

CHAPTER 58

The prophet, in this chapter, has his commission and charge renewed to reprove the sinners in Zion, particularly the hypocrites, to show them their transgressions (v. 1). It is intended for admonition and warning to all hypocrites, and is not to be confined to those of any one age. Some refer it primarily to those at that time when Isaiah prophesied; see 33:14; 29:13. Others to the captives in Babylon, the wicked among them, to whom the prophet had declared there was no peace 57:21. Against the terror of that word they thought to shelter themselves with their external performances, particularly their fastings, which they kept up in Babylon, and for some time after their return to their own land, ~~<BIB>~~Zechariah 7:3, etc. The prophet therefore here shows them that their devotions would not entitle them to peace while their conversations were not at all of a piece with them. Others think it is principally intended against the hypocrisy of the Jews, especially the Pharisees before and in our Saviour's time: they boasted of their fastings, but Christ (as the prophet here) showed them their transgressions (Matthew 23), much the same with those they are here charged with. Observe,

- I.** The plausible profession of religion which they made (v. 2).
- II.** The boasts they made of that profession, and the blame they laid upon God for taking no more notice of it (v. 3).
- III.** The sins they are charged with, which spoiled the acceptableness of their fasts (v. 4, 5).
- IV.** Instructions given them how to keep fasts aright (v. 6, 7).
- V.** Precious promises made to those who do so keep fasts (v. 8-12).
- VI.** The like precious promises made to those that sanctify sabbaths aright (v. 13, 14).

~~<BIB>~~ISAIAH 58:1-2

A CHARGE AGAINST THE PEOPLE

When our Lord Jesus promised to send the Comforter he added, *When he shall come he shall convince* (~~<BIB>~~John 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 (²⁴⁰Isaiah 40:1); here he appoints him to convince them, and show them their sins.

I. He must tell them how very bad they really were, v. 1.

1. He must deal faithfully and plainly with them. “Though they are called *the people of God* and *the house of Jacob*, though they wear an honourable title and character, by which they are interested in many glorious privileges, yet do not flatter them, but show them their transgressions and their sins, be particular in telling them their faults, what sins are committed among them, which they do not know of, nay, what sins are committed by them which they do not acknowledge to be sins; though in some things they are reformed, let them know that in other things they are still as bad as ever. Show them their transgressions and their sins, that is, all their transgressions in their sins, their sins and all the aggravations of them,” ¹⁸⁹²Leviticus 16:21. Note,

(1.) God sees sin in his people, in the house of Jacob, and is displeased with it.

(2.) They are often unapt and unwilling to see their own sins, and need to have them shown them, and to be told, *Thus and thus thou hast done*.


2. He must be vehement and in good earnest herein, must *cry aloud, and not spare*, not spare them (not touch them with his reproofs as if he were afraid of hurting them, but search the wound to the bottom, lay it bare to the bone), not spare himself or his own pains, but cry as loud as he can; though he spend his strength and waste his spirits, though he get their ill-will by it and get himself into an ill name, yet he must not spare. He must lift up his voice like a trumpet, to make those hear of their faults that were apt to be deaf when admonition was addressed to them. He must give his reproofs in the most powerful and pressing manner possible, as one who desired to be heeded. The trumpet does not give an uncertain sound, but, though loud and shrill, is intelligible; so must his alarms be, giving them warning of the fatal consequences of sin, ¹⁸⁹³Ezekiel 33:3.

II. He must acknowledge how very good they seemed to be, notwithstanding (v. 2): *Yet they seek me daily*. When the prophet went about to show them their transgressions they pleaded that they could see no transgressions which they were guilty of; for they were diligent and

constant in attending on God's worship — and what more would he have of them? Now,

1. He owns the matter of fact to be true. As far as hypocrites do that which is good, they shall not be denied the praise of it; let them make their best of it. It is owned that they have a form of godliness.

(1.) They go to church, and observe their hours of prayer: *They seek me daily*; they are very constant in their devotions and never omit them nor suffer any thing to put them by.

(2.) They love to hear good preaching; *They delight to know my ways*, as Herod, who heard John gladly, and the stony ground, that received the seed of the word with joy; it is to them *as a lovely song*,  Ezekiel 33:32.

(3.) They seem to take great pleasure in the exercises of religion and to be in their element when they are at their devotions: *They delight in approaching to God*, not for his sake to whom they approach, but for the sake of some pleasing circumstance, the company, or the festival.

(4.) They are inquisitive concerning their duty and seem desirous only to know it, making no question but that then they should do it: *They ask of me the ordinances of justice*, the rules of piety in the worship of God, the rules of equity in their dealings with men, both which are ordinances of justice.

(5.) They appear to the eye of the world as if they made conscience of doing their duty: *They are as a nation that did righteousness and forsook not the ordinances of their God*; others took them for such, and they themselves pretended to be such. Nothing lay open to view that was a contradiction to their profession, but they seemed to be such as they should be. Note, Men may go a great way towards heaven and yet come short; nay, may go to hell with a good reputation. But,

2. He intimates that this was so far from being a cover or excuse for their sin that really it was an aggravation of it: “Show them their sins which they go on in notwithstanding their knowledge of good and evil, sin and duty, and the convictions of their consciences concerning them.”

ISAIAH 58:3-7

THE NATURE OF A TRUE FAST

Here we have,

I. The displeasure which these hypocrites conceived against God for not accepting the services which they themselves had a mighty opinion of (v. 3): *Wherefore have we fasted, say they, and thou seest not?* Thus they went in the way of Cain, who was angry at God, and resented it as a gross affront that his offering was not accepted. Having gone about to put a cheat upon God by their external services, here they go about to pick a quarrel with God for not being pleased with their services, as if he had not done fairly or justly by them. Observe,

- 1.** How they boast of themselves, and magnify their own performances: *“We have fasted, and afflicted our souls; we have not only sought God daily (v. 2), but have kept some certain times of more solemn devotion.”* Some think this refers to the yearly fast (which was called *the day of atonement*), others to their arbitrary occasional fasts. Note, It is common for unhumiliated hearts to be proud of their professions of humiliation, as the Pharisee (~~AND~~ Luke 18:12), *I fast twice in the week.*
- 2.** What they expected from their performances. They thought God should take great notice of them, and own himself a debtor to them for their services. Note, It is a common thing for hypocrites, while they perform the external services of religion, to promise themselves that acceptance with God which he has promised only to the sincere; as if they must be accepted of course, or for a compliment.
- 3.** How heinously they take it that God had not put some particular marks of his favour upon them, that he had not immediately delivered them out of their troubles and advanced them to honour and prosperity. They charge God with injustice and partiality, and seem resolved to throw up their religion, and justify themselves in doing so with this, that they had found no *profit in praying* to God, ~~AND~~ Job 21:14, 15; ~~AND~~ Malachi 3:14. Note, Reigning hypocrisy often breaks out in daring impiety and an open contempt and reproach of God and religion for that which the hypocrisy itself must bear all the blame of. Sinners reflect upon religion as a hard and melancholy service, and on which there is nothing to be got by, when

really it is owing to themselves that it seems so to them, because they are not sincere in it.

II. 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*, ^{<3015>}Zechariah 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*, notwithstanding the professed humiliations and covenants of that day, they went on to *find pleasure*, that is, to do whatsoever seemed right in their own eyes, lawful or unlawful, *quicquid libet, licet* — *making their inclinations their law*; though they seemed to afflict their souls, they still gratified their lusts as much as ever.

1. They were as covetous and unmerciful as ever: “*You exact all your labours from your servants, and will neither release them according to the law nor relax the rigour of their servitude.*” This was their fault before the captivity, ^{<2848>}Jeremiah 34:8, 9. It was no less their fault after their captivity, notwithstanding all their solemn fasts, ^{<4655>}Nehemiah 5:5. “*You exact all your dues, your debts*” (so some read it); “you are as rigorous and severe in extorting what you demand from those that are poor as ever you were, though it was at the close of the yearly fast that the release was proclaimed.”

2. They were contentious and spiteful (v. 4): *Behold, you fast for strife and debate*. When they proclaimed a fast to deprecate God's judgments, they pretended to search for those sins which provoked God to threaten them with his judgments, and under that pretence perhaps particular persons were falsely accused, as Naboth in the day of Jezebel's fast, ^{<1212>}1 Kings 21:12. Or the contending parties among them upon those occasions were bitter and severe in their reflections one upon another, one side crying out, “It is owing to you,” and the other, “It is owing to you, that our deliverance is not wrought.” Thus, instead of judging themselves, which is the proper work of a fast-day, they condemned one another. They *fasted for strife*, with emulation which should make the most plausible appearance on a fast-day and humour the matter best. Nor was it only tongue-quarrels that were fomented in the times of their fasting, but they came to blows too: *You smite with the fist of wickedness*. The cruel task-masters beat their servants, and the creditors their insolvent debtors, whom they delivered to the tormentors; they abused poor innocents *with wicked*

hands. Now while they thus *continued in sin*, in those very sins which were directly contrary to the intention of a fasting day,

(1.) God would not allow them the use of such solemnities: “*You shall not fast* at all if you fast *as you do this day*, causing your voice to be heard on high, in the heat of your clamours one against another, or in your devotions, which you perform so as to make them to be taken notice of for ostentation. *Bring me no more* of these empty, noisy, vain oblations,”
²⁰¹³Isaiah 1:13. Note, Those are justly forbidden the honour of a profession of religion that will not submit to the power of it.

(2.) He would not accept of them in the use of them: “*You shall not fast*, that is, it shall not be looked upon as a fast, nor shall the voice of your prayers on those days be heard on high in heaven.” Note, Those that fast and pray, and yet go on in their wicked ways, do but mock God and deceive themselves.

III. Plain instructions given concerning the true nature of a religious fast.

1. In general, a fast is intended,

(1.) For the honouring and pleasing of God. It must be such a performance as he has chosen (v. 5); it must be *an acceptable day to the Lord*, in the duties of which we must study to approve ourselves to him and obtain his favour, else it is not a fast, else there is nothing done to any purpose.

(2.) For the humbling and abasing of ourselves. A fast is *a day to afflict the soul*; if it do not express a genuine sorrow for sin, and do not promote a real mortification of sin, it is not a fast; the law of the day of atonement was that on that day they should *afflict their souls*, ²⁰¹⁹Leviticus 16:29. That must be done on a fast-day which is a real affliction to the soul, as far as it is yet unregenerate and unsanctified, though a real pleasure and advantage to the soul as far as it is itself.

2. It concerns us therefore to enquire, on a fast-day, what it is that will be acceptable to God, and afflictive to our corrupt nature, and tending to its mortification.

(1.) We are here told negatively what is not the fast that God has chosen, and which does not amount to the afflicting of the soul.

[1.] It is not enough to look demure, to put on a grave and melancholy aspect, to bow down the head like a bulrush that is withered and broken:

as the hypocrites, that were of a sad countenance, and disfigured their faces, that they might appear unto men to fast, ~~<406>~~ Matthew 6:16. Hanging down the head did indeed well enough become the publican, whose heart was truly humbled and broken for sin, and who therefore, in token of that, would not so much as lift up his eyes to heaven (~~<403>~~ Luke 18:13); but when it was only mimicked, as here, it was justly ridiculed: it is but *hanging down the head like a bulrush*, which nobody regards or takes any notice of. As the hypocrite's humiliations are but like the hanging down of a bulrush, so his elevations in his hopes are but like the *flourishing of a bulrush* (~~<381>~~ Job 8:11, 12), which, *while it is yet in its greenness, withers before any other herb*.

[2.] It is not enough to do penance, to mortify the body a little, while the body of sin is untouched. It is not enough for a man *to spread sackcloth and ashes under him*, which may indeed give him some uneasiness for the present, but will soon be forgotten when he returns to *stretch himself upon his beds of ivory*, ~~<404>~~ Amos 6:4. *Wilt thou call this a fast?* No, it is but the shadow and carcase of a fast. *Wilt thou call this an acceptable day to the Lord?* No, it is so far from being so that the hypocrisy of it is an abomination to him. Note, The shows of religion, though they show ever so fair in the eye of the world, will not be accepted of God without the substance of it.

(2.) We are here told positively what is the fast that God has chosen, what that is which will recommend a fast-day to the divine acceptance, and what is indeed afflicting the soul, that is, crushing and subduing the corrupt nature. *It is not afflicting the soul for a day* (as some read it, v. 5) that will serve; no, it must be the business of our whole lives. It is here required,

[1.] That we be just to those with whom we have dealt hardly. The fast that God has chosen consists in reforming our lives and undoing what we have done amiss (v. 6): *To loose the bands of wickedness*, the bands which we have wickedly tied, and by which others are bound out from their right or bound down under severe usage. Those which perhaps were at first bands of justice, tying men to pay a due debt, become, when the debt is exacted with rigour from those whom Providence has reduced and emptied, *bands of wickedness*, and they must be loosed, or they will bring us into bonds of guilt much more terrible. It is *to undo the heavy burden laid on the back of the poor servant*, under which he is ready to sink. It is

to let the oppressed go free from the oppression which makes his life bitter to him. “Let the prisoner for debt that has nothing to pay be discharged, let the vexatious action be quashed, let the servant that is forcibly detained beyond the time of his servitude be released, and thus *break every yoke*; not only let go those that are wrongfully kept under the yoke, but break the yoke of slavery itself, that it may not serve again another time nor any by made again to serve under it.”

[2.] That we be charitable to those that stand in need of charity, v. 7. The particulars in the former verse *may* be taken as acts of charity, that we not only release those whom we have unjustly oppressed — that is justice, but that we contribute to the rescue and ransom of those that are oppressed by others, to the release of captives and the payment of the debts of the poor; but those in this verse are *plainly* acts of charity. This then is the fast that God has chosen. *First*, To provide food for those that want it. This is put first, as the most necessary, and which the poor can but a little while live without. It is *to break thy bread to the hungry*. Observe, “It must be *thy* bread, that which is honestly got (not that which thou hast robbed others of), the bread which thou thyself hast occasion for, the bread of thy allowance.” We must deny ourselves, that we may have to give to him that needeth. “Thy bread which thou hast spared from thyself and thy family, on the fast-day, if that, or the value of it, be not given to the poor, it is the miser's fast, which he makes a hand of; it is fasting for the world, not for God. This is the true fast, to break thy bread to the hungry, not only to give them that which is already broken meat, but to break bread on purpose for them, to give them loaves and not to put them off with scraps.” *Secondly*, To provide lodging for those that want it: It is *to take care of the poor that are cast out*, that are forced from their dwelling, turned out of house and harbour, *are cast out as rebels* (so some critics render it), that are attainted, and whom therefore it is highly penal to protect. “If they suffer unjustly, make no difficulty of sheltering them; do not only find out quarters for them and pay for their lodging elsewhere, but, which is a greater act of kindness, bring them to thy own house, make them thy own guests. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for though thou mayest not, as some have done, thereby entertain angels, thou mayest entertain Christ himself, who will recompense it in the resurrection of the just. *I was a stranger and you took me in.*” *Thirdly*, To provide clothing for those that want it: “*When thou seest the naked, that thou cover him*, both to shelter him from the injuries of the weather and to enable him to appear decently

among his neighbours; give him clothes to come to church in, and in these and other instances *hide not thyself from thy own flesh.*” Some understand it more strictly of a man's own kindred and relations: “If those of thy own house and family fall into decay, thou art *worse than an infidel* if thou dost not *provide* for them.” ^{<5488>}1 Timothy 5:8. Others understand it more generally; all that partake of the human nature are to be looked upon as our own flesh, for have we not all one Father? And for this reason we must not hide ourselves from them, not contrive to be out of the way when a poor petitioner enquires for us, not look another way when a moving object of charity and compassion presents itself; let us remember that they are flesh of our flesh and therefore we ought to sympathize with them, and in doing good to them we really do good to our own flesh and spirit too in the issue; for thus *we lay up for ourselves a good foundation, a good bond, for the time to come.*

^{<2808>}ISAIAH 58:8-12

ENCOURAGEMENT TO ISRAELITES INDEED

Here are precious promises for those to feast freely and cheerfully upon by faith who keep the fast that God has chosen; let them know that God will make it up to them. Here is,

I. A further account of the duty to be done in order to our interest in these promises (v. 9, 10); and here, as before, it is required that we both do justly and love mercy, that we cease to do evil and learn to do well.

1. We must abstain from all acts of violence and fraud. “Those must be *taken away from the midst of thee, from the midst of thy person, out of thy heart*” (so some); “thou must not only refrain from the practice of injury, but mortify in thee all inclination and disposition towards it.” Or *from the midst of thy people.* Those in authority must not only not be oppressive themselves, but must do all they can to prevent and restrain oppression in all within their jurisdiction. They must not only *break the yoke* (v. 6), but take away the yoke, that those who have been oppressed may never be re-enslaved (as they were ^{<2810>}Jeremiah 34:10, 11); they must likewise *forbear threatening* (^{<4889>}Ephesians 6:9) and take away the *putting forth of the finger*, which seems to have been then, as sometimes with us, a sign of displeasure and the indication of a purpose to correct. Let not the finger be

put forth to point at those that are poor and in misery, and so to expose them to contempt; such expressions of contumely as are provoking, and the products of ill-nature, ought to be banished from all societies. And let them not *speak vanity*, flattery or fraud, to one another, but let all conversation be governed by sincerity. Perhaps that dissimulation which is the bane of friendship is meant by the putting forth of the finger (as ²¹¹³Proverbs 6:13 by *teaching with the finger*), or it is putting forth the finger with the ring on it, which was the badge of authority, and which therefore they produced when they spoke iniquity, that is, gave unrighteous sentences.

2. We must abound in all acts of charity and beneficence. We must not only give alms according as the necessities of the poor require, but,

(1.) We must give freely and cheerfully, and from a principle of charity. We must *draw out our soul to the hungry* (v. 10), not only draw out the money and reach forth the hand, but do this from the heart, heartily, and without grudging, from a principle of compassion and with a tender affection to such as we see to be in misery. Let the heart go along with the gift; for God loves a cheerful giver, and so does a poor man too. When our Lord Jesus healed and fed the multitude it was as having compassion on them.

(2.) We must give plentifully and largely, so as not to tantalize, but to *satisfy, the afflicted soul*: “Do not only feed the hungry, but gratify the desire of the afflicted, and, if it lies in your power, make them easy.” 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 with them? And the poor we have always with us.

II. Here is a full account of the blessings and benefits which attend the performance of this duty. If a person, a family, a people, be thus disposed to every thing that is good, let them know for their comfort that they shall find God their bountiful rewarder and what they lay out in works of charity shall be abundantly made up to them.

1. 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 (v. 8): “*Then shall thy light break forth as the morning* and (v. 10) *thy light shall rise in obscurity*. Though thou hast been long buried alive thou shalt recover thy eminency; though long overwhelmed with

grief, thou shalt again look pleasant as the dawning day.” Those that are cheerful in doing good God will make cheerful in enjoying good; and this also is a special *gift of God*, ^{<12>}Ecclesiastes 2:24. 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, who helped him with their substance, so that his light rose in obscurity. “Not only thy light, which is sweet, but thy health too, or the healing of the wounds thou hast long complained of, shall spring forth speedily; all thy grievances shall be redressed, and thou shalt renew thy youth and recover thy vigour.” Those that have helped others out of trouble will obtain help of God when it is their turn.

2. 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*. Though a man's extraction be mean, his family obscure, and he has no external advantages to gain him honour, yet, if he do good in his place, that will procure him respect and veneration, and his darkness shall by this means become *as the noon-day*, that is, he shall become very eminent and shine brightly in his generation. 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, ^{<13>}Genesis 30:33), that is, it shall silence reproaches, nay, it shall bespeak thee more praises than thy humility can be pleased with.” He that has *given to the poor, his righteousness* (that is, the honour of it) *endures for ever*, ^{<14>}Psalms 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*, the gathering host, to bring up those of thee that are weary and are left behind, and to secure thee from the enemies, that, like Amalek, fall upon thy rear.” Observe, How good people are safe on all sides. Let them look which way they will, behind them or before them; let them look backward or forward; they see themselves safe, and find themselves easy and quiet from the fear of evil. And observe what it is that is their defence; it is their righteousness, and the glory of the Lord, that is, as some suppose, Christ; for it is by him that we are justified, and God is glorified. He it is that goes before us, and is the captain of our salvation, as he is the Lord our righteousness; he it is that is our rearward, on whom alone we

can depend for safety when our sins pursue us and are ready to take hold on us. Or, "God himself in his providence and grace shall both go before thee as thy guide to conduct thee, and attend thee as thy rearward to protect thee, and this shall be the reward of thy righteousness and so shall be for the glory of the Lord as the rewarder of it."

4. God will be always nigh unto them, to hear their prayers, v. 9. 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 (~~400~~ 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.*" This is a very condescending expression of God's readiness to hear prayer. When God calls to us by his word it becomes us to say, *Here we are; what saith our Lord unto his servants?* But that God should say to us, *Behold me, here I am,* is strange. 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, ~~400~~ Psalm 130:2. No sooner do they call to him than he answers, *Ready, ready.* Wherever they are praying, God says, "Here I am hearing; I am *in the midst of you.*" He is *nigh unto them in all things,* ~~400~~ Deuteronomy 4:7.

5. God will direct them in all difficult and doubtful cases (v. 11): *The Lord shall guide thee continually.* 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,* ~~200~~ Ecclesiastes 2:26. His providence will make their way plain to them, both what is their duty and what will be most for their comfort.

6. God will give them abundance of satisfaction in their own minds. As the world is a wilderness in respect of wanderings, so that they need to be guided continually, 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*, ^{<661>}Psalm 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. "These will *satisfy thy soul*, will put gladness into thy heart, even *in the drought of affliction; these will make fat thy bones*, and fill them with marrow, will give thee that pleasure which will be a support to thee as the bones to the body, that joy of the Lord which will be thy strength. *He shall give thy bones rest*" (so some read it), "rest from the pain and sickness which they have laboured under and been chastened with;" so it agrees with that promise made to the merciful. The Lord will *make all his bed in his sickness*, ^{<640>}Psalm 41:3. "*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*, ^{<644>}John 4:14. As a spring of water, though it is continually sending forth its streams, is yet always full, so the charitable man abounds in good as he abounds in doing good and is never the poorer for his liberality. He that waters shall himself be watered.

7. They and their families shall be public blessings. 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. This is here promised (v. 12): "Those that now are of thee, thy princes, and nobles, and great men, shall have such authority and influence as they never had;" or, "*Those that hereafter shall be of thee*, thy posterity, shall be serviceable to their generation, as thou art to thine." It completes the satisfaction of a good man, as to this world, to think that those that come after him shall be doing good when he is gone.

1. They shall re-edify cities that have been long in ruins, *shall build the old waste places*, which had lain so long desolate that the rebuilding of them was quite despaired of. This was fulfilled when the captives, after their return, repaired the cities of Judah, and dwelt in them, and many of those in Israel too, which had lain waste ever since the carrying away of the ten tribes.

2. They shall carry on and finish that good work which was begun long before, and shall be helped over the obstructions which had retarded the

progress of it: *They shall raise up* to the top that building *the foundation of* which was laid long since and has been for *many generations* in the rearing. This was fulfilled when the building of the temple was revived after it had stood still for many years, ^{<5815>}Ezra 5:2. Or, “They shall raise up foundations which shall continue for many generations yet to come;” they shall do that good which shall be of lasting consequence.

3. They shall have the blessing and praise of all about them: “*Thou shalt be called* (and it shall be to thy honour) *the repairer of the breach*, the breach made by the enemy in the wall of a besieged city, which whoso has the courage and dexterity to make up, or make good, gains great applause.” Happy are those who make up the breach at which virtue is running out and judgments are breaking in. “Thou shalt be *the restorer of paths*, safe and quiet paths, not only to travel in, but *to dwell in*, so safe and quiet that people shall make no difficulty of building their houses by the road-side.” 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 ^{<3015>}Zechariah 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.

^{<2813>}ISAIAH 58:13-14

THE SANCTIFICATION OF THE SABBATH

Great stress was always laid upon the due observance of the sabbath day, and it was particularly required from the Jews when they were captives in Babylon, because by keeping that day, in honour of the Creator, they distinguished themselves from the worshippers of the gods that have not made the heavens and the earth. See ^{<2811>}Isaiah 56:1, 2, where keeping the sabbath is joined, as here, with *keeping judgment* and *doing justice*. Some, indeed, understand this of the day of atonement, which they think is the fast spoken of in the former part of the chapter, and which is called a *sabbath of rest*, ^{<2812>}Leviticus 23:32. But, as the fasts before spoken of seem to be those that were occasional, so this sabbath is doubtless the weekly sabbath, that great sign between God and his professing people — his appointing it a sign of his favour to them and their observing it a sign of their obedience to him. Now observe here,

I. How the sabbath is to be sanctified (v. 13); and, there remaining still a sabbatism for the people of God, this law of the sabbath is still binding to us on our Lord's day.

1. Nothing must be done that puts contempt upon the sabbath day, or looks like having mean thoughts of it, when God has so highly dignified it. We must *turn away our foot from the sabbath*, from trampling upon it, as profane atheistical people do, from travelling on that day (so some); we must turn away our foot *from doing out pleasure on that holy day*, that is, from living at large, and taking a liberty to do what we please on sabbath days, without the control and restraint of conscience, or from indulging ourselves in the pleasures of sense, in which the modern Jews wickedly place the sanctification of the sabbath, though it is as great a profanation of it as any thing. On sabbath days we must not walk in *our own ways* (that is, not follow our callings), not *find our own pleasure* (that is, not follow our sports and recreations); nay, we must not *speak our own words*, words that concern either our callings or our pleasures; we must not allow ourselves a liberty of speech on that day as on other days, for we must then mind God's ways, make religion the business of the day; we must choose the things that please him; and speak his words, speak of divine things as we sit in the house and walk by the way. In all we say and do we must put a difference between this day and other days.

2. Every thing must be done that puts an honour on the day and is expressive of our high thoughts of it. We must call it *a delight*, not a *task and a burden*; we must delight ourselves in it, in the restraints it lays upon us and the services it obliges us to. We must be in our element when we are worshipping God, and in communion with him. *How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts!* We must not only count it a delight, but call it so, must openly profess the complacency we take in the day and the duties of it. We must call it so to God, in thanksgiving for it and earnest desire of his grace to enable us to do the work of the day in its day, because we delight in it. We must call it so to others, to invite them to come and share in the pleasure of it; and we must call it so to ourselves, that we may not entertain the least thought of wishing the sabbath gone that we may sell corn. We must call it *the Lord's holy day, and honourable*. We must call it *holy*, separated from common use and devoted to God and to his service, must call it *the holy of the Lord*, the day which he has sanctified to himself. Even in Old-Testament times the sabbath was called *the Lord's day*, and therefore it is fitly called so still,

and for a further reason, because it is the *Lord Christ's day*, ^{<611>}Revelation 1:10. It is holy because it is the Lord's day, and upon both accounts it is honourable. It is a beauty of holiness that is upon it; it is ancient, and its antiquity is its honour; and we must make it appear that we look upon it as honourable by honouring God on that day. We put honour upon the day when we give honour to him that instituted it, and to whose honour it is dedicated.

II. What the reward is of the sabbath-sanctification, v. 14. If we thus *remember the sabbath day to keep it holy*,

1. We shall have the comfort of it; the work will be its own wages. *If we call the sabbath a delight, then shall we delight ourselves in the Lord*; he will more and more manifest himself to us as the delightful subject of our thoughts and meditations and the delightful object of our best affections. Note, The more pleasure we take in serving God the more pleasure we shall find in it. If we go about duty with cheerfulness, we shall go from it with satisfaction and shall have reason to say, "It is good to be here, good to draw near to God."

2. We shall have the honour of it: *I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth*, which denotes not only a great security (as that, ^{<336>}Isaiah 32:16, *He shall dwell on high*), but great dignity and advancement. "Thou shalt ride in state, shalt appear conspicuous, and the eyes of all thy neighbours shall be upon thee." It was said of Israel, when God led them triumphantly out of Egypt, that *he made them to ride on the high places of the earth*, ^{<632>}Deuteronomy 32:12, 13. Those that honour God and his sabbath he will thus honour. If God by his grace enable us to live above the world, and so to manage it as not only not to be hindered by it, but to be furthered and carried on by it in our journey towards heaven, then he makes us *to ride on the high places of the earth*.

3. We shall have the profit of it: *I will feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father*, that is, with all the blessings of the covenant and all the precious products of Canaan (which was a type of heaven), for these were the heritage of Jacob. Observe, The heritage of believers is what they shall not only be portioned with hereafter, but fed with now, fed with the hopes of it, and not flattered, fed with the earnest and foretastes of it; and those that are so fed have reason to say that they are well fed. In order that we may depend upon it, it is added, "*The mouth of the Lord has spoken it*;

you may take God's word for it, for he cannot lie nor deceive; what his mouth has spoken his hand will give, his hand will do, and not one iota or tittle of his good promise shall fall to the ground." *Blessed, therefore, thrice blessed, is he that doeth this, and lays hold on it, that keeps the sabbath from polluting it.*