

Hosea 4:8

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity.

Analysis

Feeding on sin: 'They eat up the sin of my people, and they set their heart on their iniquity.' The priests economically benefit from people's sin—the more offerings for sin, the more priestly income (Leviticus 6:26, 10:17). This creates perverse incentive: priests profit from perpetuating sin rather than eliminating it. They 'set their heart' (literally 'lift up their soul,' נָשָׂא נַפְשׁוֹ, *nasa nafsho*) toward iniquity, desiring its continuation. This corruption transforms shepherds into wolves (Ezekiel 34:2-3, Acts 20:29). True spiritual leadership pursues holiness even at personal cost; false leadership exploits people's weakness for profit (1 Peter 5:2-3). Only Christ provides perfectly disinterested mediation—He gains nothing from our sin, everything from our holiness (Hebrews 7:26-27).

Historical Context

The Levitical system designated portions of sin and guilt offerings to priests (Leviticus 6:26, 7:6-7). This provision became corrupted when priests—rather than teaching people to avoid sin—tacitly encouraged it to maintain offerings. Similar corruption appears in Jesus's time: temple commerce exploiting worshipers (Matthew 21:12-13). Medieval Catholicism's abuse of indulgences provided parallel: profiting from sin rather than promoting holiness. This demonstrates how religious systems can become self-serving institutions rather than means of grace. Reformed theology's emphasis on *sola gratia* (grace alone) partially responds to such corruption: salvation purchased by Christ's once-for-all sacrifice requires no ongoing payment to religious mediators.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

1 John 4:8 — God is love

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How can Christian leaders guard against financial incentives that might compromise their prophetic calling to confront sin?
2. What does it mean that Christ's priesthood operates from entirely different motives than self-interested human priests?

Interlinear Text

חַטָּאת	עַמִּי י	יֹאכֵל לִי	וְאָל	עֲוֹנָם	וְשָׂאוּ
the sin	of my people	They eat up	H413	on their iniquity	and they set
H2403	H5971	H398		H5771	H5375

בְּפִשׁוֹ:
their heart
H5315

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 56:11 (Parallel theme): Yea, they are greedy dogs which can never have enough, and they are shepherds that cannot understand: they all look to their own way, every one for his gain, from his quarter.

Micah 3:11 (Parallel theme): The heads thereof judge for reward, and the priests thereof teach for hire, and the prophets thereof divine for money: yet will they lean upon the LORD, and say, Is not the LORD among us? none evil can come upon us.

Leviticus 6:26 (Sin): The priest that offereth it for sin shall eat it: in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the court of the tabernacle of the congregation.

Titus 1:11 (Parallel theme): Whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

Psalms 24:4 (Parallel theme): He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully.

Romans 16:18 (Parallel theme): For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Malachi 1:10 (Parallel theme): Who is there even among you that would shut the doors for nought? neither do ye kindle fire on mine altar for nought. I have no pleasure in you, saith the LORD of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand.

1 Samuel 2:29 (Parallel theme): Wherefore kick ye at my sacrifice and at mine offering, which I have commanded in my habitation; and honourest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat with the chiefest of all the offerings of Israel my people?