

The one true God is just; He expects His people to demonstrate their faith through right living.



A Christian friend of mine told me of a recent experience he had with a receptionist at a certain medical office. After dropping his wife off for her office visit, he was about five minutes away at a busy intersection and it was raining cats and dogs. The plan was to take his daughter to a particular store she wanted to shop in while her mother was at her appointment. Well, the phone rang. The receptionist just told his wife that her co-payment was required before she could be seen. This was her first visit at this office. Upon hearing the news, he became frustrated and asked if the receptionist would accept the co-payment after her visit when he returned to pick her up. The receptionist said that wouldn't work due to office policy. Angrily, he turned around and headed back to the office. As soon as he got there, he explained to the receptionist why he felt she should have made an exception under the circumstances as he handed her his debit card. My friend told me it wasn't long before he felt ashamed of how he had spoken to her. He realized he had been unkind in his tone. His wife even told him later she felt embarrassed. As he was telling me this episode, I couldn't help but remember how he told me just days before that he felt led to fast as well as pray for a very serious situation facing our nation.

In our lesson today, Isaiah tells us how our daily living (*including our interactions with other people*) should line up with our spiritual beliefs, practices (*including fasting*), and proclamations. True, we are vessels of clay, and we can rightly sing the famous hymn's line, "I am weak, but Thou art strong...", but we have to be determined to talk the talk and walk the walk consistently. It's a daily choice, and sometimes it comes down to gritty, heat of the moment situations. In **2 Timothy 4:2**, Paul tells Timothy (*and us*) to "*be instant in season and out of season.*" If you could say there was a good ending to my friend's story, he told me he called the receptionist the next morning to say that he was very sorry and asked for her forgiveness for his unkind demeanor. She graciously accepted his apology. Think of how much better it would have been if he had just been polite in the first place.

Verse 58-1 — Cry aloud and spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins. God was not only telling Isaiah what to say to His covenant people, but *how* to say it. It had to be conveyed in a loud, clear, and forceful manner. The people's rebellious actions had greatly affronted God and they needed to be shown their **transgressions** (*willful defiance of God's laws and commands*) and their **sins** (*falling short of the standard of God's revealed expectations in the law*). They could not plead ignorance of what God expected of them.

Verse 58-2 — 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. On the surface, God's chosen people seemed to be doing the right things pertaining to their relationship with Him. They certainly had the appearance of religious fervor, having no problem going through the required motions. However, God's eyes see much deeper than what appears to man's eyes. In our world today as Christians, we too, have to be careful. We may find ourselves in this category if we begin to cool off in our relationship with God and fall into the glittery enticements of sin. God is faithful to give us alerts. We just have to listen and take heed.

Verse 58:3 — 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 labours. We see questions here. God's people were challenging God's faithfulness to them. They fasted and were upset when they didn't get the results they wanted. The answer from God was that those He addressed were finding pleasure on the day of their fast, and oppressing their laborers. It appears that their overriding



desire for gain, which included the mistreatment of people, stood in their way of truly humbling themselves before God.

Verse 58:4 — 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.

They were following the outward requirements of fasting, but their hearts were filled with contention and strife. What is believed by some scholars here is that some of the worshippers were habitually striking their laborers and perhaps others with their fists. Then, they had the gall to seek the blessings of God through fasting. They prayed audibly, perhaps with the intention to be heard of others and appear holy.



Verse 58-5 — 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?

The fast described in this verse would be absolutely proper if practiced with a sincere heart. The question asked by the LORD here is believed to be reflective. God does not care for the externals of religion only. In the Church today, the Holy Spirit speaks to genuine believer's hearts to help them keep in check with the motives behind their religious activities. It is so wonderful that we have the Holy Spirit living inside of us!



Verse 58-6 — 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?

God asks another question and zeros in on what He is really after. Sin enslaves, hence the reference to **bands of wickedness**. Through fasting with sincere, repentant hearts, the bands of wickedness could indeed be broken by the power of God. In this verse, there is a string of things that God commands the wealthy and powerful to do to demonstrate their sincerity in serving God. They are to take the following actions which would represent true repentance:

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- **Undo the heavy burdens.** The wealthy and powerful had placed heavy burdens on their laborers. God was not pleased by how these laborers were being treated. Many centuries ago, the Israelites had been enslaved by the Egyptians and were placed under bitter bondage. Of all people, the Hebrews should not treat others the way they had been treated.
- **Let the oppressed go free.** The oppressed laborers were to be set free, no longer to be enslaved.
- **Break every yoke.** A possible word picture describing untying or cutting off the ropes of a yoke. The author of our quarterly says, "From the Lord's perspective, true fasting—indeed, all true worship—should lead to His people's exhibiting holy, gracious lifestyles."

Verse 58-7 — 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 not hide thyself from thine own flesh?

Like in the previous verse, The LORD is laying out typical lifestyle actions He was looking for in His covenant people as opportunities for showing compassion presented themselves. Fast forward to the New Testament. Luke tells us in **Acts 20:35**, "I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive." Also, Paul addresses believers in **1 Timothy 6:18**, admonishing "That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;" God wants His children to show love and compassion not only by their words, but by their actions. Everything mentioned in this verse has to do with meeting *physical* needs. May we always be ready and willing to show compassion in meeting such needs as the Holy Spirit directs and enables us to reach out and touch lives.





Verse 58-8 — *Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thine health shall spring forth speedily: and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy rereward.* If they heed His call, God promises His reward of giving *light*, which in many places throughout the Bible represents divine inspiration. Another response to their repentance would be that their *health* (KJV), *healing* (NIV, ESV), *recovery* (CSB) would return speedily. Next, the promise is given that their righteousness would go before them. This

could be figuratively compared to God's army going out before His children as they walk in obedient faith in their daily lives. Finally in this verse, the *glory of the LORD* would be their *rereward* if they would do the 180 God was calling them to do. In other words, He would guard them from behind.

Verse 58-9 — *Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; and thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;* This speaks of the intimacy that is possible when we have a close walk with the Lord, based on obeying the revealed will of God. He wants us to be that close to Him so that He can guide us and bless us so that we can be a blessing to others in His Name! God further specifies actions that must be forsaken in order to allow His blessings flow in the lives of His children. He touches again on breaking the yoke (*setting the oppressed free from their bondage*). There was so much disunity and strife caused by finger pointing and evil speaking, and God told them it had to stop if they wanted closeness with Him, and the blessings that would result from that.

Verse 58-10 — *And if thou draw out thy soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall thy light rise in obscurity, and thy darkness be as the noonday:* This verse reiterates what God said in **verse 58:7** and emphasized that the worship He was looking for included ministering to those in need. Again, we see the reference of light as a benefit of following God's commands. This time, the promised light is said to rise in obscurity. More than likely, it's the kind of light they had never seen because of the spiritual darkness they had been living in due to the callousness of their hearts.

Verse 58-11 — *And the LORD shall guide thee continually, and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones: and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not.* The contrast between what God wanted for His people—and what they, through rebellion, had rejected, was becoming clearer and clearer. He certainly painted a beautiful picture of what was available to them if they would just obey Him! Would they give ear and heed the call to repentance, or stay on their path of darkness?

Verse 58-12 — *And they that shall be of thee shall build the old waste places: thou shalt raise up the foundations of many generations; and thou shalt be called, The repairer of the breach, The restorer of paths to dwell in.* It sounds like some hearing these words, or perhaps some who will later read them, will take God's message seriously. The results will be astounding, and this goes well into Israel's future. The spiritual groundwork will be laid by those who will listen carefully and obey the words God gave Isaiah to *cry aloud and spare not*. The natural fulfillment would take shape under the future leadership of Ezra, Zerubbabel, and Nehemiah some 175 years later.

A spiritual fulfillment of **verse 12** is suggested in the *Geneva Study Bible Commentary*. It states, "*Signifying that of the Jews would come such as would build again the ruins of Jerusalem and Judea: but chiefly this is meant of the spiritual Jerusalem, whose builders were the Apostles.*"



Let us be willing to let the Spirit of God break up any fallow ground in our hearts so that we'll not be hindered to move in His compassion. May we be His hands and His feet as we go about, showing His love and meeting needs in His Name.