

Ezekiel 44:23

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And they shall teach my people the difference between the holy and profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Analysis

Priestly teaching responsibility—"teach my people the difference between the holy and profane... discern between the unclean and the clean"—addresses foundational spiritual need. Modern culture blurs all distinctions; God requires clarity. The Hebrew *חַן* (chol, 'profane') means common, ordinary, secular—not necessarily evil but not consecrated. The Hebrew *טָמֵן* (tamei, 'unclean') indicates ritual impurity, while *תָהוֹר* (tahor, 'clean') means ritually pure. These distinctions aren't arbitrary but reflect God's character and covenant requirements. Reformed theology emphasizes that inability to discern holy from profane indicates spiritual immaturity (Hebrews 5:14). Pastors must teach discernment, not merely entertain. The priesthood's teaching function predates sacrifice—Aaron's sons were to 'teach the children of Israel all the statutes' (Leviticus 10:11). Right worship requires right understanding.

Historical Context

Levitical law extensively detailed clean/unclean distinctions (Leviticus 11-15), holy/common boundaries (Leviticus 10:10), and priests' teaching responsibility (Deuteronomy 33:10, 2 Chronicles 15:3, Malachi 2:7). When priests failed to teach, people fell into syncretism—mixing YHWH worship with paganism (2 Kings 17:33). Ezekiel condemned priests who 'have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane' (Ezekiel 22:26). The exile resulted partly from failed priestly instruction. Post-exilic reforms

under Ezra and Nehemiah emphasized teaching the law (Nehemiah 8:1-8, 13). New Testament continues this emphasis: pastors must be 'apt to teach' (1 Timothy 3:2), 'able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince' (Titus 1:9).

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. Can you clearly distinguish holy from profane in your entertainment, relationships, use of time, and resources?
2. What church leaders teach you biblical discernment versus merely cultural preferences or personal opinions?
3. How seriously do you pursue the maturity that discerns good and evil (Hebrews 5:14) rather than remaining perpetually dependent?

Interlinear Text

וְאַתֶּן	עַמְּךָ	וְיֹרְצָה	בֵּין	לִשְׁמָךְ
H853	my people	And they shall teach	H996	the difference between the holy
H5971		H3384		H6944
לְחַטָּאת	וּבְנִי	טָמֵא	לְטָהָר	וְיִדְעָמֶן
and profane	H996	between the unclean	and the clean	and cause them to discern
H2455		H2931	H2889	H3045

Additional Cross-References

Ezekiel 22:26 (Holy): Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: they have put no difference between the holy and profane, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

Hosea 4:6 (Parallel theme): My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.

Zephaniah 3:4 (Parallel theme): Her prophets are light and treacherous persons: her priests have polluted the sanctuary, they have done violence to the law.

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