

Deuteronomy 23:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

Analysis

Thou shalt not bring the hire of a whore, or the price of a dog, into the house of the LORD thy God for any vow: for even both these are abomination unto the LORD thy God.

This verse prohibits using money from morally tainted sources for religious offerings. The 'hire of a whore' (etnan zonah) refers to prostitution proceeds, while 'price of a dog' (mehir kelev) likely means either literal dog sale proceeds (dogs being unclean animals) or euphemistically refers to male prostitutes' earnings ('dog' being a derogatory term for sodomites, compare Revelation 22:15). God refused offerings purchased with immoral income, regardless of the giver's intentions or the amount.

This law established crucial principles:

1. God cares about means, not just ends—worthy goals don't justify immoral methods
2. worship requires not just proper ritual but righteous living
3. money carries moral taint from its source
4. God cannot be bribed or appeased through offerings from sin's proceeds.

Calling such offerings 'abomination' (toevah, תועבה) used the strongest Hebrew term for divine disgust, the same word describing idolatry, sexual perversion, and child sacrifice. Offering ill-gotten gains compounded sin rather than atoning for it.

Theologically, this challenges health-and-wealth theology and pragmatism that ignores ethical means in pursuing 'spiritual' goals. Isaiah 1:10-17 and Amos 5:21-24 expand this principle: God rejects religious ritual disconnected from justice and righteousness. For Christians, this means examining income sources, refusing to finance ministry through compromised means, and recognizing that God desires 'mercy, and not sacrifice' (Hosea 6:6, Matthew 9:13). The church must refuse tainted donations, even if rejecting them means financial hardship, maintaining witness that holiness encompasses economic ethics.

Historical Context

Ancient Near Eastern temples regularly accepted offerings from any source, including prostitution proceeds and other morally questionable income. Temple prostitution itself enriched sanctuaries throughout Mesopotamia, Canaan, and the Mediterranean world. Archaeological evidence shows temples functioned as economic centers accumulating substantial wealth from diverse sources without moral scrutiny. The pragmatic approach maximized resources for religious activities, temple maintenance, and priestly support.

Canaanite temples particularly benefited from cultic prostitution, creating financial incentives to maintain these practices. The economic integration of immoral activities with temple operations created powerful resistance to reform. When Josiah purged Judah's temple of qedeshim (male cult prostitutes, 2 Kings 23:7), he disrupted established economic systems linking sexual immorality with sanctuary funding. This demonstrates why moral reformation often faces fierce opposition: economic interests entrench immoral practices.

Israel's prohibition of tainted offerings challenged prevailing religious economics, potentially reducing sanctuary income compared to neighboring temples that welcomed all revenue sources. This required faith that God would provide through righteous means and that maintaining holiness mattered more than accumulating wealth. Historical evidence suggests Israel frequently compromised this standard, accepting offerings from unjust sources (Isaiah 1:11-15, Malachi 1:6-14). The prophetic critique of corrupt offerings demonstrates both the law's enduring

relevance and Israel's struggle to maintain economic ethics in religious contexts, a challenge continuing in contemporary church life.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. How should churches and Christians evaluate whether income sources are morally acceptable for supporting ministry?
2. What does this prohibition teach about God's concern for ethical means, not just worthy ends?
3. How can believers guard against pragmatism that accepts questionable financial support to advance 'spiritual' goals?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	תָּבִיא	אֶתְנֶה	זוֹנָה	וּמֶחָ יָר	כָּ לָב
H3808	Thou shalt not bring	the hire	of a whore	or the price	of a dog
	H935	H868	H2181	H4242	H3611
בֵּית	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	לְכָל	נִדָּר	כִּי
into the house	of the LORD	thy God	H3605	for any vow	H3588
H1004	H3068	H430		H5088	
תּוֹעֵבִים	יְהוָה	אֱלֹהֶיךָ	גַּם	שְׁנֵיהֶם:	
these are abomination	of the LORD	thy God	H1571	for even both	
H8441	H3068	H430		H8147	

Additional Cross-References

Philippians 3:2 (Parallel theme): Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

Revelation 22:15 (Parallel theme): For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

Matthew 7:6 (Parallel theme): Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn again and rend you.

Deuteronomy 23:21 (References God): When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee.

Leviticus 18:22 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.