

Jeremiah 17:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.

Analysis

After the devastating diagnosis of verse 9, God declares His omniscience and justice. "I the LORD search the heart" uses choqer (חָקַר), meaning to examine thoroughly, investigate deeply, or probe. God's knowledge is not superficial observation but penetrating insight into motives, thoughts, and desires. "I try the reins" (kidneys, kelayot, כִּלְיֹת) refers to testing the deepest seat of emotions and conscience.

The purpose clause "to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings" establishes God's perfect justice. Derachim (ways) refers to one's habitual course of life, while "fruit of his doings" emphasizes that actions produce consequences. God's judgment is neither arbitrary nor based on external religious performance but on the heart's true condition as manifested in life patterns.

This verse grounds divine judgment in perfect knowledge. God alone can judge righteously because only He knows the heart completely (1 Sam 16:7, 1 Kgs 8:39). This should terrify the hypocrite and comfort the genuinely repentant. Christ will judge the secrets of men (Rom 2:16), rendering judgment based on perfect knowledge of hearts. Yet for believers, this omniscient Judge has also borne their judgment (Isa 53:5-6), transforming terror into assurance.

Historical Context

Ancient justice systems relied on external evidence, witness testimony, and oaths—all subject to deception and manipulation. The prophets consistently emphasized that God judges differently, seeing beneath religious externalism to covenant loyalty or rebellion. This divine prerogative to judge hearts became central to biblical ethics and eschatology, anticipating the final judgment where all secrets will be revealed (Eccl 12:14, Matt 12:36, Rev 20:12).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. How does knowing that God searches your heart affect your approach to private thoughts, hidden sins, and secret motivations?
2. In what ways does this verse challenge the tendency to judge ourselves by intentions while others judge us by actions?
3. How should the reality of divine omniscience shape both our fear of judgment and our confidence in grace?

Interlinear Text

אֲנִי	יְהוָה	חִקֵּר	לִב	בִּחַן	כָּלִי	וְלֹא	לְאִישׁ
H589	I the LORD	search	the heart	I try	the reins	even to give	every man
	H3068	H2713	H3820	H974	H3629	H5414	H376
כְּדָרְכֵי	כְּפָרִי	מַעֲלָלָיו:					
according to his ways	and according to the fruit	of his doings					
H1870	H6529	H4611					

Additional Cross-References

1 Samuel 16:7 (References Lord): But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.

Romans 8:27 (Parallel theme): And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

Revelation 2:23 (Parallel theme): And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

Jeremiah 11:20 (References Lord): But, O LORD of hosts, that judgest righteously, that triest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I revealed my cause.

Jeremiah 32:19 (Parallel theme): Great in counsel, and mighty in work: for thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men: to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings:

Jeremiah 20:12 (References Lord): But, O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause.

1 Chronicles 28:9 (References Lord): And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart and with a willing mind: for

the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts: if thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.

Revelation 22:12 (Parallel theme): And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Psalms 62:12 (References Lord): Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work.

Matthew 16:27 (Parallel theme): For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

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