

• *Isaiah tells the people how to return to God – ritualistic religion of no value without social justice*

1. The people must face God's fierce rebuke

• *Even the devout can fall into sin*

2. Godly routines are of no value if there is no genuineness of heart

(i) *Their 'godly' routines are regular and persistent*

(ii) *They seem sincere*

(iii) *They pray a lot and do so with fasting*

• *So what is wrong with them? They are full of self-centredness and inconsiderateness*

• *They do as they please and mistreat others – God is displeased with them*

In the years before salvation comes to Israel there will be the usual two major groups in Israel: the righteous and the wicked¹. There will be terrible wickedness, yet at the same time there is a way back to God. If the people will turn to God as the only refuge, come in lowliness of spirit and hope in God's mercy despite all that they have done, then God 'will not accuse for ever, nor . . . always be angry'. Isaiah 58 continues the theme, telling the people how to return to God. The point of Isaiah 58 is that ritualistic religion will be of no value to them without social justice.

1. The people must face God's fierce rebuke.

¹*'Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the house of Jacob their sins.'*

Even devout religious people can fall into sin. No one is exempt. Isaiah is not addressing pagans. He is addressing the professing people of God!

2. Godly routines are of no value if there is no genuineness of heart.

(i) Their 'godly' routines are regular and persistent.

²*'For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the judgements of its God. They ask me for just decisions and delight in the nearness of God.'*

(ii) They seem sincere¹. (iii) They pray a lot and do so with fasting.

³*'"Why have we fasted," they say, "and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?"'*

So what is wrong with them? God's answer is: they are full of self-centredness and inconsiderateness.

*'Behold, on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and oppress all your workers.
⁴Behold, you fast for quarrelling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today in order for your voice to be heard on high.
⁵Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to Yahweh?'*

¹ 56:1-57:21

¹ 58:2

They do as they please. They ill-treat others. Despite their 'godly' ways, God is displeased with such people.

3. God itemizes the godly routines he really wants

3. **God itemizes the godly routines he really wants.** They really are not religious routines at all!

- He wants them to break away from oppression of other people

⁶*'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of wickedness and untie the cords of the yoke – the wood for an animal's neck, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?'*

- And meet the needs of those in distress – especially family

⁷*'Is it not to break your bread for the hungry and to bring indoors the poor wanderer? Is it not that, when you see the naked person, you clothe him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh and blood?'*

What God really wants is for them to break away from every kind of oppression of other people^{□1}, the meeting of the needs of people in distress – the hungry, the poor, the homeless, those without adequate clothing^{□2} – especially those who have special claims on us as 'our own flesh and blood'.

□1 58:6

□2 58:7

- Result will be joy, healing and vindication

He promises that the result for us will be joy (symbolized by light), healing and vindication by the obvious presence of God with us.

⁸*'Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of Yahweh will be your rear guard.'*

- Prayer will be answered

Prayer will be answered as never before.

⁹*'Then you will call, and Yahweh will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.'*

- Action will be needed

But it will involve action on their part:

'If you do away with the burdensome yoke, the pointing finger and malicious talk,¹⁰ and if you give to the hungry what you would want for yourself, and satisfy the wants of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday.'

- Gossip and malice are also forms of oppression

Gossip and malice are included among the forms of oppression. If they and every comparable sin are removed, God will bring blessing to the nation speedily.

- If all sins are removed God will bring blessings – guidance, provision, strength, fruitfulness and recovery

¹¹*'Yahweh will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.¹² Your descendants will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations; you will be called Repairer of Broken Walls, Restorer of Streets with Dwellings.'*

Guidance, provision, strength, fruitfulness and recovery are among the blessings that will come to those to turn to God in this way.

4. Godly routines come in with (but not without) the social justice Isaiah commends

• If they use Israel's Sabbath day, they will find joy in God

• Promise of exaltation and festivity

4. **Godly routines come in with (but not without) the social justice Isaiah commends.** It is not that prayer and fasting are banned altogether! If they use Israel's sabbath-day (and we can find modern equivalents not so much in holy days as in seeking to rest in God), they then will find joy in God.

¹³'If you watch your step on the sabbath, not doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the sabbath a delight and Yahweh's holy day honourable, and if you honour it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, ¹⁴then you will find your joy in Yahweh.'

And God promises them exaltation and festivity.

'And I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.'
The mouth of Yahweh has spoken.



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