

HOPING IN GOD'S MERCY

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DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON
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“Behold, the eye of the Lord is on those who fear Him, on those who hope in His mercy.”
Psalm 33:18.

By the term, “the fear of God,” we understand in Holy Scripture the whole of true religion. We do not mean by the fear of God, the *slavish* fear which trembles in God's Presence, as the poor slave trembles under his master's lash, but that child-like fear which fears to offend, which fears to be led into error—a reverential fear such as the angels have when they veil their faces with their wings and cast their crowns before the glorious Throne of God—to have such a fear of God before our eyes as to restrain our wandering passions, to keep our hands from doing evil and our tongues from speaking the thing which is not right—to have such a fear of God that we feel as though we were in God's Presence and act, and speak, and think as though we fully recognized the eye that reads the secrets of the heart. When we read, therefore, that the eye of the Lord is upon “them that fear Him,” we are to understand that He has gracious regard towards those who delight in Him, who worship Him and are His children.

But the part of the text to which I call your special attention now is that expression, “Those who hope in His mercy.” This is intended to be of the same reach and compass as the first. Those who fear God are the same persons as those who hope in His mercy and this is very consoling, for to hope in God's mercy seems to be but a very small evidence of Divine Grace and yet it seems to be a very sure sign, for those who hope in God's mercy are the same persons who are said to fear Him. They are the same persons as are described as being His saved ones, His children—the truly godly ones.

I hope there are many here who can say, “Well, I do hope in His mercy. If I cannot get farther, yet I can get as far as that—my hope is fixed in the mercy of God in Jesus Christ.” Then, dear Friend, may the words we shall speak be comforting to you! And may you rejoice that the Lord considers you and has an eye of favor towards you, now, and will have forever!

I am always very anxious about those who have the beginnings of Grace in them. I think I would go a long way out of my way to carry one of the lambs in my bosom and to try to cherish one that was ready to die with doubt. But, on the other hand, I am always fearful of giving any encouragement to those who are on a wrong foundation. Like the ancient mariner who was afraid of the whirlpool on the one hand and the rocks on the other, and found it difficult to steer along the middle of the channel, so may I find it tonight. I would not grieve a trembling soul. I would not bolster up a self-deceived one. Far be it from these lips to ever become a rod for the backs of God's weak ones! And equally far be it from this tongue to speak so as to put pillows under men's arms and under their heads wherewith they may go to sleep and sleep themselves into Hell!

In trying, therefore, to avoid two evils, I shall begin by speaking about a hope in God's mercy which is false—and then I shall say a little about a sound hope in God's mercy. To begin, then, at the beginning—

I. THERE IS A FALSE HOPE IN GOD'S MERCY AGAINST WHICH WE EARNESTLY WARN YOU.

“I do not believe,” says a man, “that God will ever cast me into Hell, *for God Almighty is very merciful.*” “What will become of you when you die?” said one man to another. “I do not know,” was the answer, “and I do not think much about it because I know that God is a very good God—and I do not think that He will cast the souls of men into Hell, as bigots say, and cause them to be forever banished from His Presence.” Now, Friend, if this is your hope, I beseech you to be rid of it, for it is a deadly viper and though you nurse and cherish it in your bosom, it will sting you to your destruc-

tion, for do you not know that the God of the Bible is a God of Justice, as well as a God of Mercy? Though He is infinitely good, yet He Himself has said, "I will by no means spare the guilty."

What do you think of this text, "The wicked shall be turned into Hell, and all the nations that forget God"? Does that seem as if God would not punish sin? "The soul that sins, it shall die." What do you think of that? "These shall go away into everlasting punishment." Does that seem like an effeminate and sentimental kindness that will wink at sin? If you are to be saved by the general mercy of God, then let me tell you that this blessed Book of God is all a mistake and deception, for there are no such teachings here, as those of which you dream. Besides, you know better than this—I appeal to your own conscience, *you know better than this!*

We tell people that if they allow filth to accumulate and sewage to become stagnant. If they deprive themselves of fresh air and neglect ventilation and cleanliness, when the fever comes it will be sure to make them its prey! And they might say, "Oh, we don't believe that! God is merciful and we do not believe that He will ever let the fever take people off by scores—we shall not think of clearing away the dung heaps, or cleaning out the sewers, or getting the windows made to open! We tell you it is all bigoted trash! God will not let the people die of fever!" But they do die of fever and the very people who neglect the laws of health are taken away, God's mercy notwithstanding! And so it will be with you. Sin is like a dung heap—your iniquities are like those fever-breeding drains and your soul will die of the disease which springs from the sin which you so much love. And all your talk about God's mercy you will find to be a dream! If a man shall go to sea tomorrow in a leaky ship which takes in the water while she is going down the Thames, they may keep the pumps always going, but yet the water gets ahead of the men. You say to the man, "Sir, if you go out into the sea—it is only a matter of time—your ship will go down. She is not seaworthy—she will never get down the Channel." "Oh," he says, "don't tell me that—God Almighty is merciful and He will never let a poor fellow drown! I believe that my ship will float and I mean to run the risk of it, for I believe in God's mercy." Down the vessel goes—and the wretch on board of her and all her passengers are drowned! And what do we say? Do we say that God is not merciful? No! But we say that some men are insane—and so say we of you! If you trust in that general mercy of God, but will not obey the Gospel and put from you the way of salvation which God has ordained, you will perish! And on your own head will be your blood since you have foolishly perverted the goodness of God to your own destruction!

In other persons, this belief in the mercy of God takes the shape of saying, "*Well, I have always done my best. I have been a respectable person ever since I can recall—I bring up my children as well as I can—I send them to the Sunday school. I always pay my debts. I don't swear and I am not a gin drinker—I don't know that I have any particular vice. On the contrary, I am always ready and happy to help the poor and to say a good word for religion and so on. It is true that I am not all I ought to be—no doubt we are all sinners and there is a great deal that is wrong and imperfect about us—though I don't know what it is in particular. But anyhow, God is merciful and what with what I have done and what I have not done—and God's mercy to make up for all the shortcomings—I do not doubt but what it will be all right with me at the last.*" Now this, again, is a deceit and a refuge of lies—a bowing wall and a tottering fence which will fall on those who take shelter behind it!

You have read of Nebuchadnezzar's image which was part iron and part clay. Had it been all iron, it might have stood, but being part clay, by-and-by, the whole image was broken in pieces! Such is your religion! You trust in part to the mercy of God—I will call that the iron. But you trust in part to your own so-called good works—that is the clay and down your image will fall before long! Why, you are like the man in the proverb who tries to sit on two stools—and you know what becomes of him! Besides, how foolish you are to try to yoke yourselves to God to help Him! Go and yoke a gnat with an archangel, or find a worm and put it side by side with leviathan—and hope that they will plow the stormy deep together! Then think of Christ helping you and of you helping Christ. Absurd! If you are to be saved by works, then it must be all of works! But if by Grace, it must be all of Grace, for the two will no more mix than fire and water. They are two contrary principles! Therefore, give up the delusion! A hope in God's mercy which is twisted and inter-twisted with a hope in your own works is certainly vain!

But we know others who say, "Well said, Mr. Preacher! I know better than that—I shall never fall into that snare. I trust in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ and in Him, alone! I expect the mercy of God to come to me through Christ and I depend upon only Him." Well, you talk very well. You talk very well. I must go home with you! But the man does not want me to go home with him. I do not know where he means to turn in—perhaps once or twice on the road

before he gets to his house! When he gets home, we shall ask his wife what sort of a man he is. She will then be compelled to say, "Well, Sir, he is a great saint on Sunday, but he is a great devil all the rest of the week! He can talk a horse's head off about religion, but, Sir, there is no genuine living in the matter—no real, righteous, godly action in him."

Did you never read of Mr. Talkative in *The Pilgrim's Progress*? How he could tell out all the Doctrines! How he could prate about them! He had them all at his fingertips and at his tongue's tip, too, but they never operated on his life. They never affected and sweetened his character. He was just as big a rogue as though Christ had never lived—and just as graceless a villain as though he had never heard of the Savior at all! Now, Sirs—any kind of faith in Christ which does not change your life is the faith of devils! And it will take you where devils are, but will never take you to Heaven! Men are not saved by their works—we declare that plainly enough—but if faith does not *produce* good works, it is a dead faith and it leaves you a dead soul to become corrupt and to be cast out from the sight of the Most High. A genuine hope in God's mercy, according to the teaching of Scripture, purifies a man. "He that has this hope in him purifies himself, even as he is pure." If you have a hope in the mercy of God which lets you do as the ungodly do with impunity, then, Sir, you have about your neck a millstone that will sink you lower than the lowest Hell! God deliver you from such a delusion!

I fear there are still others who have a bad hope—a hope which will not save them—because they trust in the mercy of God that they shall be all right at the last, *though they have neglected all those things which make men right*. For instance, the Word of God says, "You must be born-again." These men have never been born-again, but yet they trust in the mercy of God! Sir, what right have you to expect any mercy when God has no mercy, except that which He shows to men by giving them new hearts and right spirits? You say you trust in the mercy of God and yet you have no repentance—and do you think God will forgive the man who not only does not love, but refuses and despises His Son, the only Savior? I tell you there will have to be a new Bible written before this can be true! And there will have to be a new Gospel—yes—and a new God, too, for the God of the Bible never will, nor can wink at sin! Unless He makes you sick of sin, He must be sick of you! And until you hate your iniquities with a perfect hatred, there cannot be mercy in God's heart to you, for you go on in your iniquities!

You tell me you trust in God, and yet there has been no change of life in you! Oh, Sirs! Unless you are converted and become as little children, you shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven! The first thing God's mercy will do for you will be to turn your face in the opposite direction.

If mercy shall ever come to you, it will make you a new creation, give you new loves, new hates. But if you have not conversion, what have you to do with mercy? The mercy of God, wherever it comes, makes men pray. You never bend your knees and yet you say you trust in God's mercy? Oh, Sir, you are deceiving your own soul!

The mercy of God makes a man love Christ and makes him seek to be like Christ. You have no love to Christ and no desire to be like He. Then, Sir, I pray you give up that falsehood, which has been, up to now, as a soft pillow for your head, and believe me that the mercy of God cannot come in the way in which you expect it!

I wish I might have torn away, from some now present, their false dependences, but I am afraid they are too dear to them for my hands to do it! May God's Holy Spirit deliver men from all false confidences in God's mercy! But now a much more pleasant part of my work comes before me, namely—

II. TO DESCRIBE A SOUND HOPE IN THE MERCY OF GOD.

I shall say of it, first, that *a soundly hopeful soul feels its need of mercy*. It does not talk about sin, but it feels it. It does not talk about mercy, but it groans after it. Beware of superficial religion! I think if I might only say two things before I die, one out of the two would be—*beware of surface godliness*. Take care of the paint, the tinsel, the varnish, the oil! There must be in us a hungering and a thirsting after righteousness! There must be in us the broken heart and the contrite spirit. I like revivals—far be it from me to ever say a word against them—but I have seen scores of men jump into religion just as men jump into a bath—and then jump out, again, just as quickly because they have not felt their deep need of Christ.

You may depend upon it, there is no sound bottom to a man's religion unless he begins with a broken heart. And that religion that does not begin with a deep sense of sin, and a thorough heartbreaking conviction, is a repentance that will have to be repented of before long. God save us from it! If you are to have a hope in mercy, you must know that it is mercy! You must know that you need it as mercy! You must be clean divorced from every confidence except in mercy! You

must come to this, that it must be Grace first, last, and midst—Grace everywhere—otherwise it will never serve or save such a poor helpless castaway as you are. A sound hope, then, is one in which a man knows that he needs mercy!

Another mark of a sound hope is that he clearly perceives that mercy can only come to him through the Mediator—Christ Jesus. The Word of God tells us that there is but one door of Grace, and that is Christ! But one foundation for a genuine hope—and that foundation is Christ! God's mercy is Infinite, but it always flows to men through the golden channel of Jesus Christ, His Son! Soul, it will be a good thing for you when you have done with the idea of hunting after mercy here, there and everywhere, and when you come to Christ, and Christ alone, for it! God swears by Himself that there shall be no hope for man out of Christ, but that there shall be hope for them there. "Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid." Against all other confidences God thunders out that famous sentence, "He that believes not, in condemned already, because he has not believed on the Son of God." When you are tied up to Christ. When every other door is shut and barred, and fastened up with iron padlocks. When every cistern is broken. When every hope is shipwrecked and the last broken board has been swallowed up in the whirlpool of despair—if your soul then clings to Christ—you have a sound hope, a hope that can never let you go!

Yet again. That *hope which leads a man to desire to be conformed to God's plan of mercy* is a sound hope. I mean this. There may be someone here who says, "I fear I am not regenerated. You condemned me just now, Sir, but oh, I wish I were! I am afraid I am not converted, but oh, that God in His Grace would convert me! You spoke of repentance—I fear I do not repent as I should, but oh, I wish that I could repent! Oh, that my heart would break! I feel because I do not feel and I sigh because I cannot sigh!" Ah, poor Soul, if you are willing to be what God would make you to be, then is your hope, though not yet a perfect one, yet good so far as it goes! If you will now come and cast yourself on Christ, though you have no regeneration apparent to yourself, yet you shall be saved! If you will come as you are, with all your iniquities about you, without any repentance that you can discern. If you will come empty-handed and cast yourself on what Jesus did upon the Cross and is still doing in pleading before the Throne of God, you shall never perish, but you shall be saved!

Oh, it is a precious Gospel which we have to preach to needy sinners! A full Christ for empty sinners! A free Christ for sinners that are enslaved! But you must be willing to be this—you must be willing to be renewed in the spirit of your mind—and if you can honestly say that you are so willing and that you will now close in with Christ, then yours is the hope upon which God looks with the kindest regard!

I might thus continue to describe this hope, but I shall not detain you longer upon that point. I do hope and trust that I have many here who are beginning to have a little hope in Christ. Oh, it is a mercy to see the first streaks of daylight, for the sun is rising. It is pleasing to see that first dewdrop, the first tear that comes from a troubled heart. I think the Lord is about to bring water out of the flinty rock! I feel so grateful when I meet with some in distress. Sometimes after the service there is somebody that wants to see us. They are so distracted and depressed—and they think they are giving us so much trouble, but oh, it is blessed trouble! There is not one of us but would be glad to sit up all night, I am sure, to see many such troubled ones, if we might but speak a word to them by which they might find joy and peace!

Now, I want to take the text like a very sweet and dainty morsel and just drop it into the mouths of you who are ready to faint for it—"The eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him, upon those who hope in His mercy." Though you have got no further than that, yet you have God's eye upon you and you may be greatly comforted! But we must go to another point with great brevity. We have in this house of worship, here and now—

III. SOME WHO ARE AFRAID TO HOPE IN GOD.

They unconsciously desire to trust Him in His own appointed way. They understand it, but they are afraid to do it. Now, my beloved fellow sinner, I beseech you to cast yourself upon Christ and to trust in Him! And remember that *God cannot lie*. It is blasphemy to suppose that God can say a thing that is not true. Now, He has promised, over and over again, to save everyone that trusts in Christ. And if He does not save you, well, then_____. You know what I mean. Oh, but God cannot lie! Therefore, come and cast yourself upon His faithful promise! Well do I remember when that text, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved," stayed my fainting soul for months together, before I actually had joy and peace. Do you call upon God in prayer? Do you trust in God, however little it may be? Then you shall be saved! Believe it. If any soul here feels himself to be as black as night—imagines himself to be out of the list of the hope-

ful—yet if he can but come and cast himself upon what Christ did when He died upon the Cross for sinners, God must cease to be God before that soul can perish! Hope then, hope then, Sinner, for God cannot lie!

Then hope, again, because *God has saved and is still saving others!* We have not ceased to have conversions in this Church. I am sometimes afraid that they are not as many as they once were, but they do come and come frequently, too, to the praise of God's Grace! Now, if others are saved when they trust Christ, why should not you be? Who has clambered up into the secret chambers of Heaven and found that your name is not written in the roll of election? Who? Why, no one has done so! Then, since Christ bids you come and trust Him—come and trust Him! Oh, that you might come, tonight, and as He has accepted others, He will accept you, for He says, "He that comes unto Me, I will in no wise cast out."

I beseech you have hope, again, because *it is to God's honor to save sinners*. If it were dishonoring to Christ to receive the ungodly, you might stand in doubt. But since it is one of the jewels in His crown which gladdens His heart and brings Him honor in the sight of glorified saints in Heaven, depend upon it, He is not hard to be persuaded! Christ is quite as willing to save as ever the most longing sinner can be to be saved! It is His delight to give of His liberality, to dispense of His bounty to those who need! Have hope then. The generous Character of Christ should encourage you!

Have hope, I say, once more, *because of what Christ endured upon the Cross*. See Him dying in unutterable pains and pangs! See His hands and feet distilling founts of blood! See His body racked with agonies that cannot be described! His soul, meanwhile, ground and crushed beneath the wheels of Divine Wrath against the sin He bore for our sakes! His whole Being is a mass of suffering in our place! Now, why all this miraculous and sacrificial endurance? Surely that bearing all this, we might be spared and never know its anguish! Oh, when my soul looks to Christ, it seems to see that nothing is impossible with such an Atonement! No sin is too black for that blood to wash and cleanse away! It cannot be that beneath Heaven there can be a sinner so abominable that the blood of Christ cannot make a full atonement for all his sins! Come, then! Come, then—'tis the voice of Jesus that calls you! Come, you chief of sinners! Come now, before yet another sun shall dawn! Come and find in Jesus' wounds a refuge from the stormy blast that shall soon come to sweep the unconverted into condemnation!

Yet must we still pass on and, only for a moment, linger upon—

IV. THE COMFORT WHICH THE TEXT AFFORDS TO THOSE WHO HAVE A HOPE IN GOD'S MERCY.

It says that the eye of the Lord is upon them. There is a blessing for you. Nobody else's eye is upon you. You have got up to London, away from parents and friends, and nobody looks after you now. You have come into this big Tabernacle and I am sorry to find that there are still some of our members who do not look after strangers—do not look after souls as they ought to do—and you have been coming here and nobody has spoken to you. Now, let me read the text, and I need not say any more, "*The eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him, upon those who hope in His mercy.*" God sees you and you do not need anybody else! Be content that God knows all about it. You are up in the top gallery there, somewhere behind where my eye cannot reach you—and hardly my voice—but "the eye of the Lord is upon those who fear Him, upon those who hope in His mercy." And mark that eye, as well as being an eye of observation, is also an eye of pity! God has compassion on you! He stands side by side with you—that bleeding Son of God—and in your groans He groans, and in your griefs He takes a share. He has compassion on you—yes, and He will help you—and even now He loves you. The eye with which He looks upon you is a Father's eye and when a father sees his child broken-hearted, he says to himself, "I can stand anything but this. My child's tears overcome me, overmaster me. I cannot see him sick and sad and sobbing, without pitying him."

Oh, some of you have sons and daughters of your own! And when you see that sick child of yours crying with pain, why, you would spend all you have, if you could but get some doctor that would make him well again. "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him." And that means all those who hope in His mercy, for they are put, as I told you, in the text in the same category as those who fear Him. Your Father's eye is upon you and He pities those tears, sighs and cries of yours—He loves you and He means to bless you!

Now, I want to say to you Believers here, something similar to what I said at this morning's service. I wish that all the members of this Church were more on the alert after those who are beginning to hope in God's mercy. Some are. I cannot find much fault with you. You are my joy and crown—and sometimes I boast—I hope in no wrong way, of the

earnestness of many in this Church! But make me not ashamed of this, my boasting, as some might well do, who are cold and careless about the souls of men. Do you know there are lost ones round about you, lost ones about whom you seem to have no concern, though, according to Christ's Law, they are your brethren, your neighbors? What a sad, sad story it is that we have lately been seeing in the newspapers every day—a gentleman lost, rewards offered, the police searching—but he is lost! A hat found. Some sort of clue given. But he is lost! How must the parent hearts break! How must friends, day by day, feel life a burden till they know what has become of him! He is lost! He is lost! Ah, but the loss of a man for this life, though it is a very heavy blow, is nothing compared with the loss of a soul! Ah, Mother, you have got a child who is lost. Ah, Husband, you have got a wife who is lost! Ah, Wife, your husband is lost! And have you never advertised for him? Have you never sought him? God knows where he is! Have you never gone to God and said, "Seek him and find him"? Have you never enlisted the Great Soul-Finder's aid, who came into the world, "to seek and to save that which was lost"?

Are you quite careless about it, whether your servants, your neighbors, your husbands, your wives, your children shall be lost forever or not? Then am I ashamed of you! And angels are ashamed of you! And God's living people are ashamed of you! And Christ Himself may well be ashamed of you, that you have no care for those whom you ought to love!

I do trust that this is not the case with us, but that we do anxiously desire that lost ones should be saved. Come, then, I want you to look up those who are beginning to seek Christ! And when you have done that, and have found them out, then I want you to seek after those who are *not* seeking Christ. I do not think there ought to be a person come within these four walls, into these galleries, or on the area, but shall be attacked, for his good, by someone or other, before the whole assembly is scattered! Surely you might find a way of putting some question, kindly and affectionately—not rudely—but respectfully, so that if I have been the means in any way of making a little impression on their souls, you may follow it up by personal dealing! If I have put in the nail of the Truth of God a little way, you may give it a heavy blow and drive it in deeper—and God grant that the Holy Spirit may clinch the nail so that it may never be drawn out!

Oh, my Hearers, we must have you saved! We cannot go on much longer with some of you as you are because you yourselves will not go on much longer as you are! We have been rather free for the last few weeks from deaths and departures, but do not think that we shall be free from them long! In the ordinary course of nature, as those who calculate the averages of human life will tell you, a certain proportion of a great multitude like this—some 6,000 and more—must soon die. There is no chance about whether we shall or not—*we must*. Now, who shall it be? Who shall stand before his God? To whose ears will the ringing trumpet of the archangel sound? For whom shall the funeral bell be tolled? Over whom shall it be said, "Ashes to ashes, dust to dust"? Since we know not to whom the summons may come, may this be the command to all, "Consider your ways and prepare to meet your God." Oh, that you might prepare this very night, and seek unto the Lord with full purpose of heart! And this is the promise, "He that seeks, finds; he that asks, receives and to him that knocks, it shall be opened."

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON:

PSALM 139.

This is a Psalm we can never read too often. It will be to us one of the greatest safeguards against sin if we have its teaching constantly before our mind's eyes. The teaching of this Psalm is simply this, "You, God, see me."

Verse 1. *O Lord, You have searched me, and known me.* You have looked into my most secret part. The most intricate labyrinths of my spirit are all observed by You. You have not searched and yet been unable to discover the secret of my nature, but You have searched me and known me. Your search has been an efficient one. You have read the secrets of my soul.

2. *You know my sitting down and my rising up, You understand my thoughts afar off.* It is a common enough thing to sit down and to rise up and I, myself, oftentimes scarcely know why I do the one or the other, but You know and understand all. "You understand my thoughts afar off." My heart forms a thought that never comes to a word or an act, but You not only perceive it, but You translate it! You understand my thoughts.

3. *You compass my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.* I am surrounded by You as by a ring of observers.

4. *For there is not a word on my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, You know it altogether.* Not only the words on my tongue, but those that slumber in my tongue, the unspoken words, You know them perfectly and altogether!

5. *You have beset me behind and before, and laid Your hand upon me.* Your Presence amounts to actual contact. You not only see, but touch, like the physician who does not merely look at the wound, but by-and-by comes to probe it. So do You probe my wounds and see the deeps of my sins.

6, 7. *Such knowledge is too wonderful for me! It is high, I cannot attain unto it. Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your Presence?* It seems as if the first impulse was to fly away from a God whose attributes were so lofty. 'Twas but a transient impression, yet David words it so.

8, 10. *If I ascend up into Heaven, You are there: if I make my bed in Hell, 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.* How swift he supposes his flight to be, as swift as the light, for he borrows the wings of the morning—and yet the hand of God was controlling his destiny even then! As Watts rhymes it—

*“If mounted on the morning ray,
I fly beyond the western sea,
Your swifter hand should first arrive,
And there arrest Your fugitive.”*

11, 12. *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, mystery of mysteries, and more wondrous still, You not only observe, but You always have observed! And You have not only observed my well-formed being and my visible life, but before I had a being, You did observe what I should be, and when I was yet in embryo, Your all-observing eyes watched me.

13-16. *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 worked in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being not perfect, and in Your Book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them.* In so vivid a manner does our holy poet sing of the Omniscience of God with regard to our creation. Before we had breath He formed and fashioned us.

17. *How precious also are Your thoughts unto me, O God! How great is the sum of them!* How many thoughts has God towards us! We cannot count them! And how kind are those thoughts—we cannot estimate them—how precious, how great!

18. *If I should count them, they are more in number than the sand. When I awake, I am still with You.* I suppose I had finished the tale, had counted up all Your thoughts to me and then fell asleep. I should then but begin to count again, for You continue to thrust out mercies from Your hands. My God, my numeration shall never overtake You, much less my gratitude, and the service that is Your due!

19. *Surely You will slay the wicked, O God: depart from me, therefore, you bloody men.* “Surely”—here is a solemn inference from the Omniscience of God—“surely You will slay the wicked, O God.” You have seen their wickedness. They have committed their wickedness in Your Presence. You will need no witnesses, no jury! You are all in one! Are You not the Judge of all the earth, and shall You not do right? “Surely You will destroy the wicked, O God.” Then I desire not to have those in my company who are condemned criminals and are soon to be executed. “Depart from me, therefore, you bloody men.” See how this sets David upon purging his company and keeping himself clean in his associations, since God, who sees all, and will surely punish, would hold it to be evil on the part of His servant to be found associating with rebellious men?

20-22. *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.* We are bound to love our own enemies, but not God's enemies, since they are haters of all that is

good and all that is true—and the essentially Good One, Himself. We love them as our fellow beings, but we hate them as haters of God.

23, 24. *Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there are any wicked ways in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.*

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