

Psalm 139 as God's Judgment against the Practice of Abortion

A recent report said that One in three conceptions in London and one in five elsewhere in England and Wales result in an abortion. This is truly horrific. The introit for today is two sections from Psalm 139. This psalm provides Christians with one of the best answers to arguments used by people who advocate abortion. Abortionists avoid talking about the unborn person as a baby. They desensitise the horror of what they do by referring to the baby's head, which they are about to crush, as "number one." They prefer to say that the unborn baby is just a mass of tissue or a part of the mother. Some tolerate abortions even in the last trimester.

This psalm has four sections of six verses each. It asks God to examine whether we truly love Him. The emphasis is on His loving care for us. He knows every thought, word, and deed.

The psalm begins: "O LORD, You have examined me, and You know me." God's knowledge of us goes far beyond what we know about ourselves. David writes, "You alone know when I sit down and when I rise. You have understood my thoughts from far away. You have been measuring off my path and my reclining, and You have been familiar with all my ways. For before there is any utterance on my tongue, look, O LORD, You have known it completely. You have clasped me behind and in front, and You have laid Your hand on me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me. It is unattainable, I cannot reach it."

This first section speaks about God's present knowledge of each individual. God knows our thoughts even before we have become clear about them. He knows everything we undertake, and the way in which we carry everything out. He knows our words before we speak them. Individual human beings have worth because God has made them, and because God knows them intimately and completely. God keeps them under scrutiny. This clearly also implies that our bodies and lives are not simply our own to do with what we please. God's knowledge is greater than we can fathom.

In the second section of the psalm David contemplates the fact that God is present everywhere. No one can escape His watching eye. There is no way of escaping from Him.

David writes about himself before his birth in verse 13: "You have acquired my inmost parts. You covered me up in my mother's womb." He recognises that as an adult he is the same person as he was in his mother's womb. Before birth and after birth he has been the one continuum. David compares God's creative skill to that of a weaver who puts materials together skilfully. The development of a human foetus is marvellous. It is not a product of chance forces. God put us together in the womb, and has been intimately involved all along the way. It is plainly impossible to speak about the unborn infant as if it were not a human person or a just part of the mother. The Hebrew for "inmost parts" is, literally, "kidneys". God has known us long before we were conscious, and before we knew Him.

David continues, "I praise You, because I have been fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, and my soul knows that very well. My bones were not hidden from You when I was made in the secret place, when I was intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my embryo, and all my members were being written in Your book. The days were being formed before one of them came into being." God has created our lives and He has also witnessed our formation closely in the dark of the womb. Here again David affirms that the unborn baby in the womb and the mature person are the same individual. The "I" and "me" is the same person. From the point of conception the person has not been part of the mother, or mere foetal tissue, but the same person, known and cared for by God. Even common sense tells us that if the unborn baby is killed through an abortionist's intervention, it is prevented from reaching its full potential, quite apart from the grim reality that abortion is one of the worst forms of murder, the murder of a close relative. There should be no talk about child-abuse that leaves aside the killing of defenceless children in the womb!

This psalm places our own origin in perspective. We cannot fully understand ourselves as God's creatures. We contemplate ourselves with amazement at God's design, and it is our duty to thank and praise God for all His wonders, and not merely His creation in general, but also the creation of our individual human lives. Modern technology has been able to follow the development of a baby partly by ultra-sound. However, God has always been watching us. God knows and sees His on-going creative action, even when He allows human parents to play their part in it, as co-creators with Him of new human life.

God has also ordained how long our lives are going to be from before we were born. Like an Eastern king, God keeps His decisions, as if they were written up in His register.

David continues: "How difficult for me are Your intentions, O God! How numerous is their total amount! If I were to count them, they would outnumber grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with You." We see God's thoughts expressed in what He has done. If we tried to comprehend God's thoughts and deeds we

would be driven asleep from exhaustion. Waking up makes us aware again that God is still present with us. It is not only that God knows about us, but He has also made human beings for a close relationship with Himself. This is so, whether people are healthy, unborn, handicapped, or unwell. This is a thought that abortionists discard, as they think that human life lies within their own supreme control. They want to adjudge some lives as not worth living. God wants close communion between Himself and individual human beings. He has created each individual, and keeps, knows, and loves each one, and wants them to have fellowship with Him as His own redeemed people.

In the final section of the psalm David's own dedication to God makes him aware of people who oppose God, and he includes people who are bloodthirsty. A number of psalms have such imprecatory sections. From our perspective, it is as if he wrote with abortionists and advocates of euthanasia specifically in view. "I wish, O God, that You would kill wicked people, and that bloodthirsty people would go away from me! They are speaking against You with evil intent. Your enemies have been misusing Your name. Should I not hate those who hate You, O LORD? Should I not loathe Your adversaries? I have hated them with extreme antipathy. They have become my enemies."

God is patient with wicked people. Although their end will come at last, David is uneasy that God is so patient with them. David does not, however, consider that it is his own duty, in his zeal for God, to slay the wicked. Similarly, those who oppose abortion because it is murder dare not take the lives of abortionists into their own hands. However, this section should be applied to powerful people in our society who have enacted legislation contrary to God's creative activity and His desire for love and communion with His creatures. God does not approve of what they have done. If they do not repent, God will punish them. That is certain.

Those who try to be faithful to God are often misrepresented and criticised. When they are attacked, the attack is really against God's name. Eastern kings insisted on an oath of loyalty from those who ruled under them. They had to promise to be friends to his friends and oppose his enemies. David writes here as a loyal subordinate ruler under God, his own King, and expresses his own opposition to what God's enemies are doing.

David's psalm ends with a request to God to test him. The heart was regarded as the centre of the human being. That was the place from which feelings, emotions, thoughts, motives, plans, and deeds derived. This should be a reminder to those who promote life-issues to examine whether their own intentions and motives are pure. They must pray to God to keep them faithful in every way. David concludes: "Examine me, O God, and know my heart! Test me! Know my disquieting thoughts, and see if there is any offensive way in me! Moreover, lead me in the way everlasting!"

From the perspective of the New Testament we remember that the Son of God Himself became a part of our created world, and entered it through conception and human birth. We have eternal life through the incarnate Son of God. His free salvation is the motive and the power for all we think, plan, and do as Christians, that this includes our the way we express concern for the sanctity of human life.