

Right Worship Exalts a People Isaiah 58

This lesson is not about the proprieties and improprieties of N.T. worship. We will not be discussing how often the Lord's Supper should be commemorated, or whether or not mechanical instruments of music are acceptable in worship. But we will look at this ancient text from God's prophet and seek to discern the proper **attitude** of true worship, and consider a few of the benefits derived from it by the worshipper.

Though some have the book of Isaiah dated as early as 740 B.C., which would put it prior to the Assyrian captivity of the northern ten tribes in 722, it seems to fit better later- somewhere probably between 720-700 B.C. after the captivity. However, much of Isaiah's prophetic thrust is in regard to the coming Babylonian captivity of the two southern tribes. The prophet urges the repentance of Judah so that they might avoid the coming destruction of Jerusalem, its ways, and its house, because they are no longer God's city and God's house. They have been perverted by Jewish selfishness.

I. The Contrast Between *Wrong* and *Right* Worship, vv.1-7

v.1, The prophet is urged to *cry loudly*- not as a shrill scream, but *with the voice like a trumpet* as a clarion call of warning to the *transgressions of the house of Jacob* (God's people).

v.2, *Outwardly* they seemed to be doing the "right" things- they apparently: *sought God night and day*, and *delighted to know His ways* even as a *righteous nation* would- one which had not *forsaken the ordinance of God*. Furthermore, they seemed to *seek decisions from God*, and to *delight in being near* to Him. But despite these appearances, this **is** the indictment: They *have forsaken the ordinance of God*.

v.3a, They are blinded to their own transgressions, and so ask why God has not *seen* and *noticed* them *fasting* and *humbling* themselves. They basically accuse God

of not rewarding their "worship" efforts with *quid pro quo* blessings.

v.3b, God manifests "the problems" with their "worship": a) on the *day of your fast*, you first *find your desire*- your purposes and desires are not *put aside* for worship; b) your labors and *the oppression of your laborers* are not even postponed.

v.4, And *your fasts are for* (or at least result in) *contention, strife, and fistcuffs*. While this is probably not literal, it is meant to highlight that the *purpose* of *their fasts* were not personal humbling designed to produce spiritual enlightenment and enrichment, but their own selfish interests. It was "godliness" = "gain" for them! God *would not hear their voices on high* because of this perversion, cf. 1Pet.3:10-12.

v.5, God sarcastically asks if what they are doing (and calling "fasting" or "worship") is really what He prescribed. God only ordained one fast- it was the annual fast of atonement, cf. Lev.16:29-31. This *humbling of the soul*, prescribed for Israel, was to be done in conjunction with the *sacrificial atoning* for the sins of the previous year. It had to do with a *self-inflicted inner pain* for sin, but Israel had reduced it to an outward show of sackcloth, ashes, and public- albeit hypocritical, humiliation.

v.6, God then gives the *prescription*: a) *loosen the bonds of wickedness*; b) *undo the band of the yoke*; c) *let the oppressed go free*; and, d) *break every yoke*. All of these likely have to do with the greedy oppression of laborers abused to accomplish selfish gains, cf. v.3b.

v.7, Also, God says they need to: a) *divide their plenty with the poor*; b) *provide shelter in their homes for the homeless*; c) *clothe the naked*; and, d) *stop hiding from the needs of your own family* (or *countryman*). **These are the things that true fasting would have revealed!** But their perversions of "worship" had *hidden* these enlightened perspectives and principles from them.

II. The Blessings of True Worship, vv.8-14

In the last half of the chapter, God outlines the benefits of “true worship”- which in this case centered around the self-humbling and introspection of *fasting*:

v.8, Real worship, which includes a spiritual and internal humbling of self and recognition of dependence on Jehovah, results in righteousness. And it will also allow trust in God for protection from all enemies, rather than turning to treaties with heathen nations, cf. v.2a.

vv.9-10, Real worship allows true *communion* and *fellowship* with God; which, in turn, allows access to Him in prayer, and the promise of His answer, cf. v.2c.

vv.11-12, Real worship allows God to provide *direction* and *guidance*, *strength* and *provision*, and *restoration*, cf. v.2a.

vv.13-14, Real worship allows the *reception* of all of God’s *physical* and *spiritual blessings*, cf. vv.3-4.

III. Conclusion

Real worship, whether *fasting* on the Day of Atonement, or *singing, praying, commemorating, and studying* today, has tremendous blessings and benefits, if...

One truly humbles oneself *internally*, rather than just “going through the motions” *externally*.