

Text: Luke 5:27-39

Title: The New and the Old

Truth: Jesus brings a new way: calling sinners to repentance.

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Introduction

In the previous verses of chapter 5, we learned that although mankind's situation in sin is desperate (Peter in Luke 5:8 and the leper in 5:12), Jesus is willing and able to help (5:13). He is eager and capable to forgive sin and proved so with his miraculous works (5:24). Those works witness that He is God the Son, and as such can indeed forgive sins, since all sin is ultimately done against God.

Jesus continues this pattern of dealing with sinners by summoning Levi the Roman tax collector to follow Him. Levi, also known as Matthew (Matthew 9:9-11), was despised as a thief and traitor. He was the lowest of the low in the eyes of Hebrew society. When Jesus summoned, he immediately left everything. But this summons was not without its background: Levi had most certainly heard about Jesus and Jesus knew what was going on in his heart. Still, this was a radical departure for Levi, like Moses leaving the pleasures of Egypt or Abraham leaving his homeland Ur. This is the default picture of discipleship that we should have in our minds. It accurately describes what it is like to be convicted by the Spirit of God to leave your old life. Being a disciple of Jesus is not adding on Jesus; it is replacing our old life with His new life. It is a major change in "career." It is a "new leaf," or perhaps better yet, a "new tree." When Matthew left his job at the customs office along the road, someone else was sure to fill his office. No going back.

In thankful response to the Lord, Matthew gave a banquet at his home. He was obviously wealthy and had a lot of friends in his social circle of other tax collectors and general sinners, men and women. This banquet provided the opportunity for the Lord to minister to many people who likely otherwise would not have listened to Him, and for Levi to invite others to meet his Savior.

The Jewish leaders did not do like Jesus was doing. They asked about it in a critical manner, not asking honestly.

The questions of verses 30 and 33 gives Jesus an opportunity to answer (v. 31-32, 34-35) and then to give some mini parables of explanation (36-39). It may not be clear to you what he means. Let us attempt to de-mystify what He is saying.

I. First Question: Being Around Sinners

- A. Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners? The scribes' and Pharisees' question is like asking a doctor why he goes to work in a hospital instead of to an entertainment venue. The answer is obvious: the doctor works his trade where there are people who need his help, and who know they need it. In the spiritual realm, it is similar. You can help people who realize they need help. But self-righteous people are like people who persistently say, "I do not need a doctor." (Jesus did go to eat with Pharisees too, so I suppose they count as sinners!—Luke 6:36.)
- B. Jesus's answer in the first part should not be construed to say that there exist people who need no spiritual help. There are *no* such people, but there are people who *think* themselves to be in that category. They are the ones who never do a cancer screening, only to find a silent cancer in the last few days of their lives.
- C. Jesus's answer in the second part expands on what we have seen thus far about Jesus's desire to cleanse those who are dirty with sin. He has come to call sinners to repent. That was His mission and must be ours as well. He has the power to forgive those repentant sinners. He moreover has the willingness to forgive those sinners. Jesus is calling *you* to repentance. We can go into all kinds of detail about what it means to be righteous, and what it means to repent, but let us be real—we know what it means. We know if we are living in sin...we know that we are not right before God in and of ourselves. We know we need to turn away from that. Like dising our earthly parents, we have dumped our heavenly Father, and we know we need to go talk to Him and apologize and thank Him for providing for us to be forgiven.

II. Second Question

- A. Why do the disciples of John fast often...but Yours eat and drink?

- B. Background of the Question, v. 33. The questioners asked Jesus why his disciples did not follow the normal practice of fasting and prayer that other people followed. They saw Jesus' disciples as having "too much fun" and thus not being as religious as others. The questioners were the disciples of John and of the Pharisees who happened to be fasting at that time (see Mark 2:18) and who were apparently doing as their pious teachers had instructed them. They were both present at the feast that Levi held after he became a follower of Christ.
- C. The Pharisees evidently had regular fasts and prescribed prayer times. Luke 18:12 shows us a Pharisee who said that he fasted twice each week. As "religious" folks, the disciples of John followed some of these traditions themselves. There is nothing wrong with fasting or prayer *per se*, but the Pharisees were carrying on with their fasting to an inordinate extreme. They had prayers at specific times as embellishments to the Law. The Jewish religion had devolved into a series of programmatic rituals instead of a fear and faith relationship to the God of Israel.

The Mosaic Law prescribed fasting for the Day of Atonement (probably the meaning of "afflict your souls" or "deny yourselves" in Leviticus 16:29 and 31). Obviously, the religious establishment had added many more fasts to their calendar. The fasts they were practicing were not part of keeping the Law.

- D. In his preaching, Jesus unmasked the hypocritical nature of ritual fasts and prayers:
- Matt 6:5 – they prayed in public places to be seen by people.
 - Matt 6:7 – they used empty repetition and thought that it would gain a hearing with God.
 - Matt 6:16 – they made sad-faces to appear to be fasting so that they would garner attention to themselves.
- E. We could profitably consider the answers to these questions: when we pray, do we do so to be noticed by man or to appear spiritual? Do we pray ritualistically at meals or bedtime with an expectation that it will be heard by God when our heart is not really into it?

- F. Jesus' Answer, v. 34-35. Jesus' answer, at bottom, is that his disciples have no desire to fast because they are participating in a time of rejoicing and gladness. Jesus likens their situation to a wedding feast where the friends of the groom are celebrating with the groom at his new marriage. It would be totally out of place for those friends to abstain from eating at the feast as if they were mourning for the new groom (Matthew 9:15). In Mark 2:19 Jesus answers his own question: they cannot fast!
- G. Said another way, a pre-programmed ritual that does not match the reality of one's heart is not at all useful. If the external situation or the real internal feelings of the heart do not match the ritual, then the question is, "Why are you doing that?" "Are you being honest and genuine?" We do not do things for no reason or for bad reasons or empty reasons.
- H. However, there would soon be a time in which the disciples would fast because they would experience a time of mourning—the groom would be taken away. There is a foreboding tone to this word. *Taken away* refers to the crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish and Gentile leaders. The idea is that the disciples will naturally fast because they are in sadness and deprivation (Luke 24:17, Mark 16:10, John 20:11-15). They were not told to fast, because such would not be necessary—they would do so as a reflection of the genuine feelings of their hearts.
- I. The question commonly arises as to fasting for the modern-day believer. Jesus did not condemn it—he only condemned the hypocritical version of the practice. But it is never commanded for the believer; it is always voluntary. The only two references after Acts 10 and 13-14 are in the Corinthian letters. 1 Cor. 7:5 (NKJV) indicates voluntary fasting from food may be practiced for short periods of time with spousal agreement. Some fasts were involuntary but these were periods of deprivation due to persecution (2 Cor. 11:27). Fasting is often associated with concentrated prayer during times of distress or need.
- J. Jesus did not address the matter of prayer in his answer. He modeled much prayer for his disciples, as we see in Luke 5:16 and 6:12.

K. We should note also in Jesus' words the phrase "in those days." The fasting will occur in the days when Jesus is taken away, crucified, and buried. That lasted only a few days. But what happened after that? There was great rejoicing because Jesus came back to life. There would be no fasting then. In fact, we see the disciples eating during the period after the resurrection (John 21:5, 12; Luke 24:30; 41-43; Acts 2:42). In addition, Jesus sent another comforter at Pentecost: His "replacement" (John 14:16, 25-26; 15:26; Acts 1:5). The Spirit would forever be with the believers. Therefore, today we are not in "those days." Jesus's words do not directly apply to us, because He has not been taken away from us, and we have His co-worker, the Holy Spirit, living inside of us. We do not have a feeling of deprivation of our Lord, because He is in Heaven interceding for us. The church is not mourning but rejoicing! In general terms, we are called to joyful Christian living.

Undoubtedly, we will have seasons of grief, loss, and mourning. It is appropriate to fast in those times. And it is appropriate to fast whenever you wish to spend more time seeking the Lord in prayer.

III. The Old and the New

The old way of the scribes and Pharisees was not to call a sinner to repentance, but to shame a sinner and treat them poorly. Jesus brought a new way.

A. A New Patch on an Old Garment, v. 36. The parable that Jesus next speaks has three sub-parable, if you will. A parable can be an extended story with a main point, or it can be a shorter saying with the same kind of purpose. It is a story or "saying of varying length, designed to illustrate a truth especially through comparison or simile...illustration ...proverb, maxim" (BDAG, s.v. παραβολή).

This first parable would be common to the original audience, about patching a worn garment. If you use new and old fabric, you will have three problems:

1. The patch torn from the new garment means it is ruined.
2. The patch from the new does not match the old.

3. The unshrunk patch from the new garment will tear away from the old when it shrinks and make the hole worse than it was before (see Matthew 9:16 and Mark 2:21).

The basic idea is that new and old cannot be mixed in this kind of situation. Attempting to do so just makes things worse. The old way of treating sinners like pariahs is *out*, and the new way is *in*. The old way of smug self-superiority is out. The new way of sacrificial grace is in. The old way of the Law (and its mis-application) is out, and the way of Christ is in. The Acts 15 situation is an example of how the church had to put this into practice.

- B. New Wine in Old Wineskins, v. 37-38. Wineskins were made of animal hides that were cleaned out and scraped. When new, these skins were elastic enough to handle the stress of a fermenting liquid. When they were old, they had “used” or lost their elasticity and could not handle the stress of fresh wine being placed in them.

Again, the basic idea is that new wine and old skins do not work together. The illustration shows that when you put new wine into old wineskins, both the new wine and the wineskin will be ruined. To preserve the wineskin and the wine, new of both should be used. Same point as the above.

- C. Taste of New Wine Compared to Old Wine, v. 39. Though wine is again the subject of verse 39, it is a different situation than the wineskins of the previous two verses. But it communicates the same point.

Old wine is good...popular wisdom has it that wines are very good after they have aged awhile. Most wine is meant to be drunk soon after production. But perception is reality for the person partaking. If they are accustomed to the old and like it then they will not easily be persuaded that the new is better, even if it is objectively and certainly so; even if the old is stale and the new is fresh. Something about the new taste is not as satisfying or smooth as the older stuff. They might not even bother to taste the new stuff because they like the old so much.

To “drink” suggests the idea of experiencing something. Like 1 Cor. 12:13 where we were made to drink into one Spirit, this indicates

participation with or experiencing of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. (Spirit baptism is not technically experienced; but the larger work of the Spirit of God *is* experienced in the believer's life).

The basic idea yet again is that new and old do not go together well. That happens in our lives today—the old computer system is not compatible with the new one; the new Coca-Cola does not taste like the Classic version; we cannot get our favorite music from before we were saved to serve as worship music, etc.

D. The Point of the Mini-Parables. There is obviously more to these stories than just the garments and wineskins and wine. There is a lot more here than just “try something new every once in a while, you might like it!”

In the context of the question about frequent fasting and Jesus' new ministry, Jesus has a significant message for his audience. The new way is a major break from the old way. It is not a patched-up version of the OT Jewish religion, or the Judaism of the first century which was an offshoot and perversion of that OT faith. It is not a hybrid or combination of the two systems. The old forms could not contain the new life in Christ. And it certainly is new, so it is not quickly palatable to those who are accustomed to the old way of doing things.

This new way has come by revelation from God through His Son. Jesus is teaching a new doctrine. It certainly has roots in the old teaching, and is the fulfillment of it, but it grows up beyond it. If you try to constrain or contain the new in the garb of the old, it just will not work. Like the new wine bursting the old wineskins, the old and the new do not mix. You must move out of the old and into the new. You cannot shoehorn the old fasting and rituals into Christ's new way lest your attempt at a hybrid fails and you are left with a mess on your hands.

The implication is that you must upgrade. This means following Jesus's new teaching and leaving behind the old as outmoded. The old legalism must give way to the new way of redemption. Certainly, you can do old feasts/holidays and maintain cultural forms, but you cannot think that you are making your own atonement or earning merit with God by doing cultural stuff.

Historically it took some time for this truth to sink in. Christianity was considered by some a “sect” of Judaism (Acts 24:5, 14; 28:22) even though Jesus’ teaching here shows that it was not a reformed version of the first century religion. It was a new thing!

Conclusion

By way of application, perhaps we have grown up or been accustomed to a certain religious (or irreligious) teaching. Perhaps we grew up Catholic or Mormon or Muslim or Jehovah’s Witness or Jewish or even atheist. Those, my friend, are the old wineskins of your life; the old wine; the old garments. Today should be the day that you realize that something different and new is available—salvation through no work of our own, provided by Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection. True Christianity is the new wine, the new wineskin, and the new garment. It is time to make a clean break from your old beliefs and follow the new way. It may not taste just right at first, but let it grow on you a little bit. There is a natural aversion to change (v. 39) which must be overcome to get where you should be with the Lord. You are safe to try on the new garment and to taste the new wine (= put off the old religious teaching and put on the new teaching of Christ) because Jesus is the one bidding you do so. Ultimately worthy of your trust, He will never lead you astray.

The same notion applies to old cultural customs which do not mix with Christianity. Whether it is polygamy or visiting the fortune teller or witch doctor or the old drinking lifestyle...none of these “fit” with being a Christian. Out with the old; in with the new.

This is not a matter of preference, as if you can continue to enjoy the old wine without considering the new. It is a matter of “genuine religion” and true morality. Jesus did not come to bring a new *option*. He brought a whole new system and urges you to come out of the old and into the new.

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