



Verse 9b-12 and 13-14 give two further sets of conditions and promises.

*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression,
with the pointing finger and malicious talk,
and if you spend yourselves on behalf of the hungry
and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then....."*



**What kind of oppression was Isaiah worried about in his day?
What do you think the pointing finger and malicious talk are?
How do you think this is relevant to us, particularly in our circle of friends and family?**



The word "spend yourself" is very graphic, Paul spent himself on behalf of the Gospel Philippians 2:17. Today's society is always looking for a return, as Christians, we should look for what we can give, not what we can receive.

In return God will guide us, meet our needs and strengthen our bodies (lit bones.) make us flourish and give us a legacy.



Is it OK to forget God as long as you care for the people around you?
This has been a big danger for parts of the Church, they get so involved in care for the community (social Gospel) that they forget the worship of God, they leave their first love. Our service flows from our relationship with God.



*"If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath
and from doing as you please on my holy day,
if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord'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, then ..."*

This group of conditions centre around the Sabbath Day. Notice however that both sets of conditions have something to say about our conversation!



Some of the Jews of Jesus' day had a very legalistic view of keeping the Sabbath holy. Jesus saw it as a gift to man, Mark 2:27, a day to do good, Matthew 12:12, a day to enjoy yourself and God. Paul talks of all days as equal; Romans 14:5, Colossians 2:16. It seems that Isaiah steers away from all the rules about keeping the Sabbath and concentrates on our attitude, it should be our delight, something we honour.



**Bearing this in mind how do we fulfil these requirements?
Do we still do legalism in this way?**

The result of this is that you will find your joy in the LORD, be blessed and receive the inheritance God has planned for you.
The mouth of the LORD has spoken.



**What is the overall view of a relationship with God that Isaiah presents in this passage?
How do we need to change because of it?**



Read Isaiah 58

This is a passage that talks about fasting and how to fast effectively. However, it seems that Isaiah is using fasting as an example, to show the difference between an outward conformity to God and a true living faith in Him.



**What is the difference?
Is this a danger Christians face today?
Can you think of some examples?**



This is a theme that is frequently addressed in the prophets; usually, the issue is centred around sacrifice. A good example is Isaiah 1:11-13 or 66:3. Some people assume that these passages are written against the sacrificial system, but that is not what Isaiah is saying. He is not against sacrifice but rather sacrifice that is only actions and has no faith, devotion or attention to God in it. A sacrifice that is just about external actions, or worst sacrifice that is intended to manipulate God.

Deuteronomy and Leviticus are both very keen that sacrifice only works if it is done out of a right heart.

Today much of our worship is centred around singing.



**Is it possible today for us to worship God in a way that is only concerned with externals?
What are the dangers in this?
Does this mean that we should avoid worship for fear of hypocrisy?**

Is the same danger present when we pray?

In the first verse, God calls on Isaiah to reprimand the people for their sin,
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. Isaiah 58:1



But what is their sin?

*day after day they seek me out;
they seem eager to know my ways,
They ask me for just decisions.
They seem eager for God to come near them.
They even fast.*

What's the problem? All this is good, it may even describe many of us.

What was wrong with their approach to God?



They did it:

as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.



What does the "as if" mean in this verse?

What does it imply?

What "right" does Isaiah want them to do?



All their seeking God was a façade because their actions were in rebellion against Him. They seemed to think that as long as they did their religious duty, they could organise the rest of their lives as they liked. *They had a form of godliness, but there was no reality and no power in it.* 2 Timothy 3:5



What are the dangers in this kind of a façade?

Do people today still do this?

How do you think God sees this façade?

Sometimes the façade is for the benefit of others; we want to look:
Good in Church
Righteous out of Church



Is this healthy?

Is God impressed?



Verse 3, tells us about their motives in fasting,

'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it?

Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'

What was their attitude towards fasting?

Do we still do this?

It seems to me their fasting was designed to twist God's arm.

What things do we do in order to try to manipulate God?

Can God be manipulated?

Is this a valid attitude to have towards fasting? Matthew 6:16-18



The link between fasting and humbling yourself is valid, in fact, it is one of the major reasons why we fast. But to humble yourself and then desire that it be recognised that you are humble, is closer to pride than humility!



Can you fool God with a front?

How should you fast?

What should you do if you suspect your motives are false?



What did the people do that was so offensive to God? v3b - 4a

What was the result? v4b cf Psalm 66:18.



Fasting and sinning seem a pointless combination, cherishing sin and asking God for guidance equally futile. (Cherish is a key word here, it means to love, hide and harbour; if in recognising our inability to deal with sin we sincerely cry out to God, He will certainly help us.)



Read verse 5,

Does it seem that your attitude in fasting is more important than the mechanics of how you fast?

Does, "Only a day for a man to humble himself;" suggest that fasting should have an ongoing effect, especially regarding our attitude to God?



What kind of fasting has God chosen? v6-7

How can we practice this kind of fasting?

Does this mean that we no longer need to fast physically?



No this does this means we no longer have to fast physically by denying ourselves, if we give to the poor. Jesus said -When you fast not if you fast. Matthew 6:17. It does show us that to fast God's chosen way, requires a right attitude to God and a right attitude to other people and doing His will, not doing as we please (ie sinning).



Fasting means to abstain from food for a short period of time. The goal of fasting is to enable a closer relationship with God. There is a bit of a debate today as to the form fasting can take. Is a technology fast a real fast?

Is a technology fast a real fast?



This passage seems to broaden the idea of fasting?

What does Isaiah consider fasting to be?

Following Isaiah's example, what should we consider fasting?

Can you divorce your relationship with God and the way you treat others?

Our faith is not an esoteric exercise between God and us, it has to be seen in the way we treat the people around us. You cannot just be concerned with your spiritual relationship with God and forget your obligations to the people around you.



Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world. James. 1:27



What is true religion according to the passage?

James is not trying to be definitive here: what else would you consider to be true religion?

What is false religion?



What will be the result of this new attitude towards God?

Your will break forth like the dawn,

Your will quickly appear;

Your will go before you,

the will be your rear guard.

You will call, and the LORD will will cry for help,

He will say:

How might this apply to you?



What do you think this says about the reason we often have difficulty hearing God's voice? Cf Romans 12:2