

Secrets of the heart

*If we have forgotten the name of our God, or stretched out our hands to a strange god;
Shall not God search this out? for he knoweth the secrets of the heart.*

Psalm 44:20-21

In the greater context of this psalm, the writer rides a roller-coaster of thoughts and pronouncements characteristic of the human heart. As he begins the psalm proclaiming God's past deliverance of Israel from their enemies, he plunges from there into the depths of complaint as he describes the state of the nation as a result of God's chastening, evidently through the time of Israel's captivity by their enemies. We have the balance of the Old Testament describing the utter disobedience of Israel that led to their ultimate demise, as promised in God's law for such attitudes and resulting behavior. Yet at verse seventeen we see his audacity in claiming innocence in spite of all that had come upon them. This unfortunately is very characteristic of our humanity. We are slow to see or admit our own sins that bring our calamities. Our nature readily yields to the worldly suggestion that our situation is caused by the injustices of others against us, which ultimately leads even to accusation against God, as we succumb to the notion of being a victim without personal responsibility.

However, in our text the truth mercifully grabs his conscience to remind us that God will search out the heart of deceit, even to the point of revealing the strange gods of that deception. While we may have no gods of wood or stone, there are the idols of arrogance, self-will, and self-fulfillment: those that call His name and yet forget it when it's time to do what He says. Jeremiah reminds us that "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked; who can know it?" He answers his own question, "I the Lord search the heart; I try the reins..." (Jeremiah 17:9-10). His loving desire is to reveal the true root of our problem, that it may be cast out. So, with the psalmist, let us ignore the arrogant claims of the heart, and instead allow the Lord to search out the secrets that avoid His blessing. Then let us in loving surrender cast out the strange gods of self-justification, and instead recognize that our greatest hope is His mercy, as the psalmist concludes, "redeem us for thy mercies' sake."