

ii. *The arm of the Lord is not too short!*

➤ 53:1

B. Confession of Convicted Sinners (59:9-15a)

C. A Declaration of God's Work to Save (59:15b-20)

D. Isaiah full circle (59:21)

LIVE THE STORY

We must not only love the Gospel Story, we must begin to live the Gospel Story, indeed, to have the Central Character live in us.

- In what ways have you responded wrongly to your spiritual separation from God, or the hiddenness of God in your life? What is the only cure this text offers for this problem?
- Isaiah describes religious activities that Israel carried out, those often thought to be of the most spiritual nature, while they had not curbed the activity of their tongues, and hadn't begun extending mercy to their neighbor. What ways might you be tempted to carry on religious activities while not keeping a reign on your tongue or extending mercy?
- Why must God's liberation of us, salvation, always precede our transformation? How is it the very basis of our transformation?
- Imagine what might happen if all the time we spent mentally critiquing other people, even verbally maligning, we turned into prayer for them. How might that transform our lives and those around us? (Consider the Hallesby quote.)
- How does Isaiah 59:21 answer to both the dilemma of Isaiah 58-59, and that of Isaiah 6 as well?
- What most affected you in this message/text? How do you sense the Lord directing you as a result of it?

What's Wrong with Religion?

Jerry Cisar — September 25, 2011

Text: Isaiah 58 – 59

Intro: Religion and the Hiddenness of God (Isaiah 58:1-3; 59:1-2)

A. Separated and Feeling It

- i. (58:1-3) These verses describe the separation from the people's point-of-view.
- ii. (59:1-2) These verses describe the separation from God's point-of-view.

➤ Genesis 1:6-7

B. Isaiah 58:3-5 is about *religion as a sinful way of seeking to bridge the gap, to obtain favor with God—religion as a means of manipulating God!*

Isaiah 58--59 will reveal what's wrong (and what should be right) about religion. It **begins with** this separation and sinful religious reactions to it. It ends with **God's Spirit being in us** and us as **His Spirit empowered agents of redemption in the world.**

I. Religion: Getting It Wrong (58:1-5)

A. Chapter 58 is God speaking loud and clear *what is vs. what ought to be.*

B. Religious Activity as a Means of Manipulating God

b) Righteousness will go before you; the glory of the Lord your rear guard.

➤ The picture is the pillar of cloud by day/fire by night that either **guided** or **protected** Israel.

■ Exodus 13:21-22; 14:16-20

■ Isaiah 57:12, Isaiah 53:11-12

The Gospel that saves is the Gospel that guides. Live the Gospel.

B. A Company of Restorers (9-12)

All of these are man's attempt to bridge the gap, control the relationship with God.

II. Religion: Getting It Right (58:6-14)

A. Religious Activity Driven by Mercy Received (6-8)

i. James 1:26-27

ii. vs. 6-7 Setting captives free! Liberating...

iii. Then... the floodgates of God's grace will flow.

a) *To walk in the greatest flow of God's grace to you, make sure you are giving it away constantly.*

Hallesby: *Our lives should be, according to our Lord's plans, quiet but steadily flowing streams of blessing, which through our prayers and intercessions should reach our whole environment... We think quickly. Passing rapidly by a person on the street we find time and opportunity to make critical remarks to ourselves about that person. It takes place almost automatically because our evil nature is asserting itself. But think if the Spirit of God could make the new nature within us so strong that we would automatically lift our hearts in prayer to God every time we met someone.*

➤ Now, the Lord will use the rebellious and sinful to rebuild the ruins, to bring mercy to others.

C. False religion is religious activity as a means of mending our relationship with God. True religion is the life motivated by the healing God has done.

III. Religion: Getting Started

A. Clarity on the Problem:

i. God does not ignore our sin. (59:1-8)