

The Concern about Fasting

Mark 2: 18-22

Our text today deals with a passage that is often misunderstood, and even overlooked by many. Some argue the passage is confusing, and they fail to see the great significance it reveals. Actually Jesus revealed great doctrinal truth in this conversation with men.

As He continues to minister in and around Capernaum, He is once again confronted by Pharisees and those who are skeptical about His teaching and ministry. Bear in mind that Jesus had shown great authority and power, but He did not follow the rules established by the religious elite. As you study the life of Christ, you will discover that He had more problems with the devoutly religious than any other group. They were continually trying to force Him to conform to their standard, and yet Jesus was determined to follow the will of God, not the dictates of men.

As we consider the [comparisons](#) revealed in the text, I hope you will gain a better understanding of this powerful passage concerning the Gospel. I want to preach on: [The Concern about Fasting](#). Consider:

I. The Inquiry (18) – [And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?](#) Here we notice the inquiry of the Pharisees and certain disciples of John the Baptist. Notice:

A. Their Participation (18a) – [And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast.](#) Clearly these men were in the habit of fasting. It had become a regular part of their lives. It was a time set aside to deprive themselves of food, or other provisions, in an act of self-denial. Fasting was observed as a means to deny the flesh and focus one's attention on the Lord and greater spiritual matters than the needs of the body.

- Fasting in and of itself is not a bad practice. It is referred to many times in Scripture, and was practiced by many as well. The Pharisees were adamant about fasting. They were committed to fasting twice every week. Jesus referred to this practice in [Luke 18:12 – I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.](#) By this time in Jewish history, fasting had become an expected practice of every devout Jew. Yet this was often done more for the praise and recognition of men than it was to seek the Lord and grow spiritually. Jesus dealt with the hypocrisy of fasting in [Matt.6:16 – Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.](#)

- I am in no way opposed to the practice of fasting, if you feel led to spend time in self-denial in order to draw closer to the Lord. However, we must check our motives if we are planning to engage in fasting. If you choose to fast, that should be kept between you and God. If you plan to make it public and seek the praise and approval of men, then there is no spiritual advantage to fasting. (Share some of the comments heard regarding Lent.) Fasting, in and of itself, holds no significant power. It is not a spiritual “silver bullet” to obtain one’s desires and gain the favor of God. It is not a badge of honor to wear proudly before others. If however, you are committed to genuinely seeking the Lord while denying the flesh, then I am sure God will honor your efforts.

B. Their Confrontation (18b) – [and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?](#) As these men observed Jesus and His disciples, they quickly noticed they were not fasting. With an attitude of skepticism, they confronted Jesus. Quite possibly the disciples of John had begun fasting in prayer for him as he was imprisoned. They were upset that John had been taken captive and were unsure why Jesus didn’t share their concern and fast as well. The Pharisees likely were seeking any means of accusation.

- Jesus well understood the basis of their argument and He will deal with it in the verses to follow. These men had developed religious practices and certain rituals they expected everyone else to follow. Sadly these practices remain, even within Baptist churches. Many preach a message of salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone, and yet they mercilessly add numerous rules and expectations following salvation. They preach one message, but practice something entirely different.

II. The Instruction (19-20) – Jesus responded to their inquiry with valuable instruction. Notice:

A. His Explanation (19) – [And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? as long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.](#) As He commonly did, Jesus used a familiar situation to explain His purposes and actions. Here He used a wedding as an example. For us, this may be a bit difficult to understand, but traditions were much different in Israel than in modern America. Following the wedding, instead of immediately going away on a honeymoon, the couple would host a feast of celebration that lasted for seven days. This was not a time for grief or mourning, because the bridegroom was in their presence.

- His disciples had received Him as the Christ, and Jesus desired others to do the same. This was not a time of mourning or sadness, the Bridegroom was in their presence. This was a time of joy and praise, for the promised Messiah had come and was in their midst.

- If we aren't careful, we can become guilty of the same. We tend to become burdened with the cares of life and fail to see the blessings we enjoy each day with the Lord. Believers often find themselves saddled with legalistic expectations, and fail to enjoy the liberty of grace. We are living in the presence of our Lord, having His grace and provision to guide our lives. Sure there are situations that bring grief and dismay to our lives, but we must strive to live in the joy and abundance our Lord provides. **John 10:10 – The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.**

B. Their Anticipation (20) – But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then shall they fast in those days. Although none likely understood these words, Jesus was prophesying of His coming crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. The time would come when His disciples would suffer grief and mourn the absence of their Lord. He wanted them to enjoy His presence at that moment and learn from Him while He was with them.

- This serves a great challenge and reminder for us. Jesus already gave Himself as the sacrificial atonement for our sin. He rose triumphant from the grave, and is seated at the Father's right hand, interceding for us. He has promised to come again and receive us unto Himself. This is not a time of grief and mourning regarding our Lord. He has secured eternal life and victory for every believer. We should enter His presence with rejoicing, worship, and gratitude!

III. The Illustration (21-22) – Wanting to emphasize the difference in legalistic rituals and the provision of the Gospel, Jesus offered two illustrations to explain the differences. These are the verses that many consider confusing, but they reveal eternal truth regarding the Gospel. Consider:

A. A Picture in their Clothing (21) – No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. Jesus challenged them to consider the work of a seamstress in repairing a torn garment. A piece of new cloth would never be used to repair a hole in an old garment. The new cloth would draw up and shrink when it was washed and tear apart from the stitching. This would make the tear look worse than it had before it was repaired. You can't use new cloth to repair an old garment.

- While they understood the illustration, they may have had trouble with the application. The Pharisees were using old methods to obtain new life. They sought to come before the Lord based on their works and adherence to the law. Jesus reveals that new life in Him cannot be added to the old man. They could not receive salvation by grace through faith with the same methods Judaism taught. This is obtained through faith in Christ and a personal relationship with Him.

- This truth must be proclaimed and accepted today as well. Our salvation is an act of the Lord's grace, based on His finished work on the cross. It is grace alone, plus or minus nothing. We cannot mix works and grace to obtain salvation. Jesus is not one of many ways to heaven, or just another step on the ladder. He is the sole means of salvation. We must come by grace through faith in Christ alone! Our acceptance to God the Father is not based on our works or merit, but through the righteousness of Christ imputed to us at salvation!

B. A Picture in their Containers (22) – *And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.* Again Jesus used a familiar object to reveal eternal truth. In that day, they did not have bottles of glass or plastic. Wine was kept in animal skins, usually the skin of a goat. As the skin aged, it would become brittle and begin to dry out. If new wine was placed in an old skin, as the gases in the wine expanded, the skin would rupture and the wine would spill. When new wine was made, it was always put into new skins.

- Jesus revealed a principle they needed to understand. The old rituals of the law, and the practices of Judaism could not receive the truth of the Gospel. Wine served as type or picture of the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not come to pour His Spirit into the old lives of legalism and adherence to the law. He came to pour His Spirit into those who had been made new through faith in Him. The old man of sin, and his attempts to please God through works of the flesh, must die out to be resurrected a new creature in Christ and receive the Spirit.
- I am thankful for the new life I received in Christ. The old man of sin has died, and I have been resurrected to life in Him. He has filled the new man with His Holy Spirit. I am guided and kept through the Spirit. My righteousness is not based on my ability to meet certain expectations or achieve the demands of men. I am saved and secure through the provision of Christ, and in Him alone!

Conclusion: The concern of some regarding fasting led into a discussion that revealed eternal truth regarding salvation. The Pharisees sought God through adherence to the law, but Jesus taught that salvation is obtained through grace. This struggle continues today. Many are willing to accept salvation by grace, but not grace alone. They are convinced that works must be accomplished along with grace. I believe that genuine salvation always produces works, but even the sincerest works will never produce salvation.

Have you received salvation by grace through faith in Christ alone? Are you resting in the finished work of Christ? If so, rejoice and share the Good News with others. If not, I urge you to respond to the gracious offer of salvation. Come by faith and receive His marvelous grace!