

Isaiah 66:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD.

Analysis

Specific sins are condemned: "They that sanctify themselves, and purify themselves in the gardens behind one tree in the midst, eating swine's flesh, and the abomination, and the mouse, shall be consumed together, saith the LORD." The Hebrew describes syncretistic worship—self-sanctification rituals (*mitqadshim umittaharim*) in gardens (pagan sacred groves), following cultic leaders ("behind one tree/in the midst"), eating unclean foods (swine, mouse, abominable things). These practices mixed Yahwism with pagan fertility cults. The judgment: "consumed together" (*yachad yasu'fu*)—corporate destruction, not individual. "Saith the LORD" confirms certainty. From a Reformed perspective, this condemns religious syncretism and self-sanctification—attempting to make oneself holy through rituals rather than trusting God's provision. Self-sanctification always incorporates falsehood because unregenerate humans can't make themselves acceptable to God. True sanctification comes from God through Christ's work applied by the Spirit (1 Corinthians 1:30, 6:11, Hebrews 10:10, 14). Syncretism—mixing true worship with false religion—remains spiritually deadly, warranting divine judgment.

Historical Context

These practices plagued Israel throughout their history—Canaanite fertility cult elements infiltrating worship (Judges 2:11-13, 1 Kings 14:23, 2 Kings 17:10, Jeremiah 2:20, Ezekiel 6:13). Despite reforms, syncretism persisted into the post-exilic period (Ezra 9:1-2, Nehemiah 13:23-27). The early church faced similar dangers—Judaizers adding law to grace (Galatians), Gnostics mixing Greek philosophy with Christianity (Colossians). The danger continues—cultural Christianity mixing biblical truth with worldly philosophy, prosperity gospel mixing mammon with God, nominalism mixing religious form with secular living. All syncretism faces divine judgment.

Related Passages

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. What forms of religious syncretism threaten contemporary Christianity?
2. How does self-sanctification (through rituals, works, disciplines) differ from Spirit-wrought sanctification?
3. Why is God so severe in judging syncretistic worship?

Interlinear Text

הַמְתַּקְדִּישׁ יִם	וְהַמְטַהֵר יִם	אֵל	הִגֵּן וְת	אַחֲרֵי
They that sanctify	themselves and purify	H413	themselves in the gardens	behind
H6942	H2891		H1593	H310

אֶחָד	בְּתוֹךְ	אֹכְלֵי	בָּשָׂר	הַחֲזִירִים	וְהַשֵּׁקֶץ
one	tree in the midst	eating	flesh	swine's	and the abomination
H259	H8432	H398	H1320	H2386	H8263

וְהַעֲכָבֵר	יַחַד	יִסָּפוּ	נֹאֵם	יְהוָה:
and the mouse	together	shall be consumed	saith	the LORD
H5909	H3162	H5486	H5002	H3068

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