



CAPITOL COMMISSION

The Gospel Stands Alone (Luke 5:33-39)

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As seen from the previous studies, the conflict between Jesus and the Pharisees is escalating. This account is a continuation of the Pharisees questioning of Jesus' disciples as to why they enjoy table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus interjects himself into the conversation and declares the purpose of his ministry, to call sinners to repentance (Luke 5:32). Through this statement Jesus pronounces judgment on all those who are unwilling to see their sin, and as a result, unable to see their need for him. However, in the minds of these men, Jesus is one who is a "friend to tax collectors and sinners." Thus the gulf between the religious leaders of Judaism and the gospel message proclaimed by Jesus will only grow and lead to the eventual death of the Son of God. At first glance, it would seem that Judaism is the closest kin to Jesus' gospel message. Yet through this passage Jesus makes clear that the gospel did not come to add to Judaism, but to replace it. The good news of salvation through Jesus is unique, and it must stand alone. It will not compete with any other religions or system of worship.

Luke 5:33-39 - (33) And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." (34) And Jesus said to them, "Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? (35) The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days." (36) He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. (37) And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. (38) But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. (39) And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'"

A RECOGNIZABLE DIFFERENCE

The disciples of John – The Pharisee's inquire as to why Jesus' disciples do not behave in the same manner as the disciples of John and those of the Pharisees? One must ask, "Why do John's disciples resemble the disciples of the Pharisees?" John the baptizer was the forerunner of Jesus, he was called to point the way to the Messiah and we see him do this for Andrew and John. When seeing Jesus walking by, John the baptizer says, "Behold, the Lamb of God (John 1:36)." These men leave John the baptizer and follow Jesus to become his disciples. In time, Jesus' ministry grows and the remaining disciples of John are concerned because the crowds are now following Jesus. John responds by saying, "He must become greater, I must become less (John 3:30)." The role of the forerunner was to prepare the way and identify the Messiah. John understood that his significance would

diminish and that Jesus' would grow, and that his disciples should become disciples of the Messiah.

As we learn from the current passage, not all left John and became disciples of Jesus. What we must understand is how unexpected the ministry of Jesus was to those whose religious experience was grounded in Judaism. Even John, while in prison, sends his disciples to ask Jesus, "are you the one who is to come or should we look for another (Luke 7:19)?" There were doubts and questions about Jesus. The newly committed followers of John who repented of their sin and were baptized sought a deeper spiritual commitment. It is not surprising that those who did not end up switching their allegiance to Jesus began to intermingle with the Pharisees? They start hanging around with people from their religious system who are known to be committed at the highest level. So we find this mixed group of John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees challenge the behavior of Jesus' disciples because it did not fit the standards of the religiously committed of that day. Even though they had a genuine desire to please God, apart from Jesus, the disciples of John began to think and act like the disciples of the Pharisees. It is not our religious system or superior commitment that makes us right in the eyes of God, only Jesus alone, through the gospel alone accomplishes this for us.

Fast often and offer prayers – What was this religious system of the Pharisees that permeated the culture of Judaism to such an extent it affected the disciples of John. This leads us to the next question, "What was the significance of fasting in their religious system?" In the OT there was only one fast that was commanded according to the Law. This was on the Day of Atonement, the day when the High Priest would enter the Holy of Holies with a blood sacrifice to atone for the sin of the people. On this day, as a sign of mourning and deep sorrow the people would fast, this would be a sign of repentance, and as they contemplate the gravity of their sin their appetite is taken away from them and they do not eat. Fasting was associated with great sorrow and grief and the result of this sorrow was all desire for food was taken away, as in the case of David after the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:12)¹ The OT appears to know nothing of fasting as a means to curry favor from the Lord or to prove one's spirituality.

However, fasting in Judaism and as prescribed by the Pharisees was something completely different. Instead of a response to a specific situation that caused one sorrow, fasting became a means to demonstrate one's spiritual commitment. We can see this from the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus challenges the practice of fasting, praying, and the giving of alms. His issue is with the manner in which these practices became a status of

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righteousness for those who performed these acts. Jesus says, “*your fasting should not be seen by others but by your Father* (Matt hew 6:18).” When you pray, “*you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray in the synagogue and in the streets, that they may be praised by others.*” Judaism became a means to prove one’s righteousness on the basis of their actions. We see this clearly in the prayer of the Pharisee in Luke 18:11, “*God I thank you that I am not like other men, . . . or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give a tithe of all that I get.*” The religious system of Judaism was corrupt, bankrupt and became a means to exalt one’s self before man and justify one’s self before God.

APPLICATION:

The contrast between Jesus and the religious system of Judaism was striking. They existed on two different planes and were heading in two different directions. One’s focus was on the external and sought the approval and validation of man through their own efforts. Jesus was interested in the heart and he alone could bring forgiveness. Following Jesus means we are no longer seeking to make ourselves more acceptable to God. It also means we are not drawn to people on the basis of like behavior, but like hearts. We want to know Jesus, to be around Jesus and with people who have the same passion for him as we do.

BEING WITH JESUS BRING JOY

Can you make the wedding guests fast – How does Jesus understand this inquiry about the behavior of his disciples? If fasting is meant to express one’s sorrow and grief about a specific situation, then the disciples of John and the Pharisees completely misunderstand what it means to be in the presence of Jesus. This was not a time of mourning, but it was a time to celebrate, it was a time to be filled with joy. Jesus the bridegroom was with them, the long expected Messiah had arrived, how could they not rejoice in this moment? We find that Judaism at its highest and most committed level is totally out of sync with the gospel. They do not recognize their Messiah; they do not realize that this is not a moment of sorrow, but a time to celebrate. There will be a time when Jesus’ disciples will fast, when he is snatched from their presence and put to death. But now is not that time for the disciples, now they celebrate because they walk in fellowship with the Lord of heaven and earth.

APPLICATION:

In understanding the reality of Jesus presence in our lives, we respond with hearts filled with joy. While life can be hard and there are challenges we face due to the fact that we live in a fallen world, we still hold to this truth. Jesus is resurrected and he dwells in our hearts. The time for fasting and sorrow has come to an end for us. We should live in a constant state of joy. The

bridegroom has been raised and has taken up permanent residence in our hearts. The message of the gospel changes everything, because for the Christian, circumstances no longer dictate the level of joy in our hearts. We serve a risen Lord who has secured for us a permanent salvation. We are sons and daughters of the King, we have life eternal, and so we celebrate the present reality of Jesus in our lives.

THE NEW IS INCOMPATIBLE WITH THE OLD

No one pours new wine into old wine skins – In the production of wine, grapes were crushed in the winepress. The expressed juice would flow through a channel into the lower fermenting compartment, leaving the grape dregs in the upper vat. After four to six days the wine was drawn off and poured into a de-haired skin of a small animal, such as a goat, which was sewn together.³ Once the wine is sealed within the skin the wine would ferment and release CO₂ gas expanding the skin. This process continued in these containers for two to four months. The old wineskins could not be reused to store new wine because they already expanded to their limit.

Jesus uses this illustration of new wine being poured into old wineskins to show the incompatibility of the gospel with other systems of worship. They cannot be mixed or blended, they will not work together and eventually the new wine will be wasted as it pours on the ground through the bursting of the old wineskin. The gospel cannot be added to other loyalties, but it must completely replace them. Allegiances must be changed, priorities reorganized and one’s mind grounded from a biblical perspective.

APPLICATION:

The Pharisees were the old skins, and they could not contain the new wine of the gospel. It would grow and expand to consume the hearts of men and influence every area of life. No parameters can be placed on how this new wine will work or the influence it will have. It is radically opposed to all man-made structures that seek to constrain its far-reaching effects. The gospel cannot be tacked on our lives, but must be allowed to fill and expand to every area of life and thought. If not, the skin bursts and the new wine falls to the ground. The gospel must stand alone in the hearts of men, or it will not stand at all!

1 – Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 871.

2 – John MacArthur, “*Jesus Came to Call and Save Sinners*” (www.gty.org, 2012), 3.

3 – Robert H. Stein, Luke, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 186.