

Matthew 23:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?

Analysis

Ye fools and blind: for whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?—Jesus repeats His accusation μῶροι καὶ τυφλοί, fools and blind), emphasizing their culpable ignorance. The rhetorical question parallels verse 17's structure: the altar (θυσιαστήριον, θυσιαστήριον) sanctifies the gift (δῶρον, δῶρον), not the reverse. The altar's holiness derives from God's ordained use of it for sacrifice—the gift becomes holy by contact with the holy altar.

This theological principle comes from Exodus 29:37: whatever touches the altar shall be holy. The Pharisees knew this Scripture but inverted its meaning to serve greed and dishonesty. By making gifts more binding than the altar, they could manipulate people into making larger offerings while excusing themselves from temple oaths. Jesus exposes how they distorted Scripture to rationalize sin while appearing pious—the essence of hypocrisy.

Historical Context

The brazen altar in the Temple courtyard was where burnt offerings, sin offerings, and peace offerings were sacrificed. According to Torah, the altar was anointed and consecrated to God (Exodus 40:10), making it supremely holy. The Pharisees' teaching undermined this by prioritizing the gifts over the God-ordained altar.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do religious systems today invert biblical priorities to serve institutional interests?
2. What does the altar-sanctifying-gift principle teach about the source of holiness?
3. Why is it 'foolish' and 'blind' to know Scripture yet twist it to serve selfish ends?

Interlinear Text

μωροὶ καὶ τυφλοί, τί γὰρ μεῖζον τὸ δῶρον; ἢ
Ye fools and blind whether for is greater the gift or
G3474 G2532 G5185 G5101 G1063 G3187 G3588 G1435 G2228

τὸ θυσιαστήριον τὸ ἀγιάζον τὸ δῶρον;
the altar that sanctifieth the gift
G3588 G37 G3588 G1435

Additional Cross-References

Exodus 29:37 (Sacrifice): Seven days thou shalt make an atonement for the altar, and sanctify it; and it shall be an altar most holy: whatsoever toucheth the altar shall be holy.

Exodus 30:29 (Parallel theme): And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy.