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GOSPEL STANDARD BAPTISTS

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Prayer Meeting Address by Mr. J. Delves at "Ebenezer" Clapham on
28th. October, 1950

Reading: Isaiah 58

This chapter is very solemn in relation to the Jews who, while they would outwardly observe the fast, yet did not do it in sincerity of heart, so that their professed fasting was a mere act of hypocrisy, seeing that they did not bring forth the gracious fruits of repentance but made profession before the Lord while their heart was not actually in those professions. Then the Lord goes on to show the difference between a counterfeit and a true fast, which alone can be acceptable in the sight of God, and will be attended with much blessing unto the people. There was a right way of afflicting their souls and of showing certain acts of sacrifice and kindness towards others and also of observing the Lord's day, the Sabbath, and keeping their foot from doing evil on that day.

It is to be feared that possibly even in our own land, on these occasions that are designated for prayer, many may conform themselves to certain prayers and petitions in a formal way but do not by their ordinary life show that repentance so real in the heart before God. For as it is here, if people on one day make certain professions unto God, it may be good in itself and highly desirable, but yet if they do indulge themselves in all manner of wickedness and worldliness between times there is no evidence of honesty and sincerity of heart in their professions.

It would appear that a true fast such as that which the Lord would accept, does consist in three things. Namely, in real confession of and sorrow for sin, not only personal sins but also national transgressions and departures from God. This is to afflict the soul, to be inwardly and truly grieved with a godly sorrow, to mourn over the abominations that are done in the land, not simply to say a prayer on a particular day and then go right away again like the sow to her wallowing in the mire, but to show

by their life that they are truly grieved on account of the prevailing evils as in the sight of God. But not only is it to afflict our souls in confession of our own sins and the nation's sins, but to forsake these sins, to turn away from them, to be separate. In a third sense it is to observe the laws and appointments of God as to the Sabbath day and many other things, to abstain from evil practices. How can there be that which is acceptable in the sight of God if the heart is not in it, and if these confessions are formally made, yet those who make them turn again to their sinful indulgences in the ways of this world, in violating the Sabbath and other abounding evils.

Hence the prophet was directed to cry aloud, and to spare not, not to mince matters, but faithfully to reprove the people, to lift up his voice like a trumpet and to show the people their transgressions and the house of Jacob their sins. Those who do truly mourn over national sins and do confess the same before the Lord on certain days appointed for prayer and who seek to walk in the ways of God are a far greater asset and good to the nation than many people are generally aware. May it be given us then to afflict our souls in a right way, and seeing that the Lord has held forth His gracious promise unto such, may we not hope to be favoured with some experience of what is here described? "And the Lord shall guide thee continually and satisfy thy soul in drought, and make fat thy bones, and thou shalt be like a watered garden, and like a spring of water, whose waters fail not."