

TRUE FASTING

Isaiah 58

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The prophet Isaiah in this chapter 58th chapter of his self entitled narrative has received a commission and charge given to him by God, he is to reprove the sinners in Zion—particularly those who were *hypocrites*. In short, Isaiah's assignment and instructions from God were clear; he was to show the people of God their transgressions. Isaiah without "*sparing*" anything or anyone was to inform Israel of how very bad they really were. He was to be blatantly and painfully honest with them, giving absolutely no regard to how they'd receive the message or feel about the message afterwards. God essentially says to Isaiah, "*Though they are called the people of God and the house of Jacob, and though they wear an honorable title and profess to have godly character—by which they are interested in many glorious privileges, do not flatter them, but show them their transgressions and their sins.*"

God wanted the people to know through Isaiah that He had a problem with their hypocrisy! What is a *hypocrite*?

- ❖ A *hypocrite* is "one who pretends, puts on a show, one who acts out something he or she is not". "A person who acts in contradiction to his or her stated beliefs".

Religious Hypocrites:

They act as though they believe and love God, yet they do not truly trust or obey God's holy commandments.

They pretend to be seeking God, but their hearts are in reality seeking recognition, esteem, position, power, fame, or wealth.

They act humble and helpful; nevertheless, they are full of pride, envy, selfishness, and covetousness.

They show a concern for the things of God at the same time their hearts are set on the things of the world.

They profess to know and believe God's Word, but they add to or take away from His Word at their own discretion and live as they wish instead of obeying God's Word.

God despise hypocrites! [Cr. Mark 10:12-14; 20-21]

God's Concern and Commission of Isaiah – v.v. 1, 2

“Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. ² Yet they seek me daily, and delight to know my ways, as a nation that did righteousness, and forsook not the ordinance of their God: they ask of me the ordinances of justice; they take delight in approaching to God”.

Note two powerful points in verse 1

- **THE EARS OF THE PEOPLE WERE INSENSITIVE TO THE VOICE OF GOD.**

God could not speak to the people Himself nor would they receive a Word in a normal voice; God has to commission an intermediary to speak to *His people* on His behalf and then command him to “***Cry aloud...like a trumpet***” which is to say “*at the full stretch of the voice*”.

Sin Desensitizes Our Ears!

- The thought is, the people were so caught up in their sins they could not be reasoned with (ref. Isa.1:18).

- **THE SPIRIT OF THE PEOPLE WAS DISCONNECTED FROM THE SPIRIT OF GOD.**

*“...**Shew my people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins**”*

They needed Isaiah to point out their sins which speaks of the absence of the Holy Spirit.

- One of the primary functions of the Holy Spirit is to convict us of wrong doing! (ref. Ps.51) The failure of a believer to be cognizant of his/her sins speaks of the inactivity or docility of the Holy Spirit in that person's life.

The nation of Israel were at that place of “*spiritual cluelessness*”, for when Isaiah went about to show them their transgressions, they flipped the script and maintained that they could see no transgressions which they were guilty of; (cr. Mal.3:8) they felt as if their religious devotion toward God was good enough. They felt that because they were diligent and constant in attending and participating in God's worship; that was all the Lord was requiring from them and in fact questioned *what more could he have required of them?* In verse 2 God acknowledged:

(1.) Yes, you do go to church, and observe hours of prayer: “***They seek me daily***”; they are very constant in their devotions and never omit them nor suffer any thing to put them by.

(2.) Yes, you do love to hear good preaching; “***They delight to know my ways***” as Herod, who heard John gladly, and the stony ground, that received the seed of the word with joy.

(3.) Yes, you do seem to take great pleasure in the exercises of religion and you do seem to be in your element when you’re at your devotions: “***They delight in approaching to God***” not for his sake to whom they approach, but for the sake of some pleasing circumstance, the company, or the festival.

BUT THOUGH GOD ACKNOWLEDGED THEM FOR THEIR RELIGIOSITY, HE HAD A PROBLEM WITH THEIR SPIRITUALITY!

Isaiah Describes Their fast and Attempts At Worship as Counterfeit v.v. 3-7

“Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not? Wherefore have we afflicted our soul, and thou takest no knowledge? Behold, in the day of your fast ye find pleasure, and exact all your labors. ⁴ Behold, ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness: ye shall not fast as ye do this day, to make your voice to be heard on high. ⁵ Is it such a fast that I have chosen? A day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head as a bulrush, and to spread sackcloth and ashes under him? Wilt thou call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD?”

In verse 3, the people lodge a complaint against God! They feel as though they are not being regarded by God (*given credit*) for the sacrifices they are making for God. They began boasting of themselves, and magnifying their own performances: “*We have fasted, and afflicted our souls; we have not only sought God daily (v. 2), but have kept some certain times of more solemn devotion.*”

- Thought: the posture of Israel in verse 3 is reminiscent of the parable Jesus told of the Pharisee and the Publican [Ref. Luke 18:9-14].

God demands a *personal relationship* with and *obedience* from His true followers. Hypocrites, however, confuse the issue. They substitute religion or church membership for a personal relationship with the LORD; and they equate *good works* with obedience to His commands. For the most part, hypocrites believe that good deeds are what make them acceptable to God. Therefore, they feel they can do what they wish just as long as they do enough good deeds. Seeking God daily, being eager to learn His Word, praying, and drawing near to the LORD throughout the day are all necessary to maintain a strong spiritual life and relationship with the LORD. But engaging in these worshipful activities while neglecting to behave righteously is hypocritical. This was the indictment of God against many of the Jews in Isaiah’s day. The complaint lodged against them from God was that they had a “***form of godliness, but deny the power thereof***” ([2 Ti.3:5](#)).

Therefore despite their attempts to worship God, He still rejected there fast!
The main problem God had with the fast was that their fasting and their acts of worship were entirely outward and did not reveal the condition of the heart.

Isaiah Describes The Righteous Fast

⁶ Is not this the fast that I have chosen? To loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke? ⁷ Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?"

This is tremendous -- it gets right down to the nitty-gritty, right down where the rubber meets the road. God says in effect, "If you really want to fast, let Me tell you what to do: Instead of fasting and going around with a pious look, stop your sinning. Stop your gossiping. Stop the things that reveal the wickedness and the evil in your hearts. Demonstrate your faith in Me by your conduct. Start being honest in your dealings. Be truthful in what you say. Instead of seeing you in sackcloth and covered with ashes, I'd like to see you clean on the inside."

God outlines the purpose of our fast v.6:

- To Loose Bands of Wickedness
- To Undo Heavy Burdens
- To Set The Captive Free
- To Break Yokes