

Your Religion: True or False?

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[0:00] Isaiah chapter 58. We're going to read the chapter in its entirety. Isaiah 58. 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.

For day after day they seek me out. They seem eager to know my ways as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. Why have we fasted they say and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have not noticed? Yet on the day of your fasting you do as you please and exploit all your workers. Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife and in striking each other with wicked fists.

You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. Is this the kind of fast I have chosen? Only a day for a man to humble himself?

[1:14] Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying on sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast? A day acceptable to the Lord?

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen? To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke?

To set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter? When you see the naked to clothe him and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Then your light will break forth like the dawn and your healing will quickly appear. Then your righteousness will go before you and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.

Then you will call and the Lord will answer. You will cry for help and he will say, here am I. If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with a pointing finger and malicious talk, and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night will become like the noonday.

[2:31] The Lord will guide you always. He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land, and you will strengthen and will strengthen your frame.

You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. Your people will rebuild the ancient ruins and will raise up the age-old foundations.

You will be called repairer of broken walls, restorer of streets with dwellings. 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 honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.

The mouth of the Lord has spoken. One of the God-given tasks of a faithful minister is to point out the specific sins of his hearers.

Isaiah is told, Now the difficulty of this work is seen in how few are doing it.

[4:07] Indeed, Isaiah was a rare exception in his day. We saw in chapter 56 that Israel's watchmen, their prophets, their spokesmen for God, were blind, mute, and sleepy dogs who could not bark.

And there are plenty of reasons in the preacher himself and in his people for why he might be afraid to point out their sins.

So, the preacher both needs and receives God's forceful words here, Do not hold back.

But lift up your voice and trumpet forth the people's rebellion and sins. And if the ongoing ministry, there's more to the ministry of God's word than that, you know that.

But if the ongoing ministry of God's word does not make you aware of your specific sins, then you need to find a new church. It's not safe to be under a ministry where this is not happening.

[5:17] So God's stated purpose in this chapter is given right up front in verse 1. The purpose of this chapter is to convince the people of their sins. Well, we hear that and we brace ourselves, don't we?

We're expecting now a list of really terrible things to follow about these people. But instead, we find a people who are daily seeking God.

They seem eager to know His ways. They're asking for His righteous laws. They're delighting to have God come near to them. And they're so zealous about their prayers that they're actually fasting along with their praying.

If you just moved into this town and you visited a church full of these people, I'm sure you would say to your wife on your way home, wow, what a holy people.

How eager, how zealous for God. Our search for a church has ended. This is surely a great church for us to join. And you would be oh so wrong.

[6:26] For they appear to be one thing, but in reality, they're quite another thing. As a kid, I belonged to the West South Street gang. It was made up of my older and immediately younger brother and myself and three neighbor boys.

And we were into knives in a big way. pocket knives. And if you could throw it and make it stick in the ground, well, you could be our leader.

And I had a knife. And it had been given to me. It was a yellow knife. It had two blades. And the larger blade had a unique curve on the top. It looked like a wave of the sea on the top.

And one day I lost my knife. And three days later, one of the neighbor boys had a new black knife. And he was showing it to us.

And as he opened the larger blade, I couldn't help but notice that the blade had that same unusual wave-like effect on it. And I pointed that out. And his older brother noticed it too.

[7:37] And he took a penny out of his pocket. And with the edge of the penny, he scraped the black handle. And would you believe it? It was yellow underneath.

And so another mystery of the West South Street gang was solved. It had only appeared to be a new black knife.

In reality, it was my old yellow knife. And what God does in Isaiah chapter 58 is to scrape on Israel's religion and reveal their true colors.

And that which appears at first sight to be so zealous and committed and true is discovered to be just a thin coat of paint covering their real rebellion and sin.

And that's what God says to Isaiah. I want you to show them their rebellion and their sins. They seemed eager to seek God. They seemed eager to have Him come near and to do His will.

[8:44] But to seem eager and to be eager are two altogether different things. What looked good at a distance looks quite different close up.

And so God, the searcher of hearts, knows what they are and He calls Isaiah to confront them with it. So friends, we are being searched here.

Your religion, my religion, is being searched by Isaiah chapter 58. Is it true?

Or is it false? A mere veneer covering something else. Nothing more common today in America than false religion.

Don't be deceived. Not all that claims to be Christianity is Christianity. Not all that flies under the banner of the cross is acceptable to the Christ of the cross.

[9:49] And so we'll see today some marks that point out the difference between true religion and false religion. And the first point we see is that false religion is void of real repentance and practical holiness.

That's been the drum Isaiah's been beating. A call to real repentance and practical holiness. False religion does not have this.

And a Christianity without repentance, a Christianity without practical holy living, without commandment keeping, is an abomination to the Lord. And the real scary thing is that people can keep up the outward actions and trappings of religion.

While all the while continuing on in their rebellion and sin. Well, their true colors are seen when they open their mouths with their complaint. Their complaint is given in verse 3.

You see it. Why have we fasted, they say, and you haven't seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves and you have not noticed? Now, fasting is to be an accompaniment to other spiritual disciplines.

[11:00] It doesn't have value in and of itself. It's not like, well, if I can just starve myself today, I become more spiritual. No, together with prayer, it can help focus my energies upon God and upon the thing that I am praying for.

And together with prayer and Bible study and meditation, it can enhance my relationship with God and it can say to Him, oh God, I want You and I want this answer to my prayer more than I want my daily food.

But Israel used fasting as a way to manipulate God and to get out of Him what they wanted. So their land is in shambles. It's been decimated!

as God's judgment upon them for turning their back on Him and going after their idols. We've been seeing some of that already in the past couple chapters. So the land's decimated.

But remember, God had promised, if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and I will forgive their sin and I will heal their land.

[12:14] So that's the promise given to people who are straying from God. Humble yourselves and pray and so here they are.

They've fasted. They've prayed. They've put on their humble face. They're lying in sackcloth and ashes. But He hadn't answered their prayers.

He hadn't healed their land. He hadn't fixed any of their problems. And they're ticked at God. We've held up our end of the deal but you haven't held up yours. We've even deprived ourselves of food and it hasn't worked.

Why have we fasted and you haven't noticed? It's like you haven't even paid attention to all that we're doing for you down here. They thought their religious deeds put God in their debt because of what we've done.

You owe us. After all, we've fasted. God says, yes, you have, haven't you? Let's just have a closer look at your fasting.

[13:23] On the day of your fasting, you do as you please. Let's just pause there a moment because that's a sure mark of false religion. False religion is self-pleasing instead of God-pleasing.

And in chapter 58, there are just two elements of religion that are mentioned in this chapter and self-seeking marks both of them. We have fasting and we have Sabbath keeping.

And as for their fasting, on the day of your fasting, you do as you please. Verse 3. And as for their Sabbath keeping, twice in verse 13, he accuses them of doing as you please on my holy day.

Indeed, this was the one thing consistent about their religion. They only do what pleases them. It's a pick and choose kind of religion when it comes to God's commandments.

Well, I'll pick and I'll choose which ones I want to obey. So, if you see them, they may be very zealous and very busy about the commandments they've chosen to obey.

[14:30] But scratch a bit on that religion and you'll find they're in rebellion against God and they are choosing which commands they'll obey and which ones they'll not obey.

Yeah, I know the Lord commands us to remember him with the Lord's Supper, but you know, it's hard to get back to church Sunday night. I'd rather not.

Some wouldn't think of missing church on Sunday, yet at home they don't submit to their husbands, they don't love their wives and give themselves to them, they don't obey their parents.

Others wouldn't think of cheating on their wives, but cheating on their employer and the government? Well, yeah, that's okay. I'll choose this command, but not that one. This application, but not here.

selective obedience and it's all based on one thing, what pleases them. A sure mark of false religion.

[15:39] These who seemed eager to seek God upon closer examination are seen for what they really are. They're self-seeking. They're self-pleasing people and it marks their religion.

So God's got a complaint. They complain. We fasted, you didn't notice. Now God says, verse 3, following on, that as you're fasting, you do as you please, even if that means exploiting your workers, taking advantage of them.

Even if it means quarreling and fighting and even hitting each other with your fists. So we're being told to follow these people home from church. Before we join the church, let's follow them home and see what's going on there.

And what do we see? Can't you just see them? They don't have a heart for God now. These are lost people in Israel.

They're Israel, but they're not the Israel within Israel. They're not the remnant of true believers.

They're lost people. They don't have new hearts. They don't have a heart for God. And yet they're going to be religious. They're going to fast today and put God in their debt to heal their land.

[16:50] And the longer they go into the day without food, the more irritable they're getting with each other. And they start snapping at each other and quarreling and fighting. And then the fists come out.

And there's bloody noses. All in the name of fasting, you see. Maybe this isn't the church for us to join.

The third lesson we see is that all true religion moves us to love God and man. All true religion moves us to love God and man. In fact, that's what Jesus says the summary of religion is, isn't it? You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And you should love your neighbor as yourself. And on these two commands hang all the law and the prophets. You can sum up the whole of religion, of true religion, by love to God and love to neighbor.

So all true religious exercises should make us better parents, better children, better spouses, better neighbors, better friends, but their religion only brought out the worst in them, quarrel, fighting, fists.

[18:05] Is God to be impressed with such fasting? Is what he's saying? Is this the effect of your fasting? Is what is the effect, I must ask you, what is the effect of your religion upon your relationships?

Does it make you a better person to live with? A better person to work next to? Does it make you more loving and kind and thoughtful and considerate and self-denying?

Does it make you others-centered instead of self-centered? J.C. Ryle says all true religion is home religion, by which he means if you follow a person home, you will find at home what you find in church.

Professed love for God and neighbor will be lived out in the home life, in the work life, with the neighbors, with people, because true religion humbles us.

And it makes us more like Jesus, who gave himself for us, willing to lay down our lives for others.

[19:16] Well, they thought that their fasting was simply the sure way to get their prayers answered. And God answers, you cannot fast as you are doing today and have your voice heard in heaven on high.

Did you know that how you live, how you live, can keep your prayers from being answered? Did you know that how you treat others determines how God treats your prayers, your fasting, your worship?

For the past three chapters, God's been calling the nation to repent, to turn from their sins. And now we see that a failure to actually repent and to do what God has called them to do makes their worship unacceptable to him.

It makes their prayers go unheard and unanswered on high. Now that was the note sounded in chapter one of Isaiah, verse 15. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you.

Even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen, God says. And we say, what is wrong here? Well, he goes on and tells them. They were sinning and not repenting of it.

[20:39] They were mistreating one another and not repenting of it. They were rebelling and were not finding cleansing that washes sins whiter than snow and stop doing evil and start doing good.

And God says, I won't hear. Your worship to me is offensive. That was chapter one. And now here we are in chapter 58 and it's the same.

Even though they added fasting to prayer, he still will not listen because their religion is void of true repentance and void of holy living. What you do outside of church may move God to reject all that you do inside of church.

Your worship and praying and reading and giving in here is all worthless to God if it's not accompanied by a life of real repentance. David knew it.

David had cried out to God in his distress. Psalm 66, 18. If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have heard me, he says.

[21:47] I prayed, but if I cherished sin in my heart, he wouldn't have heard me. Oh, but God has surely listened and he has heard my voice in prayer.

Praise be to God who has not rejected my prayer or withheld his love from me. But he would have if I would have cherished sin in my heart.

Cuddling it instead of killing it. Giving it VIP status. Oh, it's you. Well, stay here rather than rejecting sin.

If I had cherished it, held it in, the Lord would not have heard me. Solomon, David's son, knew this. Proverbs 28, 9. If anyone turns a deaf ear to the law, even his prayers are detestable.

God is saying, I'll treat you and your prayers as you treat my law. And if you turn a deaf ear when my law is brought to you, I'll turn a deaf ear to your prayer.

[23:01] It will be a detestable thing to me. Not something to awaken my eager concern for you, but something that arouses my disgust. Your prayers.

The Apostle John knew this. This is true of prayers even when you add fasting. It's true of prayers even when you add in Jesus' name formula to it. John the Apostle says in 1 John 3, 21-23, Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and we receive from Him anything we ask because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him.

Let me read that again. we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him.

And this is His command to believe in the name of His Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as He commanded us.

You can't play fast and loose with God's commands and expect God to hear and answer your prayers. Peter knew this. He says, Husbands, you live with your wife in a considerate way.

[24:23] You respect her, you treat her as a fragile vase, a weaker vessel that she is, and as an heir together of the grace of life so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Do you mean that before answering my prayers, God looks to see how I'm treating her? Yes, that's what Peter says.

That's what David knew. That's what Solomon knew. That's what John knew and what Peter knew. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high.

Quarreling, fighting, fast, and fighting and fisting, mistreating people in your life. Is this the kind of fast God says? Is this the kind of fast I've chosen?

Only a day for a man to humble himself? Is it only for a man to bow his head? And to lie on sackcloth and ashes?

[25:27] Is that what you call a fast? A day acceptable to the Lord? Is that all I'm after in fasting? He's asking these people. Do you think that's all it takes to make it acceptable to me?

Just to keep food out of your mouth for a day? And just to keep your head low? And to keep sackcloth and ashes beneath your body? Does it have nothing to do with keeping your fist to yourself?

And the kinds of words that you use with another? And the way that you treat people in your life? As if I had no deeper interest in your religion than that you be in that seat today?

That's all I care about? Is that what God is to think? That you're in the right place at the right time? Doing the right things with the right people? Acceptable. Is that the kind of God I am?

No. My eyes see right past these things. And they see right into how you treated people this week. What you did with my laws. Whether you're repenting of these sins.

[26:35] Whether you're coming to Christ for pardon and power concerning them. How you treated others on the way to church. Whether it be other drivers or other people sitting in your car.

God views our life as a whole. That's what we see here. And when we come and we're praying and worshiping, God doesn't just have isolated eyesight and somehow forget what we are as expressed elsewhere.

He sees us as whole beings. And John worshiping is the same John that was doing something yesterday. And that's how he sees me as I stand before him.

And if it's not one humbled with my sin and repenting and looking to Christ, then he says don't expect your worship to be accepted on high.

Not all worship is acceptable to God. God, that's what we're seeing. Is this what you call a fast? A day acceptable to the Lord. How many in church today would not only be surprised but downright offended if you met them as they went out the door and just asked, was your worship acceptable to God today?

[27 : 49] Did God accept it? Is it not taken for granted by many that if I came to church, he better good and jolly accept it? I could have been at the beach, I could have slept in, I could be lounging around the house, I could have spent that money on something else rather than on the office.

We just expect that God accepts whatever is offered to him. Is this what you think is acceptable to me?

God asks? God how many think they're winning brownie points with God by their attendance at church today and God's not impressed at all because he sees what is done Monday through Saturday as well as Sunday.

Religion, if it's true, promotes true holiness throughout the whole of life in every area. Having seen false religion in action, God now describes true religion.

This is the kind of fast you bring? You think that's what I've chosen? No, let me tell you what true religion looks like. Let me tell you about the true fasting. And he starts then with fasting.

[29 : 00] He's going to deal with true fasting and true Sabbath keeping. He starts with true fasting, the kind that he's chosen, the kind that pleases him, the kind that is acceptable to him. And he says instead of it being a day filled with fists and fighting and quarreling, it rather is concerned with active love toward others.

Instead of exploiting those who work for you, it's accompanied by seeking to undo injustice and to remove unfair treatment and remove oppression. it concerns itself.

True fasting is not just to stop eating, it's to stop oppression and it's to stop and to break every yoke, every treating of mankind as if they were beasts.

Everything that dehumanizes man. It's to help the poor. My chosen fast is not just keeping food out of your mouth for a day, it's to move you to put some of your food in the mouth of the hungry. to provide shelter for the poor wanderer, clothing for the naked, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood.

[30 : 10] How sad that he must mention that. Not becoming scarce when somebody in your family has a need and acting as if you don't know about it. Do you know a man can be fastidious about spiritual disciplines and neglect his or her family?

God's not impressed. It's not the kind of religion that he accepts. It's worse than an infidel. It's totally irreligious. It's rebellion and sin. And so he says, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood.

True spiritual disciplines, fasting, praying, worship, meditation, Bible read, it'll all lead you to doing away with the yoke of oppression, lightening the burdens of others.

This is the kind of fast that I have ordained. Lightening burdens rather than adding to them. It means doing away with your own finger pointing gossip and malicious talk that only adds burdens to other people's lives.

Have you thought about that? When you gossip and you pass on that salacious rumor, you are adding burdens. True fasting will seek to unload burdens, not add to them.

[31 : 27] It's the true humbling of ourselves that God is after in spiritual disciplines. Verse 10, it'll cost you something.

It means spending yourself on behalf of the hungry. It means satisfying the needs of the oppressed. It means pouring yourself out as Christ did for others out of deep concern for their good, both spiritual and material.

material. And it'll cost you time, it'll cost you money, it'll cost you your presence, your presence being there.

It'll cost you self-centered pleasures. But true religion is willing to make those sacrifices because the God we worship made deep sacrifices for us.

And that's the spirit from which we drink. it's the true humbling of ourselves in fasting, not just putting on the long face and the sack cloth and ashes, but truly humbling ourselves to stoop down and to serve one another in love.

[32 : 36] That's the kind of fast I'm after. That's the humility I'm looking for. Do you see how true religion moves us toward people rather than into isolation from people?

love. We need that because people are problems in our lives. And we can think I'm just going to get alone with Jesus.

He doesn't give me problems. I'm going to cut myself off from people. No. He doesn't want that kind of religion. Yes, there are exercises, spiritual exercises that require us to go into our closet and pray and fast and meditate and read his word.

But that is to move us out toward people loving, serving, tending to their needs, thinking of them instead of ourselves. That's the kind of fest that I have chosen.

and it could just be that some people who would like to think of themselves so spiritual but who are isolating themselves from people are really avoiding the more self-denying thing.

[33 : 45] They're afflicting themselves by fasting, they think. They're denying themselves. But the more self-denying thing would be to spend time, labor-intensive involvement with needy people.

That's the kind of self-denial that my fast calls for. True religion looks for those who are laden down by life's troubles, life's hard and people are low and true religion looks for them, gets by them and comes alongside of them and seeks to lift them up spiritually, materially, emotionally, in every way. Isn't that what James says? The religion, true religion that is acceptable and pure to God our Father is this, to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

There's no true religion without loving others and pursuing holiness, loving God and loving man.

The fourth lesson is that true religion is richly rewarded.

True religion is richly rewarded. That's the very thing they're complaining about. We fast and you didn't reward us. No, your fasting was not met by any blessing from me, the Lord would say, but true fasting would find blessing.

[35 : 18] You would find blessing if you brought the kind of fast that I've chosen, that I've just laid out for you. And this whole chapter is just loaded with the sheer blessedness of true religion.

Those who serve the Lord are not the poor for doing so. They are enriched greatly in every way.

This is the thing that Satan labors to lie about. And he would tell you it isn't so.

You will find greater pleasures and blessings in life by serving yourself rather than God and others. And God counters. That's what they're thinking.

We fasted and you didn't bless. God says, no, but if, if you give me the true fast that I'm after, of brokenness and seeking to lay yourself out for others as I have laid myself out for you, well then, if, then, then great blessings follow.

Look at the then's that follow true religion. verse 8, then your light will break forth like the dawn.

Verse 10, then your light will rise in the darkness and your night become like the noon sun.

[36 : 33] Pastor Jason was talking about that. He will turn your darkness to light. Is your life dark and dismal and depressing?

Come to Christ. Don't we hear that counsel given for depressed people? Just go serve somebody else.

Forget about yourself long enough to become involved in someone else. Serve them and see how your light is turned into, your darkness is turned into light. Light instead of your darkness and you'll find that in refreshing others you yourself will be refreshed.

And healing, your healing will quickly occur. That which they expected if we humble ourselves and pray. I'll heal your land. I'll heal you. I'll bring you the blessings that I promised in my covenant.

And if you would do as I command, you would find healing. And you would also find security. Your righteousness going before you, verse 8, and the glory of the Lord, your rear guard, front and behind, God's guardian presence with you.

[37 : 45] Your security, you're surrounded by Him, hemmed in, front and back. And then there's answered prayer, verse 9, then, if this, then, verse 9, then you will call and the Lord will answer.

You will cry for help and He will say, here I am. Again, we prize this far too little. But when we cry, Almighty God listens, gives us His attention in answers our prayer.

That's a blessing of true religion, to have a God in heaven who pays attention to the prayers of His people. We fasted and prayed and you didn't hear.

No, but you didn't bring me the fast I wanted. If you do, you will be answered from heaven. One commentator writes, do you want God to answer your prayers? Then be His answer to someone else's prayer.

Do you want God's intimate fellowship and personal closeness to you, saying, John, here I am, right here with you in your trouble? Then you get close to needy people and say to them, here I am. [38:56] The blessings continue. There's guidance. The Lord, verse 11, will guide you always. Instead of you being out there in life all on your own, trying to carve out a life that's best for you, I will guide you into the way that is best for you.

I will lead you in paths of righteousness. There's plenty provision. He'll satisfy your needs, verse 11, in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You'll be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail.

There's the fruitfulness, being under the Lord's blessing, under His grace, which is like water to a thirsty garden. And there's this fruitfulness that whereas before there was nothing but a barren life, as you live for yourself, as you come to know God and place your faith in Jesus Christ and repent of that self-serving life, you'll find your life is brimming full of vitality and fruitfulness and life.

And lastly, a bright future, verse 12, your people will rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise up the age-old foundations, you will be called repairer of broken walls, restorer of streets with dwellings. You see, God is able, by grace, to restore what was lost through sin. He's able to rebuild what was ruined and broken by their rebellion. What a future, what a glorious future awaits those who have true religion.

[40:24] Eye is not seen, ear is not heard, neither is the mind of man imagined all that he is preparing for those who love him. Blessings abound wherever Jesus reigns.

His laws are not burdensome. His yoke is easy and his burden is light and all who trust and obey him find it so. That's the blessing that follows true fasting, true spiritual exercises.

And then he says the same thing is true about true Sabbath keeping. Six days of work and one day of rest and worship.

And we find the same if-then format to this passage. Verse 13 is the if and verse 14 is the then. 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 honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words.

The fifth lesson for us is notice that true religion is careful to keep the Lord's holy day. He calls it his holy day because it's his in a way that is set apart from the other six days of the week.

[41:39] People say aren't all days gods? Yes they are, but God doesn't call them that way. He says he has his holy day that is different from the other six days and no small part of your duty in keeping the Lord's day is to keep it holy, to keep it set apart.

Don't treat it like a Saturday. Don't treat it like a Monday. Don't treat it like a Thursday. It's to be set apart, kept holy, kept distinctly his for what he has called for its use on that day.

And this commandment searches our hearts. Chapter 56 already held up the true Sabbath observance as one of the litmus tests of true religion.

He did it three times in chapter 56 and now we see it again in chapter 58 as a mark. One of the marks of true religion. Our whole weekly schedule is to be organized around the joyful worship of God.

It's not to be your work that defines you. It's to be your God that defines you. And he's front and center. He's worshipped heart and then the other six days you glorify him at your job.

[42:57] It reveals the heart because it calls us to set aside lesser things in order to delight ourselves in the greatest thing, in God himself. It's a weekly appointment that God makes with his people in which he comes to us with blessing.

He's always here. Are you? He requires us to keep our feet from trampling on his day with our feet. He says don't trample on it.

He requires us to consider what he wants done on his day, not what pleases us. He requires us to consider it not burdensome, joyless, drudging. Okay, I guess if I have to go to church today then I will.

But to call the Sabbath a delight. To consider it his holy day, an honorable thing, a delightful day, a day of all the days the best. Better one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere, David says. Now this is where the Lord's holy day tests our hearts. Do you delight in God that much to give him one day in seven? Do you count spending a whole day with him without the many distractions of the week as the most delightful way to spend a day?

[44:10] Or did you have the attitude that says, oh when will the Sabbath be over as they say in Amos, that we might give ourselves to that which truly owns our hearts? Do you look forward to it?

Do you prepare yourself for it? If we prize his presence, we will honor his weekly day with us and we will guard it from every intruder. Not going our own way, not doing what we please, not just filling it with the idle chit-chat of our mouths.

God bless. So the question should not be, well what can't I do today? It should rather be, how can I find most delight in God today?

How can I call this day a delight? How can I find my joy in the Lord? How can I give it most to those things for which God has set this day aside? To rest from all the rest that I might without distraction. Meet with him and his people and serve him. Yes, reach out to needy people. And if you will do this, then, verse 14, true religion always has great blessing.

[45:24] Then you will find your joy in the Lord. If you spend the Lord's day with the Lord, then you'll come to know him better and you'll come to enjoy him more. Here's the test of Lord's day well spent.

Does it increase your joy in the Lord himself? God promises it will if you spend it like he wants you to. Not only joy, victory.

I'll cause you to ride on the heights of the land. Phrase used of those who were riding in triumph over their enemies. Instead of being beaten down by the world, you will ride victoriously over the world.

And this is the victory that overcomes the world. Even our faith and the Sabbath day well spent will strengthen your faith as you spend it with the Lord and his people and his word and in his service.

Yes, joy, victory, and then feasting on promised blessings. You'll feast on the inheritance of your father, Jacob. Those things that were promised to God's people in that covenant with Jacob.

[46:27] You'll feast on them. The Lord is the one who blessed the Sabbath day and for those who keep it, he'll come and he'll see to it that those blessings are not just daintily sprinkled upon you, but such that you'll feast on them.

There will be plenty. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken. There's the guarantee of its fulfillment. What his mouth promises, his hand performs.

What blessings held out to who? Do you remember where we started? These are held out to the very people who were rebelling and sinning.

Under the veneer was rebellion and sin. Veneer of religion, rebellion and sin. But if they will only repent, forsake their own way and seek the Lord, then these fruits of true religion will be theirs.

Don't let anyone think that true religion wins God's favor for you, makes you a Christian, saves you in some way.

[47:38] You can't do anything to contribute to your religion, to your salvation. True fasting, true Sabbath, he's not saying this is the way to be, to make the slate clear so that you're right with heaven.

No, these are the fruits of all who come with nothing good to say for themselves and cast themselves upon God in faith, looking away from self and anything we've done to what Christ has done by his obedience and his death on the cross.

And everyone who does that will repent and turn away from their own way and follow in God's way. not once, but continually, a whole life of turning away, looking to Christ, turning away, looking to Christ.

Such blessings are promised to all who turn to the Lord. They were bought by the Lord. That's what Isaiah told us three chapters or five chapters ago in chapter 53, didn't he?

It's by his wounds that you are healed. It's by his being crushed and damned that you are blessed.

[48:53] It's by his spirit that we're given a new heart and empowered to live a new way. And so the last lesson is clear. True religion is only possible by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the testimony that God has given us eternal life, the blessedness of eternal life. It starts here and now. It's to know God and Jesus Christ whom he sent. It's to live under his blessings now and forever.

And this is the record that God has given us this eternal life. And this life is in his son. He that has the son has life. He that has not the son does not have this blessedness of life that God gives.

So the purpose of this chapter was to convince us of our sins in order that we might seek God in repentance and seek the Lord for cleansing and for sin killing power.

And I ask you, has it accomplished its purpose? Has it brought you to God in fresh repentance and faith in Jesus Christ? As the Lord has scraped on the exterior of our religion, what did it reveal? [50:05] Is your religion real or is it fake? Well, there's reality only in Jesus Christ. Only in Jesus Christ.

Let's pray and bring to him our heart's response to his word to us. We're aware our father in heaven, searcher of hearts that that people may look in on the outside and see one thing and you look in and see something altogether different.

And where we are hypocrites, forgive us. And make us real. That when we're scratched, what comes out is not just human.

It is the life of God lived out through the power of the Holy Spirit who's come to dwell within us as he seeks out lowly and contrite hearts in which to live.

God, we thank you for Jesus who saves us from the coming wrath. How we thank you for Jesus whose blood has power to deliver us from sin. How we thank you for the gift of repentance and for the work of the spirit ever moving us to repent and to look afresh to Christ.

[51:41] We'll make our religion real. Whatever it is, make it real. Don't let us be satisfied to have a name that we live when we're really dead.

So we come. You know what we are. Make us what we ought to be. We would turn away from all hope and self and turn to you and your wonderful grace in Jesus Christ.

We pray in his name. Amen. Amen. If you take your hymnal, we'll respond to God's word in number 700.

Trust and obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus but to trust and obey. These blessings that Isaiah 58 have spoken about are for those who will trust and obey.

number 700. We're going to sing the first verse and then the fourth verse and only then will we sing the chorus. We'll sing the chorus just once. Verse 1, verse 4 and then the chorus.

[52:48] Stand with me as we sing. You trust first. You trust in all that Jesus is for sinners. And then you go and show that your faith is real by obeying.

Amen. Amen.