

Rev. T. Jefferson Rogers Jr.
Matthew 9:14-17
Jesus is Teaching About the Old and New Covenants

The very purpose of the Lord Jesus' coming was not to call righteous men. His great act of Divine self-sacrifice would not have been necessary if men had been righteous. There is none righteous, no, not one. However, there were some who thought and trusted that they were righteous. Such were the Pharisees, Jesus addressed in verses 11-13. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for eating with sinners. Jesus responded by saying, "They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

Jesus could interact with sinners and not mar His perfect purity.

The Pharisees failed to see themselves as the worst of sinners. They were the sickest people of that generation. Jesus came to minister spiritual healing to all men. The sickest of men refuse spiritual healing, because they refused to see themselves as sick and unhealthy. The Pharisees could not see their own condition, because they were biased and blind to the truth.

The disciples of John and the Pharisees approached Jesus asking, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but your disciples fast not?" Both the Pharisees and the disciples of John were startled by the absence of asceticism from His life and teaching. Asceticism—severe self-discipline and avoidance of all forms of indulgence.

The disciples of John and the Pharisees made their own practice the rule for others. They thought so much of their regular fasting that they partnered themselves with the Pharisees in opposition to Jesus.

Jesus criticizes the disciples of John and the Pharisees because their way of religion would not work for the sinners sitting with Jesus at the table. The people were in need of a new solution to solve the problems of hopelessness among sinners. Fasting won't solve sinners' problems. It is not appropriate to recommend a fast for sinners.

Jesus is not opposed to fasting! He is opposed to fasting for the wrong reasons. Jesus' point in this passage is—it was not the time for fasting. So, there is a right reason to fast and a right time to fast. The disciples of John and the Pharisees got it wrong.

Jesus responded to their opposition of Him with three illustrations:

- I. Illustration 1— Verse 15 ***And Jesus said unto them, Can the children of the bridechamber mourn, as long as the bridegroom is with them? but the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken from them, and then shall they fast.***
The first illustration Jesus used is one the disciples of John would have been familiar with because it was John who applied the term "Bridegroom" to Jesus in John 3:29. Jesus being the Bridegroom, then His disciples are the friends of the bridegroom. Fasting has to do with Him and His presence. The absence of Jesus determines the appropriateness of the fast. Fasting was a natural expression of sorrow. While Jesus

was with His disciples in body, fasting was unseasonable. As long as Jesus was with His disciples it was a time of joy, because joy is where He is. But when His presence would be withdrawn from them, they would express their sorrows through fasting.

The phrase “when the bridegroom shall be taken from them” refers to the time after Christ’s ascension and before His return. We are living between the time of His ascension and return. Jesus is not here physically, and we are awaiting His return. We are in the time when fasting should be happening.

The early church fasted.

Acts 13:3 ***And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.***

Acts 14:23 ***And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.***

Fasting is a means of focusing our minds and bodies for spiritual reasons.

We fast to seek God’s guidance—Judges 20:26

We fast to express grief—1 Samuel 31:13

We fast to express repentance and a return to God—1 Samuel 7:6

We fast to humble ourselves before God—1 Kings 21:27-29

We fast to express love and worship for God—Luke 2:37

- II. Illustration 2— Verse 16 ***No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.***

The message of the second illustration is the difference between the Old and New Covenants. Jesus did not come to patch up an old garment (Judaism). His coming ushered in a new covenant (Christianity).

New Cloth—New Covenant

Old Cloth—Old Covenant

New cloth—a cloth that has not passed through the fuller’s hands. New, undressed, unfurled, in its freshest and strongest state.

The new cloth is too strong for the old damaged cloth. The new cloth is not in agreement with the old cloth. Therefore, the new cloth cannot be used to fix the old cloth. Jesus said if the new cloth is used to fix the old cloth the condition of the old cloth will be worse than it was, before the attempted repair.

Jesus ushered in a New Covenant to replace the Old. Hebrews 8:13 ***In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.***

- III. Illustration 3— Verse 17 ***Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new***

wine into new bottles, and both are preserved. The third illustration was taken from wine put into bottles. Bottles, in eastern nations, were made of skins of beast. By long usage, the skins would become tender, and would easily rupture. New skins would yield to the fermenting wine and be strong enough to hold it. Fermentation is a process that turns some juices into alcohol. During fermentation, yeasts transform sugars present in the juice into ethanol and carbon dioxide.

New wine represents the new things that Jesus brought. In order for the people to receive the new doctrines of Jesus Christ, they had to have a new heart. They needed a heart of compassion, meekness, trustfulness, open to God and to others. The Pharisees didn't have a new heart. Their hearts were stony and hard, inflexible, rigid, and stiff. Jesus said that you can't put new wine into old wineskins. New concepts, new ideas, and new strategies are like new wine. An old wineskin cannot handle the pressure of fermentation. Therefore, Jesus said it is unwise to put new wine into old wineskins. If you do, you will ruin both the skin and the wine.

Jesus said put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved (9:17).

