, because brethren, this is what guides and controls our life's decisions. Now everybody can think, perceive, and feel, but what separates David from others is that within the context of this Psalm, David is declaring that God sovereignly, using His powers from on high, has taken a direct role in shaping the way that David perceives, thinks, and feels.

David is not saying that God did this before he was born, but rather he is inferring strongly that because of what God has done, David is *different* from other men. I think that we can see some of the effects of this. How many men, brethren, do you know who have written Psalms? You can probably count them all on one circled index finger. You don't know anybody. David is declaring that God, using His sovereign authority, has

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made, has created David to do this. God was out in front of him, putting him through experiences, directing, guiding, chastising, and doing whatever was necessary to bring David to the place where he could see God in such a way that he marveled at the things God would do, and extolled God, and wondered about life, and wrote them all down, and we get the blessing.

But brethren, let's not detach this from us. God is doing **exactly** the same thing to us. We may not write Psalms, but isn't God converting our minds so that we think, perceive, feel, look upon things differently from other men? Absolutely! David marvels at this.

There is one more thing that I want us to get before we break off here. In verse 16 he says:

Psalm 139:16 Your eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.

This one is really intriguing. It doesn't really make a great deal of sense in the King James, so I'm going to read this verse as it appears in Hebrew. I will not speak in Hebrew. I will speak in English! David is speaking to God in this meditation, and he said, "*Upon Your book all of them were written. Days were formed, and not one of them.*"

Obviously Hebrew syntax is clearly different from ours. In order to make things understandable to us the translators have to rearrange the words so that we can make sense of what is being said. I want you to first notice the difference. In the English version, in the King James, you will notice quite a number of words in italics. Those words were inserted. They do not appear in the Hebrew. The word "members" is inserted, and it seems to refer to the members of a body: arms, legs, fingers, and whatever. Well, that word nowhere appears in the Hebrew. The translators have inserted it into the verse.

In addition, my Bible has a marginal reference for the phrase that begins: "*which in continuance were fashioned.*" My marginal reference says that it should be translated: "*The days were fashioned for me.*" Already we're beginning to get a clue as to what David really wrote here. What I am going to do is give you this verse from several modern translations, because the King James really mangled it.

The New American Standard Bible:

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Psalm 139:16 Thine eyes have seen my unformed substance, and in Your book they were all written. The days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them.

Already you can begin to see there is a difference here. What was written in the book? Days were written, and they used the term "ordained." That means, "*appointed*" when there was not even one of them yet; in other words, before David was even born, before he was even out of the womb. We're talking about days.

The Revised Standard Version:

Psalm 139:16 Your eyes beheld 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.

The Lamsa Translation:

Psalm 139:16 Your eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect, and upon Your book all these things were written even before day was, and man was brought into existence.

The Jerusalem Bible: [This one is a bell ringer.]

Psalm 139:16 You scrutinize my every action. All were recorded in Your book. My days listed and determined even before the first of them occurred.

Shake your head over that one! Now we're going to get to two free translations—paraphrases in which they have done some interpretation. They carried it a bit further.

The Amplified Bible:

Psalm 139:16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance, and in Your book all the days of my life were written before they ever took shape, when as yet there was none of them.

The Living Bible:

Psalm 139:16 You saw me before I was born, and scheduled each day of my life before I began to breathe. Every day was recorded in Your book.

The progression of those translations is quite interesting because it takes us from merely saying the total number of days that David would live were recorded by God in His book (which is shocking enough by itself), all the way though to God having recorded the script of every day of David's life even before he was born.

Let's not lose sight of why David is saying these things; in fact writing the whole Psalm. He is meditating on a very troubling situation. So troubling, he feels it is very possible that he may not live out the day, and he is looking for things—facts, reality—from which he can take assurance, hope, and strength. David is thinking all the way down to the very bedrock of his existence so that his faith might be firmly anchored. All of the human events that surround him are a jumble of uncertainty, and he could lose his nerve. So what does David need? He needs certainties: things, truths that he can really rely on and trust in.

David is reaching out to the things that he can grab hold of in moveable reality so that he can make his stand. To this point in the Psalm, what is David saying in the overall sense? He is rehearsing to himself the reality of how closely intertwined his life is with God, and his meditating assures him that he is not in the present danger by mere chance, that he is actually living out God's will and plan for his life. Notice the effect finally in verses 17 and 18.

Psalm 139:17-18 How precious also are your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them! If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand: when I awake, I am still with you.

David's meditation gives him poise in the face of the danger, and he feels almost overwhelmed by God's detailed constant and watchful care. The loving attention of God hovering over His child David is so minute, so comprehensive, that David cannot fully grasp it. He sees by faith an invisible and powerful presence with him, caring for him, orchestrating his life, and he rejoices. And then he goes on to express what he did in verses 19 through 24, and actually ends by inviting God to do whatever He needs to do to bring David to completion.

I think that we will stop there. As I said earlier, I don't understand how comprehensive these things are, and what the total application of them is, but they are very, very

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interesting. The purpose, you see, is that we reach the same kind of mind that David expressed of being so confident and sure of the presence of God regardless of where he was, and what kind of a situation he was in. God was already there before him, and everything is under control.