

Psalm 115:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not:

Analysis

They have ears, but they hear not: noses have they, but they smell not. The anatomical inventory continues with ears (oznayim, אָזְנַיִם) and noses (af, אָף). Deaf idols cannot hear prayers, vows, or cries for help. This contrasts sharply with Israel's God, whose ears are open to righteous prayers (Psalm 34:15; 1 Peter 3:12) and who hears the groaning of the oppressed (Exodus 2:24).

The mention of noses unable to smell may seem odd until we recall that sacrificial worship involved burning incense and animals. Genesis 8:21 says the LORD 'smelled a sweet savour' from Noah's sacrifice—anthropomorphic language indicating divine pleasure and acceptance. Leviticus repeatedly describes offerings as 'sweet savour unto the LORD.' Idols, by contrast, smell nothing—neither sacrifice nor worshiper. The rituals offered before them ascend into void.

Paul's Areopagus address echoes this critique: God 'is not worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing' (Acts 17:25). The true God needs no food, hears without ears, and sees without eyes because He is spirit (John 4:24). Anthropomorphic biblical language communicates relationship, not divine limitation.

Historical Context

Ancient worship centered on sensory experience: visual splendor of temples, sounds of music and chanting, smells of incense and roasting meat. Pagan cults

appealed to all senses, creating powerful emotional experiences. Israel's critique cut through the sensory spectacle to ask: Does your god actually exist and act? Can he deliver in crisis? The question wasn't aesthetic but ontological and soteriological. No matter how impressive the ritual, a god who cannot hear prayers is useless when enemies invade or famine strikes.

Related Passages

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How can Christians distinguish between helpful sensory elements in worship (music, art, liturgy) and idolatrous dependence on religious experience?
2. What does God's ability to 'hear' and 'see' (though He has no physical body) teach about His personal nature versus impersonal philosophical concepts of deity?
3. In what areas might you be treating God like an idol—going through religious motions while doubting His actual involvement in your life?

Interlinear Text

וְלֹא לְפָנָם יִשְׁמַע עַזְבֵּן יְמִינָה
They have ears H0 H3808 but they hear not noses H0 H3808

יריחוֹן:

have they but they smell

H7306