

Contrasting Right and Wrong Worship

Isaiah 58:1-14

III. The reminder of the nation's sinfulness (Isa. 58:1-2)

Outwardly the people seemed to desire to follow God, to know Him, and want to be close to Him. The reality though is that this formal, cold worship was an insult to a holy God who demanded and expected whole-hearted inward worship leading to an outward desire of following His laws. They pretended to know what God wanted them to do and lived like a nation that had done righteously.

All the show, the outward worship is a feigned attempt to appease God and make a person feel good. But the end result is an abomination to God (1:11-14) both for His people and His church today.

IV. Judah's questions (Isa. 58:3a)

Judah complained that God did not see their actions and accused Him of indifference. But in reality He had seen them but not with the favor they desired. God did not approve of their actions because their worship flowed from a heart that was not devoted to Him. Their worship was external and cold. "They were trusting in the outward merit of religious exercises and not in the living God" (Young 417).

The church today as a whole can fall into one of two traps: wrong worship or good worship from the outside with wrong motives. Both are full of pride and selfish in nature. We must guard against the same in our own lives as we seek to live truly and rightly before our Heavenly Father (Matt. 6:16-18).

V. Jehovah's response (Isa. 58:3b-14)

****God's indictment on the people's self-centered worship**

The problem with the fasting and supposed humbling of the people was it was all done selfishly and not for Jehovah (Zech. 7:5).

Instead of being truly humble and contrite (57:15), the people reveled in exploiting their employees and quarreling with their neighbors. Their fasting amounted to trying to make their voices heard on high towards the Lord. In the end they were not heard no matter how loud they prayed and how hard they fasted. God would not listen to fake prayers and sham fasts when the people's hearts were far from Him. Instead of Godward focused worship, the results produced strife. They didn't really care to please God on high; they desired to please themselves.

Mock repentance is not acceptable to God. Fake humility and worship are repugnant to a holy, righteous, good God. Did God want the people to fast? Certainly! Did He want them to wear sackcloth and ashes as a sign of repentance? Yes. But unless these are accompanied by a heart change, an inward repentance, this type of worship is self-centered, man-made, and wrong.

****Jehovah's blessings on the right kind of God-focused worship**

Clearly God desired the right kind of fast and when He observed the people doing anything opposite, He did not approve. If the people would obey His commands they would be blessed.

If they wanted to prove their fasts and worship were God-focused they would develop an attitude that pleases God.

"One cannot even rightly diagnose the ills of mankind unless he has first learned their true nature from the Lord. The setting free of those whom we have wrongly oppressed only occurs when our own hearts are filled with God's love" (Young 420).

v. 8: With the transition word *then* God points to the blessings of those who follow His ways.

- 1) These blessings will break like the morning light at sunrise and dispel the darkness of the people's current lifestyle.
- 2) The nation will be *healed (health)*, a word that means *to be restored*. Light and life will be the center of these spiritual life changes.
- 3) It is at this point that their righteousness will go before them. That refers to Jehovah Himself who will guide the people.
- 4) God's glory will be their rear guard. His glory is the manifestation of all His works. Illustration: God's guidance in the wilderness with a pillar of cloud and fire by day and night. His righteousness leads them and His glory follows them.

v. 9:

- 5) Above all the other rewards is the faithfulness of God when the people call to Him out of a pure heart and right motive. Jehovah will answer them.