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The Bible is full of assurances of the nearness of God to us. None is perhaps more vivid pictorially than those found in Psalm 139. God, sings the Psalmist, knows him through and through. God knows when the singer sits down and when he arises, knows the Psalmist's thoughts and all of his ways. God even knows what the Psalmist is going to say and circles the Psalmist's whole life. Therefore, says the author, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me...I cannot attain it."

But the thought of God's nearness to the faithful is not limited to the Old Testament. According to Matthew, Jesus teaches that God knows all of our needs for food and clothing (Matt. 6:25-32) and values us so highly that he numbers the hairs of our head (Matt. 10:30). He does not leave us desolate (John 14:18), but comes into our midst in his Spirit (Matt. 18:20). And he promises that he will be with us to the close of the age (Matt. 20:28).

How we love those assurances of God's presence with us, for we take them to be comforting and strengthening in all the turmoils of our daily lives. God is always present to help us! He will protect and guide us through all our fortunes and misfortunes. He is our Rock and our Refuge, and we can always count on his deliverance from any of the troubles and tribulations that beset us. God is a kindly friend and companion who heaps upon us sweet and amazing grace.

### **The contradiction**

The Bible's teachings concerning God's comfort and nearness to us form a direct contradiction to the predominate views of human beings in our society, however. For the thought of most of the people in modern America is that we are autonomous, self-directed, self-fulfilling individuals, who have responsibility only to ourselves. There is no thought that God's nearness to us also carries with it a responsibility to God - - no thought that perhaps God "beset[s] us behind and before" (Ps. 139:5) and that Christ in his Spirit is "with us always" (Matt. 20:28) because he cares whether or not we are doing his will. Rather, God has been demoted to the position of being only a Comforter and Helper in times of trouble. Otherwise, we are in charge of directing and leading our own individual lives, and God is the kindly assistant who will help us out if we get ourselves into a jam. Our individual selves are sovereign; God is just there as an assisting servant.

### **The connection with abortion**

It is this latter attitude and view of God that lies behind the abortion crisis of our time. With very few exceptions, our people, and very often some clergy, forget the fact that we are always responsible, in everything we do, to the Lord who is always with us - - that there is no word on our tongue or action in our lives that is not spoken or done towards God, and that we are responsible to him for those words and deeds.

Rather, for those who approve and promote abortion, the individual is in charge of his or her own life. The individual can decide if the elimination of a child in the womb is the proper course of action. The individual can assess the situation and decide what is the best thing to do for his or her own welfare. (Cf. "You can be like God knowing good and evil," Gen.3:8). The individual's wellbeing is supreme, and God is there only to comfort and to approve whatever action is taken. As David Wells has written, salvation is seen as synonymous with feeling good about oneself,\*\* and God is only an agent to help along the feeling.

### **Our tactics**

Those of us in the pro-life movement, therefore, are confronting not just individual erroneous views on the part of pro-abortionists. We are facing a whole society in which the understanding of God and human beings has changed; we are facing a total worldview. The autonomous, supreme Self has replaced the sovereignty of God and eliminated any responsibility to him. God is no longer the biblical Lord over nature and history. God is a secondary helpmeet, created in our image, and like any servant subservient to a master's will, he can be ignored if necessary.

For years, we in the religious pro-life movement have quoted scripture verses to support our position, hoping that evidence from the Word of God will change hearts and minds. But if pro-abortionists feel no responsibility to God, if the Lord is understood just as a tool to make individuals feel better, then those quotations of biblical passages do not carry much weight with our opponents.

Perhaps what we need to do is to back up a step in our proclamations and to set before our people their erroneous reasoning. They - - and we - - all love to hear of the comfort provided us by God. "Lo, I am with you always to the close of the age" (Matt. 28:20) - - we like the warm and fuzzy feeling of security that furnishes us. But have we ever preached or taught the responsibility that promise carries with it - - the responsibility to be faithful to the Lord's will? Our faithless society cannot be given the comfort and grace of God apart from commands and judgments of God. There is no comfort apart from responsibility. And so perhaps we need to begin, in our discipleship, to teach and preach more about the real relation of human beings to the Lord.

The autonomous individual is not God. And the autonomous self-directed, self-fulfilling individual tries to assume that position only at the risk of death (cf. Gen 3:19; Rom. 6:23). God is still the Lord, who will not be mocked, and try as our age may to make him a servant of our good feelings, he will not relinquish his throne to petty humans with their desires.

So we in the pro-life movement need to preach and teach and write about the real nature of God and of human beings, as they are presented to us in the scriptures, before we can ever talk about abortion. From God's lordship flow all true views. But because of God's lordship, we can also be assured that all things are possible.

\*In Theology Matters, Mar/Apr 1998, p. 4.