

Ezekiel 33:31

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness.

Analysis

And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they shew much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. This verse exposes religious hypocrisy in devastating terms. The people attended Ezekiel's prophetic gatherings, appearing to be "my people" (God's covenant community), and "hear thy words" (shamau, שָׁמְעוּ)—but hearing without obeying reveals false religion. The contrast between external conformity and internal rebellion illustrates what Jesus later condemned as honoring God with lips while hearts remain far from Him (Matthew 15:8, citing Isaiah 29:13).

"They will not do them" (lo ya'asu otam, לֹא יַעֲשׂוּ אוֹתָם) reveals the heart of the problem—disconnection between profession and practice, hearing and doing. James 1:22-25 echoes this warning against self-deception through hearing-only religion. "With their mouth they shew much love" (agavim rabim, אֶגְבִּימ רַבִּים) describes emotional expressions of devotion—possibly enthusiastic worship or affirmations of love for God—that mask true heart condition.

The root problem: "their heart goeth after their covetousness" (acharey bitzam libam holek, אַחֲרַי בִּצְעָם לִבָּם הוֹלֵךְ). Betza (בִּצְעָה) means unjust gain, greed, profit pursued at others' expense. Covetousness—desiring what belongs to others or prioritizing material gain—reveals idolatry (Colossians 3:5). Theologically, this

verse warns that religious activity without heart transformation is worthless before God. True faith produces obedience; genuine love for God surpasses love for wealth.

Historical Context

This rebuke came during Ezekiel's later ministry (approximately 586-585 BC), after Jerusalem's fall. News of the city's destruction had reached the exiles (Ezekiel 33:21), validating Ezekiel's prophecies and initially increasing his popularity. People gathered to hear him, treating his messages as entertainment or novelty rather than as God's authoritative word requiring obedience. This created a dangerous situation—religious observance without genuine repentance.

The exile community faced identity crisis: removed from the land, temple destroyed, political independence lost. Some responded with genuine soul-searching and repentance; others maintained external religious forms while pursuing material prosperity in Babylon. Archaeological evidence shows some Jewish exiles achieved economic success in Babylon, particularly in banking and commerce. This prosperity created tension between maintaining covenant faithfulness and adopting Babylonian commercial values.

Ancient Near Eastern culture recognized similar hypocrisy. Egyptian wisdom texts condemned those who gave lip service to gods while violating *ma'at* (truth/justice). However, Israel's prophets uniquely emphasized that Yahweh demands heart-level integrity, not mere ritual compliance. The historical context shows that exile should have prompted deep repentance, yet many substituted religious attendance for genuine transformation. This pattern recurred throughout Israel's history and continues in every generation of the church.

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Study Questions

1. How does this passage distinguish between genuine faith and religious hypocrisy?
2. What does it mean to "hear" God's word in the biblical sense, and why is hearing without doing self-deception?
3. How does covetousness function as practical idolatry, and what does it reveal about true heart allegiance?
4. In what ways might contemporary Christians exhibit this same pattern of outward religious observance with inward covetousness?
5. How can believers examine themselves to ensure their worship and profession of love for God align with obedient, transformed lives?

Interlinear Text

וַיָּבֹאוּ And they come H935	אֵלַי H413	כְּמִבּוֹא cometh H3996	עַמִּי thee as my people H5971	וַיֵּשְׁבוּ and they sit H3427	לִפְנֵי יְיָ before H6440
עַמִּי thee as my people H5971	וַיִּשְׁמְעוּ and they hear H8085	אֶת H853	דְּבָרֶיךָ יְיָ thy words H1697	וְאֹתָם H853	לֹא H3808
עֲשֵׂי יִם but they will not do H6213	כִּי H3588	עֲגֹב יִם much love H5690	בְּפִיָּהֶם them for with their mouth H6310	וְהָמָה H1992	
עֲשֵׂי יִם but they will not do H6213	אַחֲרַי after H310	בְּצַעַם their covetousness H1215	לִבָּם but their heart H3820	הִלָּךְ goeth H1980	

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 13:22 (Word): He also that received seed among the thorns is he that heareth the word; and the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word, and he becometh unfruitful.

Luke 11:28 (Word): But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

Isaiah 29:13 (Parallel theme): Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

Jeremiah 44:16 (Word): As for the word that thou hast spoken unto us in the name of the LORD, we will not hearken unto thee.

Ezekiel 8:1 (Parallel theme): And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, in the fifth day of the month, as I sat in mine house, and the elders of Judah sat before me, that the hand of the Lord GOD fell there upon me.

Isaiah 28:13 (Word): But the word of the LORD was unto them precept upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little; that they might go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.

Acts 10:33 (Parallel theme): Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

Luke 10:39 (Word): And she had a sister called Mary, which also sat at Jesus' feet, and heard his word.

Luke 8:21 (Word): And he answered and said unto them, My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.

Ephesians 5:5 (Parallel theme): For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.