

False Worship, and True  
Isaiah 58

February 12, 2012

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<sup>A</sup> John 12:47, Matthew 23:13, 14, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29

<sup>B</sup> Isaiah 29:13

A. Introduction

1. Man and Hypocrisy

a. Our Attitude

- (A) What is one thing that really bothers us in a person?
- (B) we can usually tolerate a lot of things in people
- (C) but not their putting on a phony front, pretending to be what they are not, especially in religious matters – acting 'holier than thou'

b. Our Practice

- (A) and yet, how easy it is to fall into that same fault ourselves
- (B) to let on that we are something that we know inside we are not
- (C) to let those at work, the people on the street, even our own family – but that's harder to get away with – think that we live a fine Christian life: are good, and kind, and generous, and faithful
- (D) and all the time ... God and I know better: I am not that at all

2. God and Hypocrisy

a. Jesus' Message

- (A) Christ's words throughout the gospels are very gracious
- (B) time and time again, as He healed people physically, He would also administer the spiritual healing of forgiveness
- (C) His message was, 'If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world.' (John 12:47)
- (D) but uniformly He expressed sorrow and warning against hypocrisy as in Matthew 23: **woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites**
  - (1) because of ...
  - (2) v 13 – their impossible rules
  - (3) v 14 – their greed
  - (4) v 15 – their misplaced evangelical fervour

- (5) v 23 – their wrong priorities
- (6) v 25 – their inward wrong
- (7) v 27 – their false fronts
- (8) v 29 – their pretence at piety – Jesus condemned all these

(E) and through Isaiah in this 58th chapter, that too is ...

b. God's Message (1)

- (A) it's a message that God's people needed to hear through Isaiah
- (B) Shout it: '**Cry loudly**' – literally, 'cry with the throat' – give a 'full-throated yell' – 'because', says God, 'I want it to be heard!'
- (C) '**do not hold back**' – this is not to be spoken quietly, or gently
- (D) '**Raise your voice like a trumpet,**' – a shofar, sounded in battle when the enemy approached, to signal danger – and 'you,' says God, 'are in danger; you're in big trouble; and you don't know it'
- (E) but God says they are to hear this message – '**And declare to My people their transgression And to the house of Jacob their sins.**' – 'No; what Israel is doing is simply ...'

B. False Worship

1. As Seen by Man – here is how their worship appeared to themselves

a. Attending: (2a) – **Yet they seek Me day by day**

- (A) you can go to church every Sunday; in fact, be there every single day
- (B) but if the heart isn't right with God – it's all in vain

b. Studying: (2b) – **and delight to know My ways,**

- (A) that's strange at first sight; but these were people who took great pride in their knowledge of Scripture
- (B) there have been those in every age who enjoyed the study of God's word as an intellectual exercise, as mental stimulation
- (C) **as a young student pastor, I came to know Ken. He was in his late thirties or so. His knowledge of prophecy was marvellous. He had a big library of books on the subject and could discuss the various interpretations at length. But never did he give any indication of a desire to serve the Lord with all he knew – service he left to his wife!**

- c. Praying: (2e) – **They ask Me for just decisions,**  
(A) there are those who constantly ask for prayer  
(B) for healing; for help in trouble; for some need  
(C) and even attend prayer meetings  
(D) but all of it is motivated by their own self interest: not to worship
- d. Praising: (2f) – **They delight in the nearness of God.**  
(A) Judah and Jerusalem took pride that the temple was in their midst  
(B) it is comfortable to be able to think that God is near to you; that you live in a 'Christian country;'  
(C) and there they would be giving praise to God;  
(D) but of this we read, '**Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honour Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned by rote,"**' (Isaiah 29:13)
- e. Fasting: (3a) – **'Why have we fasted and You do not see?'**  
(A) these hypocrites complain to God: 'look what we have done'  
(B) look at our fasting – surely we make our fasting very visible!!!  
(C) surely, God, you must see – well, as Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, making your fasting visible doesn't make it acceptable
- f. Repenting: (3b) – **Why have we humbled ourselves (or, afflicted our souls) and You do not notice?'**  
(A) in Leviticus is the command that the Israelites afflict or humble their souls, and in a couple of places in the OT the same phrase is used along with fasting, as here – so it has long been interpreted, first by the Jews then Christians, that the two mean the same  
(B) but really there is a difference  
(1) fasting is an external act – sometimes commanded to the nation, sometimes undertaken voluntarily by an individual – in order that supplicating prayer be made in earnest to God  
(2) afflicting or humbling one's soul is an internal act of seeking to get one's heart right before God  
(C) a week from this coming Tuesday will be Mardi Gras, where many will give themselves to excesses and to immorality as a last fling before settling down for the 40-day lenten period – this perhaps to give a person something solid to repent about. But there is no justification in Scripture for either – but now look at how all these are ...

2. As Seen by God – but this is how their worship appeared to God
- a. Imitating: (2c) – **As a nation that has done righteousness**
    - (A) that little word ‘as’ – ‘as a nation’ shows it to be sham
    - (B) what Israel does is only an imitation of the real thing
    - (C) the hypocrite, imitating a Christian, shows Christianity to be real – people are not imprisoned for counterfeiting Monopoly money!
  - b. Backsliding: (2d) – **And has not forsaken the ordinance of their God.**
    - (A) they still consider themselves part of God’s people, His family
    - (B) but they have forsaken, left off keeping the conducting of their lives in the way that God has ordained and made known to them
    - (C) religious in appearance and word; apostate in reality
  - c. Self-Pleasing: (3c) – **Behold, on the day of your fast you find (or, are getting, obtaining) your desire,**
    - (A) that desire seems to include both simply pleasures as well as the conducting of their regular business
    - (B) so that this fasting in which they were engaged had no real effect on their lives, which went on in unchanged routine
    - (C) consider too their Sabbath-keeping: as seen in (13) – **If because of the sabbath, you turn your foot From doing your own pleasure on My holy day, And call the sabbath a delight, the holy day of the Lord honorable, And honor it, desisting from your own ways, From seeking your own pleasure And speaking your own word,**
    - (D) the Sabbath did not interrupt their doing as they pleased
    - (E) they continued in their ways, pleasure, words just as though it was a day like any other day
  - d. Oppressing: (3d) – **And drive hard all your workers.**
    - (A) in the very midst of their religious exercises, so-called worship
    - (B) they are driving their employees to work harder
    - (C) their eyes are on their business, their success, personal profit
  - e. Quarrelling: (4a) – **Behold, you fast for** (i.e. with the result of) **contention and strife** – instead of a peace with man which comes from having a real peace with God, the fruit of false fasting and worthless worship

is disagreement, disgruntlement, discontent

f. Assaulting: (4b) – **and to strike with a wicked fist.**

(A) fasting, as an aid to prayer and to repentance, should make us so very aware of our own weakness before Almighty God

(B) how can this co-exist with bullying, with wrongful violence?

(C) only if it is not real, not genuine; it is mere ...

g. Pretending:

(A) as to their purpose: (4c) – **You do not fast like you do today to make your voice heard on high.** here is a key and a lesson – fasting is a means of aiding prayer – hypocrites fail to recognize the purpose of the very religious acts they perform, things given such as the Lord's Table when we can repair our fellowship with God

(B) going through motions (5b) – **Is it for bowing one's head like a reed**

(C) and done with great show: (5c) – **And for spreading out sackcloth and ashes as a bed?** – all this, done in pretense

### 3. False Worship Evaluated

a. Uncalled For: (5a) – **Is it a fast like this which I choose, a day for a man to humble himself?** – and the answer expected, and we give, is 'No!'

b. Unacceptable: (5d) – **Will you call this a fast, even an acceptable day to the Lord?** – again, the expected and correct answer is 'No!'

c. false worship can contain every element that you find in the true; 'But,' said Jesus, '**an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshippers.**' (John 4:23)

C. True Worship – the nature of this emerges from its sharp contrast with the description of the false that has gone before it; but to this it can be added

#### 1. Demonstrated to Man

a. Seeks Justice

(A) our God is a righteous God – to whom justice, fairness, equity matter – and so they should to those

who are His children

(B) verse (6): *'Is this not the fast which I choose, To loosen the bonds of wickedness, To undo the bands of the yoke, And to let the oppressed go free And break every yoke?'*

(C) again in (9): *'If you remove the yoke from your midst'*

(D) when God chooses a fast, it is the fast of giving up injustice

(E) in Jeremiah 34:8-22, we read of the Jews being besieged by the Babylonian armies, at which time the rulers called for all of the Jews enslaved to their own brother citizens to be set free. These are men who should have been released already. But when the armies left for a while then those freed were enslaved again

(F) that is the kind of injustice that God call here to be corrected

b. Shows Love

(A) to feed: (7a) – *Is it not to divide your bread with the hungry?*

(1) a God-chosen fast that denies self for the benefit of the needy

(B) to shelter: (7b) – *And bring the homeless poor into the house;*

(1) the word *'homeless'* (AV: *cast out*) is probably best rendered in English today by the word *transient* – those who wander from place to place without root or shelter

(2) this really us up short, doesn't it? when did we last care thus?

(C) to provide: (7c) – *When you see the naked, to cover him;*

(D) and the reminder to us all , (7d) *And not to hide yourself from your own flesh?*, where *'flesh'* could mean to the Jew, his own kin, but in reality if goes beyond that to all mankind, as Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan teaches

c. two more demonstrations to man, verse 9

(A) a fast that gives up: (9b) *'The pointing (sending out) of the finger'*

(1) this could mean a mark of contempt or derision (as even now)

(2) or, as in Proverbs 6:12-13, of a dishonest man, *'12 A worthless person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, 13 Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers;'*

(B) and a fast that gives up: (9c) – *'speaking wickedness'*

(C) these demonstrations of true worship to man are also ...

## 2. Demonstrated to God – to which can be added ...

### a. Use of the Lord's Day

(A) in the OT, the Sabbath was given to Israel as a national distinctive

- (1) a day in which they rested from their daily labours
- (2) a reminder of God's delivering them from Egypt's slavery
- (3) an assurance that God could provide for their need in the seventh day without their having to work for it
- (4) an opportunity to rest from thinking about their business to consider His business and Being

(B) in the NT, Jesus Christ is our Rest

- (1) it is by abiding in Christ that we are distinguished to man
- (2) and the Lord's Day – in the NT the first day of the week – is a time for the gathering together of God's people
- (3) usually in the NT, it was probably in the evening and the one time of the week when the church could gather as a whole
- (4) to remember Him in His death and resurrection
- (5) a time of prayer; a time of praise; a time of teaching the Word

### b. Joy in the Lord's Day

(A) as a delight: (13b) – 'and call the sabbath a delight'

- (1) Judaism, Pharisaism, legalism – make it a burden
- (2) God made it for man; to be a joy, a rest, a real pleasure

(B) as holy & honourable: (13c) – 'the holy of the Lord, honourable'

- (1) the sabbath predates the Mosaic law by millennia
- (2) at the end of creation, God rested and sanctified it
- (3) it was holy; set apart by God for Himself
- (4) and this He invites His people to share in together with Him

(C) that is, to honour it (13d) – 'and shall honour it' or, '...him'

- (1) grammatically you cannot distinguish between 'it' and 'him'
- (2) but the order of the Hebrew suggests rather 'it'

(3) and in reality, if you honour the day of the Lord, as a day in which you can draw near to God in worship with those who gather in His Name, then you honour God.

(D) so then (14a) becomes true in those who so worship 'Then you will take delight in the Lord'

(1) **delight** – a different word than used concerning the sabbath

(2) an exquisite, pleasurable, joyful delight in the Lord

D. Promises to True Worshipers – true worship brings benefits or blessings –in verse 14 God says 'I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father' and Paul assures us, 'to be specific, that the Gentiles are fellow heirs and fellow members of the body, and fellow partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,' (Ephesians 3:6)– listen to what is promised here to those who worship in this spirit of truth

#### 1. Salvation's Blessing

a. from night to light: (8a) – 'Then your light will break out like the dawn,' and again (10b) – 'Then your light will rise in darkness And your gloom will become like midday.'

b. from exile to home, from sickness to health: (8b) – And your recovery will speedily spring forth;

c. shepherded home by God: (8c) – And your righteousness will go before you; The glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. (or, gathers us)

(A) Jesus Christ, our forerunner goes before us

(B) God Himself surrounds us ensuring we reach our heavenly home

#### 2. Prayer's Blessing

a. answered: (9a) – Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;

b. help in trouble: (9b) – You will cry, and He will say, 'Here I am.'

(A) the word 'cry' here is specifically a cry for help – it is Shua' to which Yeshua' (that is, Jesus) comes as the answer

#### 3. Fellowship's Blessing

a. guidance: (11a) – And the LORD will continually guide you,

b. contentment: (11b) – And satisfy your desire in scorched places,

c. perseverance: (11c) – And give strength to your bones;

- (A) this is the strength need by a sentinel on duty, a soldier at war
- d. refreshment: (11d) – **And you will be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water whose waters do not fail.**
  - (A) as Jesus promised in the person of the Holy Spirit (John 7:38-39)
- e. victory: (14b) – **'I will make you ride on the heights of the earth.'**
  - (A) an expression used of Israel's victory, Deuteronomy 32:13
- f. edifying: (12) – this verse is specifically about the rebuilding of the city of Jerusalem, but the spiritual application of the blessing of building up God's church is readily discerned – that for another day!

## E. Conclusion

1. These Words Are True: (14c) – **For the mouth of the Lord has spoken.**
  - a. hypocrites can put us off of religion, off of church
  - b. but this passage goes beyond religion or even church
  - c. this is the kind of worship our heavenly Father seeks: un-hypocritical
2. These Words Are Life: John 6:36 – Jesus said, **'the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.'**
  - a. Christianity has important teaching, but its basis isn't teaching
  - b. the base and foundation of Christian is a person; not just any person; not a pastor, nor an evangelist, nor a priest, nor a pope
  - c. the foundation of Christianity is Christ, and in Him there was no sin
  - d. when you follow Christ, what you see in Him your receive
  - e. He is without hypocrisy; ... the altogether lovely; ... the Rock of Ages

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