

Isaiah 58:6

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

Analysis

God now defines the fast He chooses: "to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke." Four parallel phrases emphasize comprehensive liberation. "Bands of wickedness" are cords of injustice binding people in oppression. "Heavy burdens" are the crushing weights of exploitation—economic, social, or political. "Let the oppressed go free" uses the Hebrew *ratsats* (oppressed/crushed), describing those ground down by injustice. "Break every yoke" employs the imagery of slavery—removing the wooden beam that harnessed oxen. True fasting manifests in social justice: freeing slaves, canceling unjust debts, ending exploitation, reforming oppressive structures. This is not works-righteousness but the fruit of genuine repentance. From a Reformed perspective, this illustrates that justification by faith alone necessarily produces sanctification. Those truly regenerated demonstrate transformed affections, seeking God's glory through love of neighbor. This anticipates Jesus' proclamation of His mission: "to preach deliverance to the captives...to set at liberty them that are bruised" (Luke 4:18), and James's definition of pure religion as caring for orphans and widows (James 1:27).

Historical Context

Post-exilic Judah struggled with economic oppression despite their religious revival. Nehemiah confronted exploitation of the poor by wealthy Jews (Nehemiah 5:1-13). The returned exiles had rebuilt the temple but maintained systemic

injustice—exactly the combination God condemns here. This pattern continued in Jesus' day when religious leaders maintained their positions while exploiting widows (Mark 12:40, Luke 20:47) and neglecting justice (Matthew 23:23).

Related Passages

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

Study Questions

1. How does genuine faith in Christ necessarily produce concern for justice and liberation of the oppressed?
2. What modern 'yokes' of oppression should Christians work to break in obedience to this passage?
3. How do we balance the spiritual and social dimensions of the gospel without subordinating one to the other?

Interlinear Text

הָלֹא זֶה	צֹם	אֲבָחֵרָהוּ	פֶּתִי חָ	חֲרָצִיב וְתִ	
H3808	H2088				
	Is not this the fast	that I have chosen	to loose	the bands	
	H6685	H977	H6605	H2784	
כִּי שָׁעַ	הֵיטֵר	אֶגְדֹּת	מוֹטְהָ	וְיִשְׁלַח	רְצוּצִים
of wickedness	to undo	burdens	every yoke	go	and to let the oppressed
H7562	H5425	H92	H4133	H7971	H7533
חֲפֹשִׁים	וְכָל	מוֹטְהָ	תִּנְתְּקוּ:		
free	H3605	every yoke	and that ye break		
H2670		H4133	H5423		

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 58:9 (Parallel theme): Then shalt thou call, and the LORD shall answer; thou shalt cry, and he shall say, Here I am. If thou take away from the midst of thee the yoke, the putting forth of the finger, and speaking vanity;

1 Timothy 6:1 (Parallel theme): Let as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

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