

The Characteristics Of The Acceptable Fast

(by: Father Samaan Saint Paul)

The main points in (Isaiah 58) are:

1. The sins they are charged with, which spoiled the acceptableness of their fasts.
2. Instructions given them how to keep fasts aright.
3. Precious promises made to those who do so keep fasts.
4. The like precious promises made to those that sanctify Sabbaths aright.

When our Lord Jesus promised to send the Comforter he added, *When he shall come he shall convince* ([Jn. 16:7](#), 8); for conviction must prepare for comfort, and must also separate between the precious and the vile, and mark out those to whom comfort does not belong. God had appointed this prophet to comfort his people (ch. 40:1); here he appoints him to convince them, and show them their sins.

Isaiah 58:1-5

The true reason assigned why God did not accept their fastings, nor answer the prayers they made on their fast-days; it was because they did not fast aright—to God, even to him, [Zec. 7:5](#). They fasted indeed, but they persisted in their sins, and did not, as the Ninevites, turn every one from his evil way; but *in the day of their fast*, they went on to *find pleasure*, that is, to do whatsoever seemed right in their own eyes, lawful or unlawful, *making their inclinations their law*; though they seemed to afflict their souls, they still gratified their lusts as much as ever. Instead of judging themselves, which is the proper work of a fast-day, they condemned one another.

So God may direct His speech to us and say: “*Bring me no more of these empty, noisy, vain oblations,*” Those that fast and pray, and yet go on in their wicked ways, do but mock God and deceive themselves.

Isaiah 58: 8-12

It is required that we do justly and love mercy, that we cease to do evil and learn to do well. Let all conversations be governed by sincerity.

For God loves a cheerful giver, and so does a poor man too. We must give plentifully and largely, What are we born for, and what have we our abilities of body, mind, and estate for, but to do all the good we can in this world. Here is a full account of the blessings and benefits which attend the performance of this duty.

1. They shall find God their bountiful rewarder and what they lay out in works of charity shall be abundantly made up to them.
2. God will surprise them with the return of mercy after great affliction, which shall be as welcome as the light of the morning after a long and dark night
3. Those that have shown mercy shall find mercy. Job, who in his prosperity had done a great deal of good, had friends raised up for him by the Lord when he was reduced, “Not only thy light, which is sweet, but thy health too”, and thou shalt renew thy youth and recover thy vigour.”
4. Those that have helped others out of trouble will obtain help of God when it is their turn. God will put honour upon them. Good works shall be recompensed with a good name; this is included in that “*light which rises out of obscurity*”.

See here what is the surest way for a man to make himself illustrious; let him study to do good. He that would be the greatest of all, and best-loved, let him by humility and industry make himself a servant of all. *"Thy righteousness shall answer for thee* (as Jacob says, [Gen. 30:33](#)), that is, it shall silence reproaches," He that has *given to the poor, his righteousness endures for ever*, ([Ps. 112:9](#). 3). They shall always be safe under the divine protection: *"Thy righteousness shall go before thee as thy vanguard, to secure thee from enemies that charge thee in the front, and the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward"*

5. God will be always near them, to hear their prayers, As, on the one hand, he that shuts his ears to the cry of the poor shall himself cry and God will not hear him; so, on the other hand, he that is liberal to the poor, his prayers shall come up with his alms for a memorial before God, as Cornelius's did ([Acts 10:4](#)): *"Then shalt thou call, on thy fast-days, which ought to be days of prayer, and the Lord shall answer, shall give thee the things thou callest to him for; thou shalt cry when thou art in any distress or sudden fright, and he shall say, Here I am."*

When we cry to him, as if he were at a distance, he will let us know that he is near, even at our right hand, nearer than we thought He was. *It is I, be not afraid*. When danger is near our protector is nearer, *a very present help*. "Here I am, ready to give you what you want, and do for you what you desire; what have you to say to me?" God is attentive to the prayers of the upright, ([Ps. 130:2](#)). No sooner do they call to him than he answers,

6. God will direct them in all difficult and doubtful cases (v. 11): While we are here, in the wilderness of this world, we have need of continual direction from heaven; for, if at any time we be left to ourselves, we shall certainly miss our way; and therefore it is to those who are good in God's sight that he gives the wisdom which in all cases is profitable to direct, and he will be to them *instead of eyes*, [Eccl. 2:26](#).
7. God will give them abundance of satisfaction in their own minds. so also is it in respect of wants, which makes it necessary that they should have continual supplies, as Israel in the wilderness had not only the pillar of cloud to guide them continually, but manna and water out of the rock to satisfy their souls in drought, *in a dry and thirsty land where no water is*, [Ps. 63:1](#). To a good man God gives not only wisdom and knowledge, but joy; he is satisfied in himself with the testimony of his conscience and the assurances of God's favour.

"Thou shalt be like a watered garden, so flourishing and fruitful in graces and comforts, and like a spring of water, like a garden that has a spring of water in it, whose waters fail not either in droughts or in frosts." The principle of holy love in those that are good shall be a *well of living water*, [Jn. 4:14](#).

so the charitable man abounds in good as he abounds in doing good. He that waters shall himself be watered. It is a good reward to those that are fruitful and useful to be rendered more so, and especially to have those who descend from them to be so too.

It completes the satisfaction of a good man, to think that those that come after him shall be doing good when he is gone.

Happy are those who make up the breach at which virtue is running out and judgments are breaking in. The sum is that, if they keep such fasts as God has chosen, he will settle them again in their former peace and prosperity, and there shall be none to make them afraid. See [Zec. 7:5](#), 9; 8:3-5. It teaches us that those who do justly and love mercy shall have the comfort thereof in this world.