

24/7/365 FOLLOWING AFTER GOD

The thing that seemed to annoy Jesus the most was “hypocrisy.” People who claimed to be godly, but who were not - particularly got under His skin. This shouldn’t surprise us since God has always been upset with self-righteous, two faced people. Consider **Isaiah 58** as the LORD addresses His people.

¹ "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. ² 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. ³ '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. ⁴ 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."

⁵ "Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for a man to humble himself? 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 ? ⁶ 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? ⁷ 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?"

⁸ "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. ⁹ 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 the pointing finger and malicious talk, ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ The LORD will guide you always; He will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail. ¹² 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.'" ¹³ "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, ¹⁴ 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 would think this is plain enough. If we'd let it sink in, we could just go home and I'd never need to mention the issue again. But they didn't - and most today don't either. So, I'm going to offer an abbreviated interpretation of the passage and put forth a challenge. Ready?

God never intended for the Sabbath then, or for the Lord's Day today, to be merely a day for us to deny ourselves for an hour or so. To be honest, a lot of church goers don't even do that, as they are still more focused on what pleases them than what blesses God and others. But, if we think giving Him a little of our precious time is all that He wants, we've missed it.

And He surely didn't intend for us to come to an assembly, participate in some religious rituals, and then return home unchanged. An encounter with Him and His word is always intended to transform us. The issue for some is that they may want for their circumstances to change, but they don't want to change. Or they may want to change, but they want it to come about without any effort or sacrifice on their part.

Yet, our God wants for us to spend time with Him and then become like Him. He wants for our time in His presence to transform us. You see, God is unchanging in His nature. And His Son Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So by the power of His Holy Spirit, His desire is that we become consistent, taking on His divine nature.

He wants us to stop our fussing and fighting. Why? **The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit** are one, and when we embrace the Spirit of unity and the bond of peace (**Ephesians 4:3-5**), we reflect His nature. He wants us to be benevolent and kind. Why? Because when we love others we display our Heavenly DNA. He wants us to help people. Why? Because it's what God does...and His children are like Him in this world.

Ultimately, He wants for us to be changed; to be transformed into His image, and to become catalysts for change in this world. **Romans 8:28-29**

And if we don't cooperate? What if we resist His promptings and instruction?

God plainly told the Israelites that they should not expect Him to be benevolent and kind towards them in such a state of duplicity. He said if they continued to turn a deaf ear toward Him, He would turn a deaf ear to them. Their prayers would go unanswered. And so might ours...

Listen to **James 4**: ¹**"What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?"** ²**You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God.** ³**When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.**

⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God? Anyone who chooses to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God.”⁵ “Or do you think Scripture says without reason that the spirit He caused to live in us envies intensely?⁶ But He gives us more grace. That is why Scripture says: ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.’

So bottom line: Feel like your prayers aren't getting off the ground? Like God isn't listening to you, lately? Are you listening to Him? Are you expecting Him to bless you in spite of your hypocrisy? Think again. Reading on, here's the solution...

⁷ Submit yourselves, then, to God. Until you do, you can't do the next thing. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Then, ⁸ Come near to God and He will come near to you. Be prepared, because when you do, it better be with **regret** in your heart for your sin and a willingness to **repent** of it. God loves you the way you are, but too much to leave you that way. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. ⁹ **Grieve, mourn and wail. Change your laughter to mourning and your joy to gloom.**

And He promises this: ¹⁰ Humble yourselves before the Lord, and He will lift you up.”