



4. March 2021

“The deviousness of the heart and the holiness of God”

Jer 17:5-10

Yahweh says this, 'Accursed be anyone who trusts in human beings, who relies on human strength and whose heart turns from Yahweh. Such a person is like scrub in the wastelands: when good comes, it does not affect him since he lives in the parched places of the desert, uninhabited, salt land. 'Blessed is anyone who trusts in Yahweh, with Yahweh to rely on. Such a person is like a tree by the waterside that thrusts its roots to the stream: when the heat comes it has nothing to fear, its foliage stays green; untroubled in a year of drought, it never stops bearing fruit. 'The heart is more devious than any other thing, and is depraved; who can pierce its secrets? I, Yahweh, search the heart, test the motives, to give each person what his conduct and his actions deserve.

Our heart is devious and is depraved. Who likes to hear that? It would be no wonder if something in us fought back strongly! Is this not too negative a view of human beings that the Holy Scriptures suggest?

The view is directed towards God Himself - we look at ourselves in comparison to His holiness, in comparison with what God has called us to. Let us remember the word of Jesus: *“You must therefore be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”* (Mt 5:48) That is the standard.

Nor is the Lord concerned to make us despondent in the face of our sins and imperfections, nor, of course, is he trying to tell us that our condition is hopeless.

No, it is about a realistic view of God's holiness and our imperfections. It is about gaining a new heart in the face of our loving and merciful Father.

Who knows his own heart, who can look into his own depths and know himself down to his last areas?

There is an answer: God knows our heart! Nothing is hidden from Him, it is He, as it says in the above text, who searches the heart and test the motives. The *“depravedness”* of the heart is not something that must always remain so, but shows us that only God can give us a new heart (*cf. Ezek 36:26*) and that our

human efforts are far from sufficient. It awakens the longing for a new heart, a heart that is truly able to love (*cf. Ps 51:10*).

We can look without fear at our heart, without fear at the shadows we perceive in ourselves, without fear at the disparity between what we want and what we accomplish (*cf. Rom 7:19*).

With such a realistic view, we approach the text in order to be able to draw conclusions for our own path.

Precisely because our heart is fickle and, left to itself, inclined to evil, our hope in people is futile. The Holy Scriptures told us even more strongly today: If one's hope is in human beings and this is connected with the turning away of the heart from God, then one is accursed. On such a path, man becomes an idol, he takes the place of God.

Such a thing is not as far from us as it may sound at first.

There is always a subtle temptation to substitute the visible man for God. The futility of doing this is clearly addressed: the man who puts his hope in God is not "*like scrub in the wastelands*", but "*like a tree by the waterside*".

So let us take this aspect to explore our "devious heart".

What do we put our hope in? On people? Do we rely on them rather than on God? Do we seek comfort from them rather than from the Lord? Or has our heart already fully engaged with God, so that the depths of our being are anchored in Him?

Maybe we can't really answer these questions and don't really know! Possibly we say: sometimes it is like this, other times like that.

This can happen because we do not know our heart so well and are perhaps fickle.

But we are shown a way to take a closer look at the condition of our heart. Thus it is said: "*I, Yahweh, search the heart, test the motives*".

So we can turn to God and ask Him to examine our heart and show us where we still lack trust, where we mistakenly place our hope in people instead of in God.

If we then recognise with God's help that our heart is not yet really free for Him, that we are still too attached to people, then we hold out our heart to Him and ask Him to draw it completely to Himself.

If we always do this when we realise that we are not deeply enough anchored in God, then our heart will change over time, because God wants us to have a new heart: a heart in which He is in the first place, as it is due to Him and right for us!

We then counter the “deviousness” of our heart with the holiness of God, and in this way the love of the Lord penetrates deeper into our heart and we can then become “*like a tree by the waterside*” that “*never stops bearing fruit*”!