
THE REFORMED WITNESS HOUR

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Search and Know
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Dear radio friends,

Today we are going to consider a request that the psalmist, King David, makes in Psalm 139:23, 24. “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.”

It is quite the request that David makes here in this passage. He is asking the holy God, who hates sin, to search out, to examine, what goes on in his heart. Now, I do not know about you, but I know that there are a lot of thoughts and desires in my heart I would never want anyone, especially God, to know.

And that is what makes this request of David here a bold one. You see, the heart is the spiritual center of a man. David, therefore, refers to what goes on at the very core of our spiritual existence. The heart is what makes us tick, so to speak. It determines who I am spiritually. What I think, what I desire, what I do, all find their root in my heart. Solomon tells us that out of the heart are the issues

of life. What is true of me in my heart, therefore, in my spiritual center, will have a direct bearing on the way that I think, on what I desire, and ultimately in the way that I live. If my heart is spiritually right with God, then I will think and will and live the good. If it is, on the other hand, at odds with God, then I will think and will and live the evil. So all the issues of my spiritual life can find their beginnings, their source, in the heart.

Now, as I mentioned, there are determinations of the heart that we would certainly rather have not anyone know about. And that is especially true of God. And here is why. Our hearts are, in part, made up of sin. Now, I realize that we have to be very careful at this point. Scripture teaches us that the child of God has been delivered from the power and dominion of sin. The child of God, in his heart and in his life, belongs to God. And God has delivered him from such horrible sins.

The unbeliever in whom Christ has not worked by His Spirit is given over to sin. His

heart is filled with sin. His heart does not simply *contain* sin, but it *is* sin. The unbeliever is depraved to the very core of his being, and that is why he is incapable of doing any good. His heart is totally corrupt.

That is not true of the child of God. Christ has sent forth His Spirit into our hearts. Christ Himself, therefore, lives within us. When that Spirit of Christ took up residence in our hearts, He sanctified and cleansed them. He shed abroad the love of God in them, we are told in Romans 5:5. Faith is worked there so that we believe with the heart. God has written the law in our heart, the writer to the Hebrews tells us in Hebrews 8:10. The result is that the child of God has, indeed, a renewed heart. His heart is not totally given over to sin as is the unbeliever's, in whom God does not work by His grace.

And yet, the Word of God is also clear that "I find then a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me." That is what Paul writes in Romans 7. Also in that same chapter we read, "For I delight in the law of God in the inward man; but I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into the captivity of the law of sin which is in my mem-

bers." How does one explain this? It is almost as if, at the very core or nucleus of the heart there is the life of Christ implanted within us. We are new creatures who have within us, in the center of our being, the principle of eternal life. But the good inclinations of our heart must pass through the sinful desires of that heart. The result is that even our best works are polluted with sin. Or, as Paul writes again in Romans 7, "For to will [to do the good] is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not."

But that means that when we examine our hearts we see in them sin, sins of the worst sort. If they are not sins that actually come to fruition in our lives, nevertheless, they are there within us—horrible sins, dark sins, sins that are most despicable in nature are found tucked away in the deep corners of our hearts. And David now asks God to search his heart? I think I would be quite afraid to ask God to do this.

Furthermore, David asks God to try his thoughts. We can distinguish these, too, in us. Our minds are always working. They are always filled with thoughts. Sometimes we can be thinking and expressing thoughts at the same time. Sometimes we can

be doing something else and at the same time be lost deep in thought. We are always thinking. Yet the psalmist is interested not simply in what he reasons to himself about such things as work, or the solution to a math problem, or whatever. David wants God to examine the moral character of his thoughts. The thoughts of our text refer to the spiritual, ethical character of what we are thinking. Judge and try the spiritual caliber of my thoughts, David asks God. And again, that, in my estimation, is quite the request. Certainly our thoughts are far too often characterized by the sin of our flesh. From the spiritual/ethical point of view, our thoughts are not always all that good, but in fact, sinful, very sinful.

The same thing that we said concerning the intentions of our heart can be said about our thoughts. They are far from pure. The motivation behind our thoughts is sinful. And that means that our thoughts themselves come out oftentimes corrupt and decayed with sin.

We discover that every time we study the Ten Commandments, do we not? We must not commit adultery. And in our thoughts we do so. We may not kill. Yet in our thoughts we do so. We may

not steal. Yet, how often in our thoughts we covet. We may speak no evil of our neighbor. Yet how often we can think evil of them, if we do not speak it. Even the best of our thoughts, it seems, are tainted with the influence of sin. Sin is in us and it ruins, it mars, it destroys, and eats up as a canker the thoughts and intents of our hearts and minds.

And yet it is so well hidden there in us. It is out of the view of anyone else. No one knows, much less sees, what goes on in our hearts and thoughts. That is the one secret place of our lives. It is the inner sanctum. No one enters there except we ourselves.

You know, there is that area of our lives that is open for everyone to see. It is when we are together with friends or the saints or what have you. It is during that time, of course, that we are exemplary, we are at our best. We do not wish to have others see our sins or our weaknesses or our horribly wicked thoughts.

And then there is that area of life that is a bit more private—life in the home and in the family. We do not want people to know everything that goes on there because we have a tendency to let our sins and weaknesses show a little bit more there in the privacy of our homes. Life in the home

can be much different than life in the presence of God's saints in general.

Then there is that area in life that we share only with the most intimate of companions. A wife or a husband oftentimes share in that. Sins of even a worse nature can be revealed there. This is why marriages can often fall apart, because we are not afraid to give free rein to sin in these intimate relationships.

But then, finally, there is that area of our lives of what goes on inside of us, in our own thoughts and hearts, where we find all the sludge of sin. We think of things that we would not dare say to anyone. There are thoughts there we would not let out even to the closest of our loved ones. Within are hidden faults. Within are secret transgressions.

Now, here is David in our text, requesting that God, the holy One, who dwells in a light of perfection unto which no sinner can come, and the God who is an all-consuming fire in His holiness—David comes with such a request to this God: “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts.” Do we really want God to do this? Do we really want God to search, to try, to see, and to know what is going on within us?

That is a *bold* request that the psalmist makes here to God. Mightily bold.

Consider once the various words that David uses in this request. “Search me, O God.” That means, thoroughly investigate. Dig up every desire and intention of my heart and of my thoughts. David asks God to enter into the deepest inner recesses of his heart and thoughts and into every intention and every motivation that proceeds from that heart and to take a good hard look at what is going on there. “Enter into the deepest part of my heart and uncover, dig up, turn over every log of my thoughts and intents. Do not leave one thought or motivation of my heart buried. Dig it all up and look to see if there is any guile and envy and hatred and pride in me. Expose it all. Try it.” David actually asks God here to *try* or to test all of these thoughts and intents of his heart. Unbelievable. Do you want God to do that? Examine my thoughts and expose those thoughts as to what they really are? “See them,” he adds. “See if there be any wicked way in me. Take a look, a close look, at the tendency, the way that my heart desires to go in. View the direction, the way that I am heading, with Thy all-searching eye and see if there is any wicked way

in me. Turn my intentions over and see them for what they are and determine if there is in me any way that grieves Thee. And know them. Understand my every thought and my every intent. Know exactly what motivates me in all of my life. Discover if I am evil and therefore an offense to Thee. Search, try, see, and know. Those are the terms that David uses and the request that he makes to God.

Are you and I ready today to make this request of David our request too? Are we ready to do that as old saints, as busy mothers and fathers, as husbands and wives? Are we ready to do that as young people and as children? Do you and I want God to search *our* hearts and uncover everything in them? Well, even if we do not *want* this to happen, God has already done this.

We read of that in verses 1-4 of this Psalm that we are considering. "O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassed my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether." God already knows what is going on in our

hearts. We have never been able to pull one over on God! We have never been able to do something and keep it hidden from Him. We were not ever able to let a little thought or desire escape without God knowing it. He is the omniscient One. God is God, the God of all virtue. He is the discerner of the thoughts and intents of man's heart. He understands our thoughts afar off. We certainly cannot hide from God. He knows us. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And you know what? He knows our sins better than we do. He knows those sins of which at times we are not even aware. He knows the sins of omission and the sins of commission. He knows our hidden faults. He knows the sinful defects of our very natures. And He is, as God, extremely sensitive to what sin is in our lives. Do you ever have it when a piece of ice touches a cold-sensitive tooth, how that aches? Well, that is how sensitive God is to sin. Every one of them. And God is aware of every one of them too.

But, then, why does David wish for God to search out and examine his heart and thoughts? Does David want God to see how much of a man of integrity he is, how good he really is? Of course not! David

knew his own sin. Then why does David want God to search out and know his heart if he knows that God already does search and know? What is the reason for the request of this passage?

Because David desires of God to make *him* aware of his own sins and weaknesses. What God sees in him David wants God to reveal to him so that he is able to see it, too. What a request! “Teach me to know myself that I might not leave one sin uncovered and hidden in me. Teach me to search my own heart, to investigate and uncover that which motivates me. Teach me to examine and test my thoughts against Thy holy law. Teach me to know my sin. Teach me to know myself in the way that Thou knowest me.” Why? Because if I do not, then I will not humble myself properly before God and seek my salvation in Jesus Christ alone.

The child of God knows the inclinations of his flesh. He knows that it is our tendency to commit sin and remain insensitive to it, to sever that nerve, that Spirit-guided, that Word-guided conscience in order that we might not feel the ache of our sin. Search me and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see me. Why? In order that *I* might make diligent search to try my

own heart and my own thoughts. Then I will know that there is absolutely no reason to boast in myself, that there is no reason to think that I am good enough to earn my way into God’s favor, that there is absolutely no reason to think that my own works can in any way earn or maintain my righteousness before God.

Then I will know my utter need for the cross of Christ and that there is no righteousness in me but that my righteousness before God can only be imputed to me because of what Christ has done on the cross. He has paid the price for sin. He alone has freed me from its guilt and from its curse.

Ah, that all of us together with David might make this prayer. Ah, that we might know our sin. Yes, we may be hesitant in making this kind of a prayer before God, but it is a necessity in our lives.

Then we will understand the urgent need David expresses at the very end of this verse. “Lead me in the way everlasting.” Literally that means “Lead me in a perpetual way, a way that has no end to it, a way of endless continuance.” And to understand the full import of this final request of the passage, we should ask ourselves, “What is the opposite way?” That is a way that

ends, right? The way that ceases. What way is that? That is the way that leads to hell. What is that way to hell? It is the way of sin and unbelief. It is the way that places trust in self and in our own works. It is a way in which those who walk think they will achieve heaven through their own accomplishments. To these God says in the day of days, "I never knew you." And in that day, their way ends.

The way that leads on forever, however, is the way of eternal life. It is a way that begins with regeneration and continues on forever. It is a way that leads us to heaven where we continue on that way unto all eternity.

But now we have come to know our sin. Our hearts and thoughts are wicked. Why would God ever lead us in this way everlasting? Because that way is Christ. Of course. And there is the urgent need that we have as God's people. When we search our hearts and examine our thoughts, then we know that the only way to everlasting life is found, not in us, but only in Jesus Christ, because He alone is *the* way, the truth, and the life. He alone makes possible favor with God. We cannot walk in that everlasting way except we are found in Christ alone. This is true because of what

He merited for us on the cross. The only way everlasting is found in Christ. Through His death those sinful thoughts, those sinful inclinations, those sinful motivations of our heart are forgiven us. We are made righteous in His blood and saved from guilt.

Thus the request. Lead me, O God, unto the way that leads to life everlasting. Lead me to Christ. This is why the need is so urgent to know our sin. God takes us by the hand today and leads us by this Word to Christ, where alone we will find forgiveness of sin. There I find my righteousness and there I find my holiness and there I find my way to everlasting life

Let us pray.

O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is Thy name in all the earth. Thou dost search and know our hearts and thoughts. And now we pray that Thou wilt reveal to us what Thou dost see, that we might know our sin and that we may know that our salvation is found in the cross of Jesus Christ. Teach us to take these sins, to confess them before Thee, to find plenteous forgiveness in that cross of our Savior. And lead us, Father, in the way that leads to life everlasting. For Jesus' sake, Amen.