

Isaiah 29:13

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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:

Analysis

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me (וַיֹּאמֶר אֲדֹנָי יְעֹזֵב כִּי נִגַּשׁ הָעָם הַזֶּה בִּפְּיוֹ וּבִשְׂפָתָיו, vayomer Adonai ya'an ki nigash ha'am hazeh befiw uvisefataw kibeduni)—they נִגַּשׁ (nigash, draw near) with פֶּה (peh, mouth) and שְׂפָתַיִם (sefatayim, lips) to כִּבֵּד (kibed, honor) God. **But have removed their heart far from me** (וְלִבּוֹ וְלִבָּם, velibo richaq mimeni)—their לֵב (lev, heart) is רָחָק (rachaq, far, distant). **And their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men** (וְתִהְיֶי יִרְאַתָּם אֹתִי מִצֻּוֹת, vatehi yir'atam oti mitsvat anashim melumdah)—their יִרְאַה (yir'ah, fear/reverence) is merely human tradition, מְלֻמָּדָה (melumdah, taught/learned by rote).

Jesus quoted this verse verbatim when confronting Pharisaic tradition-worship (Matthew 15:8-9, Mark 7:6-7). The diagnosis: externalized religion divorced from internal transformation. Lips move in prayer, rituals are performed, but the heart—center of will and affection—remains distant. The fear of God has devolved into human tradition, rules taught by rote rather than reverent response to God's character. Orthodoxy without heart equals hypocrisy.

Historical Context

By Isaiah's time, Israel's religion had ossified into ritualism. The Temple functioned, sacrifices continued, festivals were observed—all the machinery of Mosaic worship operated. But hearts were far from God, pursuing idolatry and injustice. This pattern repeated: by Jesus's day, Pharisees meticulously tithed garden herbs while neglecting justice and mercy (Matthew 23:23).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How do we 'draw near' to God with words while our hearts remain distant?
2. What's the difference between fearing God reverently versus following religious traditions mechanically?
3. In what areas might your spiritual practices be 'taught by the precept of men' rather than flowing from genuine love?

Interlinear Text

וַיֹּאמֶר	אֲדֹנָי	יָעַן	כִּי	נִגַּשׁ	הָעַם	הַזֶּה
said	Wherefore the Lord	Forasmuch	H3588	draw near	as this people	H2088
H559	H136	H3282		H5066	H5971	
בִּפִּי יוֹ	וּבִשְׂפָתָיו	כָּבֵד וְנִי	וְלֵב וְ	רַחֵם	מִי	
me with their mouth	and with their lips	do honour	their heart	far		H4480
H6310	H8193	H3513	H3820	H7368		
וַתֵּהָיֵא	יִרְאַתָּם	אֵת	מִצְוַת	אֲנֹשׁ יָם	מְלִמָּדָה:	
H1961	H3373	H853	by the precept	H376	toward me is taught	
			H4687		H3925	

Additional Cross-References

Jeremiah 12:2 (Parallel theme): Thou hast planted them, yea, they have taken root: they grow, yea, they bring forth fruit: thou art near in their mouth, and far from their reins.

Jeremiah 3:10 (References Lord): And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD.

Proverbs 30:6 (Parallel theme): Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar.

Colossians 2:22 (Parallel theme): Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

Jeremiah 5:2 (References Lord): And though they say, The LORD liveth; surely they swear falsely.