

It is helpful to read the parallel passages in Mark 2:18-22 and Luke 5:33-39. The Lord Jesus had effectually called Matthew to follow Him. He was an object of the everlasting electing love of God in Christ, one whom the Savior had come to redeem. Christ would put away his sins and bring in for him everlasting righteousness by His one offering for sin (Heb. 10:10-14). Matthew was born again by the Spirit and drawn by invincible grace to the Savior as he was taught the Gospel. He invited Jesus to a feast held in His honor and invited his only friends, other publicans and sinners, to join him in honoring Christ. Those who have come to see the glory of the Lord Jesus and trust Him for their whole salvation also want those dearest to them to hear and believe the Gospel of salvation by God's grace (Rom. 10:1).

**(Matt. 9:14)** - Here, as the Lord was leaving Matthew's house, some of John's (the Baptist) disciples approached the Lord and asked, "*WHY DO WE AND THE PHARISEES FAST OFT, BUT THY DISCIPLES FAST NOT?*" While Matthew and Mark only mention fasting, Luke said that the question also involved praying (Luke 5:33). We know that John's disciples were looking for the Messiah and believed Him (Matt. 11:2-6). They were children of God, but sometimes those who love and follow Christ are adversely influenced by the enemies of Christ and the Gospel. John's disciples and the Pharisees were not together as to their doctrine, but they both dared to judge Jesus Christ, Matthew, and other disciples by their own standards. This is so wrong (Rom. 14:1-14). Sometimes it takes more time to remove the grave clothes of unbelief and self-righteousness from our minds. Though their actions were sinful, the Savior dealt with His true disciples in mercy (2 Tim. 2:13; Psa. 103:10).

The Pharisees fasted twice every week, Monday and Thursday, and were not hesitant to let people know about it as if to claim this as part of their righteousness before God (Luke 18:9-12; cp. Matt. 6:16-18). In addition, they prayed publicly, making certain that their prayers were heard and seen by people (Matt. 6:5; 23:14; Luke 18:11). This is why John the Baptist told them, "*O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance*" (Matt. 3:7-8). Fasting and prayer had become dead works and even evil deeds because of their evil hearts in seeking salvation by such works.

While these men were fasting, Jesus, Matthew, and his friends were enjoying a feast, because this was a time for celebration and rejoicing. One of Christ's lost sheep had been found and called into the fold. This was a feast of happiness (Isa. 25:6), a celebration of God's grace (Luke 15:6-7,9-10,23-24,32). The presence of Christ brings joy to His people (Psa. 16:11). As to prayer, which only Luke mentions, perhaps these men wondered why the Lord and His disciples did not pray in public as the Pharisees did. It may be that they did not hear the Lord's instructions on prayer in Matthew 6:6.

**(Matt. 9:15)** - In the Old Testament, fasting with prayer had to do with a sense of need and dependence, and/or of abject helplessness in the face of actual or anticipated tragedy. Prayer and fasting are combined in the Old Testament in times of mourning, repentance, and/or deep spiritual need. The Lord had taught that neither prayer nor fasting was to be done publicly so as to draw attention to oneself (Matt. 6:5-8,16-18). In this light, the question of how often or how seldom one fasts and/or prays should never be raised. But God's Word tells us that there is a time and place for all things that would drive His people to express their need of Him and communion with Him - "*To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven*" (Eccl. 3:1), and this included "*a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance*" (Eccl. 3:4). His point here is that as long as He

(the Bridegroom) is present among His bride (His children), it is not the time to mourn. It is a time to rejoice and celebrate.

Christ being the Bridegroom and His children being His bride is one of the clearest and most beautiful types in the Bible. It describes the unbreakable covenant love union between Christ and His church. God the Father chose the bride and gave her to His Son before the foundation of the world. All of the spiritual and eternal well-being of the bride was placed and conditioned upon Christ, the Bridegroom. The debt of her sins was laid upon Christ, and He had to be made like her by being made flesh without sin to redeem her from her sins by His obedience unto death as her Surety, Substitute, and Redeemer. He took away her sins and clothed her in a robe of pure, incorruptible righteousness (the imputed righteousness of Christ). He washed her clean by His blood and draws her to Himself with cords of love. He gives her spiritual life and sheds abroad in her heart His love for her which draws out her love for Him and faith in Him.

The time of mourning and fasting would come when *“THE BRIDEGROOM SHALL BE TAKEN FROM THEM.”* The Lord Jesus would be taken from them when He would permit the soldiers to arrest Him, take Him to be tried, tortured, and, finally, put to death on the cross. But His cross-work would be a victory as He would fulfill all the conditions required to save His people, all for whom He died. He would be resurrected from the dead and dwell among them briefly before He would be taken away again to go unto His Father. When all of this would come about according to God’s sovereign will, sorrow and fear would fill the disciples’ hearts. They would go through much persecution for righteousness’ sake, but by the Spirit of God, they would learn to rejoice in the Lord, knowing that they were secure in salvation by God’s grace in Christ.

**(Matt. 9:16-17)** - These two proverbial statements show us three important things concerning the salvation of sinners. (1) They were intended to show them that He, the Lord of Glory, did not come to add something new to the old ideas of the Pharisees, that people must do something for God in order to merit forgiveness, make themselves righteous, and be saved. His way, the way of salvation by grace, was (and is) not their way, the way of salvation by works. As they were seeking to establish righteousness by their works, Christ’s way was (and is) the way of righteousness by Him and imputed to His children (Rom. 9:30–10:4).

(2) This also speaks of the difference between the Old Covenant law and the New Covenant Gospel. The New Covenant, *“NEW CLOTH”* and *“NEW WINE,”* is new only in the sense of time as it was brought in by the first coming of Christ. It is the fulfillment in time of all the terms and conditions of the Everlasting Covenant of Grace which was made before the world began. But as the Lord was contrasting it with the Old Covenant, *“OLD GARMENT”* and *“OLD BOTTLES,”* He speaks of it as new. The New Covenant established in Christ has abolished the Old Covenant by way of fulfillment (Heb. 8).

(3) This shows us that we cannot rightly maintain our profession of truth in the true Gospel within the parameters of an old profession of faith under a false gospel. Salvation is not being saved under a lie and then morphing into the truth. False gospels produce false converts, and when God the Holy Spirit brings Christ’s children under the truth of God’s free and sovereign grace in Christ, He gives us faith to believe in the true Christ and repentance of the false christs of false gospels. He will not allow us to sew the new cloth of the true Gospel onto the old garment of a false gospel. He will not allow us to pour the new wine of God’s glory and truth in Christ into the old wineskin of a false profession. He puts *“NEW WINE INTO NEW BOTTLES, AND BOTH ARE PRESERVED,”* preserved by God’s grace in Christ.