OLD AND NEW

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast [often], but your disciples do not fast?" And Jesus said to them: "Those who are at the side of the bridegroom {those who are the sons of the bridal chamber} are not able to grieve as long as the bridegroom is with them, are they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they will fast."

But no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for then the repair {what is fulfilled} rips away from the garment and the tear becomes worse. Neither do people put new wine into old wineskins: otherwise the new wine tears the skins and the wine pours out, and the skins are destroyed. Instead, they put new wine into new skins and both are preserved.
Matthew 9:14-17

In the last passage we saw that Jesus and his disciples refused to abide by the regulations concerning separation from sinners. What is becoming clear as Matthew's narrative moves along is that Jesus has a different concept of righteousness than do the Pharisees.

This is important when we take into account the words Jesus spoke on the mount about righteousness.

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them. 18 For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Therefore whoever relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever does them and teaches them will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. 20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:17-20

He has not only invited tax collectors into his entourage, but he has banqueted with sinners. Now the disciples of John ask why Jesus and his disciples do not fast.

Given this, we could ask what is the position of Jesus regarding the accepted standards of righteousness? Here, in this passage today, Jesus will give us an answer.

Matthew once again abbreviates this account along with the following variations. Matthew omits Mark's statement that John's disciples and the Pharisees *were* fasting. Matthew omits *"disciples of the Pharisees,"* simply stating *"Pharisees."* Matthew substitutes the word *"grief"* or *"mourn"* for Mark's *"fast."* This calls attention to the nature of fasting that Jesus will address concerning the bridegroom.

Matthew omits Mark's phrase *"[and on that day] they will fast."* This could be done to keep open the possibility of future fasting within the Body of Christ. Matthew replaces Mark's statement that *"the wine perishes"* with *"the wine is poured out.* This places the emphasis of destruction on the skins and not the wine. Matthew adds the phrase *"and both are preserved"* at the end of this passage.

Matthew once again presents the passage as another controversy. Clearly, he is setting up a distinction between the traditional practices of Judaism against those of the coming new age.

Then the disciples of John came to him, saying: "Why do we and the Pharisees fast [often], but your disciples do not fast?"
Matthew 9:14

By this time John the Baptist has been put into prison. This is important to this part of the narrative for it reveals that though incarcerated, he still has followers.

And it happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the inland country and came to Ephesus. There he found some disciples. **2** *And he said to them, "Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?" And they said, "No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit."* **3** *And he said, "Into what then were you baptized?" They said, "Into John's baptism."*
Acts 19:1-3

John came preaching repentance with a view toward the coming eschatological judgment. This stood in contrast to Jesus who was compelled by joy that the Kingdom had arrived. Though the Kingdom brought with it the eschatological judgment John spoke about, Jesus understood his mission as one of salvation and restoration extended to a fallen world.

18 *For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon.'* **19** *The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."* *Matthew 11:18-19*

John's disciples understand well why they fast but wonder why Jesus and his disciples do not. The reason being that any claim one would make about righteousness could not omit fasting.

11 *The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed*[a] *thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.* **12** *I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.'*
Luke 18:11-12

But as for your fasts, let them not be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth days of the week, but do ye fast on the fourth and sixth days.
Didache 8:1

John's disciples and the Pharisees often fasted but it's important to know that these fast went above and beyond the religious acts of duty.

There were days where fasting was required under the old covenant such as the Day of Atonement but the matter here centers on the practice of righteousness. It is here that the disciples of John, even more than the Pharisees, would have worried since they saw themselves as those related to the mission of Jesus.

For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. And even when you saw it, you did not afterward change your minds and believe him.
Matthew 21:32

And Jesus said to them: "Those who are at the side of the bridegroom {those who are the sons of the bridal chamber} are not able to grieve as long as the bridegroom is with them, are they? But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they will fast."
Matthew 9:15

In his answer, Jesus turns to the idea of messianic jubilation expressed specifically in the imagery of the bridegroom and his attendants. The announcement of the presence of the messianic kingdom is similar to being present at a great wedding banquet.
Hagner – Matthew, page 243

Matthew finds the wedding imagery appealing.

And again Jesus spoke to them in parables, saying, ² *"The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who gave a wedding feast for his son,*
Matthew 22:1-2

"*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamp and went to meet the bridegroom.*
Matthew 25:1

Sons of the bridal chamber – means those in relation to, belonging to, those attending to the bridegroom – *the sons of the Kingdom.*

Important to know is that in the Old Testament bridegroom language refers to Yahweh as the husband. Matthew is clearly drawing that distinction and relating that same concept to Christ.

For your Maker is your husband, the LORD of hosts is his name;
and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer,
the God of the whole earth he is called. **6** *For the LORD has called you*
like a wife deserted and grieved in spirit, like a wife of youth when she is cast
off, says your God.
Isaiah 54:5-6

16 *"And in that day, declares the LORD, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no*
longer will you call me 'My Baal.' **17** *For I will remove the names of the Baals*
from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more. **18** *And I will*
make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the
heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish[a] *the bow, the*
sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety. **19** *And I will*
betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice,
in steadfast love and in mercy. **20** *I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you*
shall know the LORD.
Hosea 2:16-20

For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to
present you as a pure virgin to Christ.
2 Corinthians 11:2

Let us rejoice and exult
and give him the glory,
for the marriage of the Lamb has come,
and his Bride has made herself ready;
Revealtion 19:7

With such a promise realized in the coming of the Messiah and the inauguration of the Kingdom, is it any wonder that Jesus says:

"Those who are at the side of the bridegroom {those who are the sons of the bridal chamber} are not able to grieve as long as the bridegroom is with them, are they?"

By using *"grieve"* rather than Mark's *"fast,"* Matthew emphasizes the absolute jubilation of the hour. Fasting at a wedding feast would seem contrary to the moment.

"Thus says the LORD of hosts: The fast of the fourth month and the fast of the fifth and the fast of the seventh and the fast of the tenth shall be to the house of Judah seasons of joy and gladness and cheerful feasts. Therefore love truth and peace.
Zechariah 8:19

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.
John 3:29

What must be understood just as clearly in the words of Jesus about the Bridegroom is the lamenting language that truly will be the *"grief"* of the wedding attendants.

But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken from them, and then they will fast."
Matthew 9:15

He was despised and rejected by men,
a man of sorrows[c] and acquainted with[d] grief;
and as one from whom men hide their faces
he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

By oppression and judgment he was taken away;
and as for his generation, who considered
that he was cut off out of the land of the living,
stricken for the transgression of my people?

Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him;
he has put him to grief;
when his soul makes[d] an offering for guilt,
he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days;
the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.
Isaiah 53:3, 8, 10

When the servant fulfills the Isaih prophecy, it will be a time of fasting and sorrow – but it will only be temporary.

Truly, truly, I say to you, you will weep and lament, but the world will rejoice. You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will turn into joy.
John 16:20

Hagner says that though Jesus' statement regarding the bridegroom being taken away is not quite a passion prediction, it is a clear allusion to his future and unexpected death.

That the *"bridegroom will be taken from them"* does not yet make sense to the disciples or those present, Jesus' hints that *"and then they will fast"* clearly lets us know that it will be soon.

Matthew does not put a time stamp on fasting. He simply records Jesus as saying, *"The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, then thy will fast."* It appears that by doing this, Matthew leaves an opening for his church to continue the Jewish tradition of fasting.

But as for your fasts, let them not be with the hypocrites, for they fast on the second and fifth days of the week, but do ye fast on the fourth and sixth days.
Didache 8:1

As seen in the Didache, fasting for followers of Jesus was to take place on Wednesday and Friday as opposed to the Jewish custom of Monday and Thursday. Understand, that Matthew would be keen to distinguish fasting by the church as an acknowledgment of the Kingdom's present reality rather than the Jews whose fasting anticipated the arrival of that Kingdom.

The wrong kind of fasting, however, as understood by Matthew, is not fasting that will be heard by the Lord nor endear one to him

'Why have we fasted, and you see it not? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you take no knowledge of it? Behold, in the day of your fast you seek your own pleasure, and oppress all your workers. ⁴ *Behold, you fast only to quarrel and to fight and to hit with a wicked fist. Fasting like yours this day will not make your voice to be heard on high.*
Isaiah 58:3-4

This type of fasting brings us back around to the words, *"I will have mercy and not sacrifice."*

But no one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for then the repair {what is fulfilled} rips away from the garment and the tear becomes worse. Neither do people put new wine into old wineskins: otherwise the new wine tears the skins and the wine pours out, and the skins are destroyed. Instead, they put new wine into new skins and both are preserved.
Matthew 9:16-17

Jesus now gives the *"how"* of the newness represented by his presence and combines it with the previous Old Testament or conventional modes of conduct. To do this he uses the parable form of teaching.

The new cannot simply be superimposed upon or contained within the framework of the old.

The old conventions are not compatible with the new.

For then the repair – or the patch – rips away from the garment. The word for *patch* here is πλήρωμα (play-ro-ma) and it means to *fulfill, to complete, fulness.* In other words, the patch is a supplement to the garment; a compliment to it if you will.

Jesus and the Kingdom he inaugurates is the completion, the fulfillment to the old garment. But to try and force the new into the old rather than being a compliment to it, will cause the patch to rip away from the old, to separate from it, which is not the intention of the fulfilling patch.

The second form of the parable is like the first and makes the same point.

"New wine" is grape juice in its early stage of fermentation. This would require that the skins that hold it would be more pliable than old skins.

> *Behold, my belly is like wine that has no vent; like new wineskins ready to burst.*
> *Job 32:19*

> *And these skins of wine, which we filled, were new; and behold, they be rent; and these our garments and our shoes are become old by reason of the journey.*
> *Joshua 9:13*

If old skins are used to contain new wine, the skins will tear; the wine will be poured out; the skins will be ruined. All will be lost. If, however, new wine is put into new skins, *"both will be preserved."*

The *new wine* is the newness of the Gospel which finds its fulfilled personification in Jesus.

> *When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom* **10** *and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now.* **11** *This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him."*
> *John 2:9-11*

> *The proposal to combine the two may well have been a temptation to Matthew's Jewish-Christian readers. But the new reality of the gospel required instead "new skins," i.e., new patterns of conduct based on the ethical teaching of Jesus as the true exposition of the meaning and intent of the Torah.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 244*

This means that faithful obedience to Torah – *the old wine and the old skins* – and the inauguration of the Kingdom through Jesus and his teaching – *the new wine and the new skins* are both preserved in their faithful obedience to the law, but as expounded now by Jesus.

> *For Matthew, gospel and law (not Christianity and Judaism), are held together in the Church, but the standard of interpretation of and obedience to the latter is always solely the authoritative teaching of Jesus.*
> *Hagner – Matthew, page 244*

What constitutes *righteous conduct* begins with an understanding and appreciation of *who Jesus is*. In this case *"the bridegroom."* He is proclaiming the good news in the fulfillment of the *old* which is not a time for grief and fasting but celebration and rejoicing.

Everyone's conduct is being judged on the basis of Jesus and his teaching which would include his Old Testament interpretations.

If one is lamenting the condition of things and anticipating something more liberating coming, then fasting would seem to be a way of showing God one's faithfulness to gain his favor.

This is contrary to what the Gospel proclaims. The Believer who follows after Jesus with all of his being is not a person bedecked in grave clothes and ashes, but one who understands, in fact, believes even against the sorrow of this present age, that grace and the fulfillment that has come with that grace in the person of Christ and his Kingdom can be experienced now.

Fasting in this case should be done with this reality. It can be done to sharpen one's focus or for one to gain a deeper relational experience with the Lord.

One cannot add the Gospel to Judaism. It is not a matter of loyalty to Torah or God's righteousness that is in question. It is rather a matter of interpretation of God's will.

Jesus the Messiah, is the One teacher who understands and reveal this, as will those scribes who delve into his word honestly.

But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers.[a] **9** *And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.* **10** *Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ.* **11** *The greatest among you shall be your servant.* **12** *Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.*
Matthew 23:8-12

And he said to them, "Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old."
Matthew 13:52

The disciples' new obedience turns on the unique person and mission of Jesus.
Hagner – Matthew, page 245