

# Hungering for God

## A Biblical Examination of Fasting

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### Part A- Should 21<sup>st</sup> Century Believers Fast? Is Fasting Biblical?

#### Lesson 4- An Exegesis of Luke 5:33-39- Part 2

##### Luke 5:33-39

**33** And they said to Him, "The disciples of John often fast and offer prayers, the *disciples* of the Pharisees also do the same, but Yours eat and drink."

**34** And Jesus said to them, "**You cannot make the attendants of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them, can you?**"

**35** "**But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.**"

**36** And He was also telling them a parable: "**No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.**"

**37** "**And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined.**"

**38** "**But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.**"

**39** "**And no one, after drinking old *wine* wishes for new; for he says, 'The old is good enough.'**"

#### The Explanation of the Old and New Wine and Wineskins

Now here in verses 36-39 Jesus teaches a Parable concerning "wine" and "wineskins". And these commodities are divided into two categories:

1. New
2. Old

Now back in the first Century- when the Jew made alcoholic wine- they went through a process of "fermentation". So when they got the "new juice" out of the grapes, the grapes were crushed and the juice was yielded out in the vats- they would literally pour that juice into the skin of an animal- typically a goat's skin- and they would sew the goat skin up with the feet together- so you had this big sack or a big pouch. And they cut the head off and the neck would be the spout and they would wrap the neck up and tie it with leather thongs. And they would fill this carcass with the grape juice.

And while it is in that skin- the juice ferments, and when grape juice

ferments- gas is released and it expands. So it was critical to use freshly killed animal skins because they were subtle and soft and they would expand with that fermentation process without tearing. And as the juice fermented- the impurities or the dregs sank to the bottom and the newly fermented wine was at the top- close to the spout.

And then the fermented wine would be poured out into another skin and it would continue the process of fermentation and more dregs would fall down. And the wine went from skin to skin to skin until it was "pure"- meaning there were no more dregs and no sour vinegar left at the bottom.

So what Jesus is saying here is, if you take the "new wine" of the Gospel and you try to put it into the old cracked, brittle, stiff wineskins of the Jewish man-made religion- the expansion process of the Gospel taking hold on the souls of the individual will burst the brittle, old, man-made "skins" and the skins will burst- meaning the people who try to hold on to the Old Covenant will be offended and hurt while the "new wine"- the Gospel- will be spilled out onto the ground and wasted.

In other words- Jesus was saying to these Pharisees that you cannot put the glorious Gospel of Salvation by Grace through Faith into the old "wineskin" of Judaism. And by extension- it is also true that you also can't put the true Gospel into any other false religious system or human philosophy either. In other words- you cannot combine the Biblical Gospel with a sacramental Romish system. And you can't combine the true Gospel with any works/righteousness religious system. You cannot combine the Gospel with social liberalism. You cannot combine it with neo-orthodoxy. You cannot combine it with a cult. You cannot combine the true Gospel with *anything* else.

Jesus was teaching here that the true Biblical Gospel is utterly unique- nothing else is like it, it stands alone, it is an exclusive. And, therefore, any attempt by anybody for any reason to *add* anything to the Gospel- changes the Gospel on a fundamental level and thus destroys both it and them. And anything you *take away* from the true Gospel also changes it fundamentally, and also destroys both the Gospel and those who trust in that false teaching.

The Gospel is what it is, and so once you change or alter the Gospel- you no longer *have* the true Biblical Gospel. After you add any man-made portion to the one true Gospel- you have successfully altered the Gospel to the point that it is no longer what God said- but has become a perverted system that cannot forgive a single sin or save a single soul.

So the goal of the Christian Church is not to add to or take away anything from what the Apostles articulated in that Body of Teaching called "**The Apostles Doctrine**" (**The Acts 2:42**)- which is the collective revealed Divine Truth found in the 27 Books of the New Testament. The goal of the Church is to study and research and pray and struggle and labor to:

### **Jude 3b**

**... contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.**

Because nobody is forgiven or saved through good intentions or sincerity. True Salvation can only be obtained in the one single way that God has determined:

### **Salvation comes by hearing and believing and obeying the Gospel**

... so changing the Gospel- even for sincere reasons- will not accomplish anything except doom people to hell.

So Jesus was telling these religious hypocrites that the Gospel is the "new wine". And this new wine cannot be *mixed with* anything "old" and it cannot be *contained* by anything "old".

So any combination of the true Gospel with any works/righteousness system simply causes the Gospel to lose its Power to convict and convert and renders it to be null and void. So at the point where you mix the true Gospel with something else- the Gospel itself becomes whatever you mix it with. And in this case- the Gospel itself becomes an "old skin" and it will crack and the Power to save souls will be lost and men will die in their sins.

So in context- Jesus is teaching here that the "Old" must be replaced with the "New". The man-made, works-righteousness religious "system" of the Pharisees with its elaborate rituals and endless ceremonies and burdensome requirements is replaced by the simplicity of the Gospel- the glorious New Covenant.

### **Is Fasting Part of the "Old Wineskins" that Have Been Replaced?**

So since the Pharisees and those who lived under the Old Covenant fasted- does that mean that fasting itself has been replaced along with the other trappings of the inferior Revelation of the Old Covenant? No.

Jesus says something very crucial in **Luke 5:36b-38**:

**36 ..."No one tears a piece of cloth from a new garment and puts it on an old garment; otherwise he will both tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old.**

**37 "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled out, and the skins will be ruined.**

**38 "But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins.**

And in the "sister" verse of this same Parable we find Jesus wording this slightly different:

#### **Matthew 9:16&17**

**16 "But no one puts a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; for the patch pulls away from the garment, and a worse tear results.**

**17 "Nor do *people* put new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wineskins burst, and the wine pours out and the wineskins are ruined; but they put new wine into fresh wineskins, and both are preserved."**

Now the logic is the same for both Accounts. The “patch” of unshrunk cloth and the “new wine” both represent the same thing: The new Reality that Jesus has brought with Him. The Kingdom of God is now here. The Bridegroom has come. The long awaited Messiah is now in our midst. And that Reality is not temporary. Jesus is not here now and later on- He will be gone- like all the Old Testament Prophets and godly Kings were. No, one of the profound distinctions of the New Covenant is that God will now remain with us and in us forever!

### **John 1:32-34**

**32 John testified saying, "I have seen the Spirit descending as a dove out of heaven, and He remained upon Him.**

**33 "I did not recognize Him, but He who sent me to baptize in water said to me, 'He upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, this is the One who baptizes in the Holy Spirit.'**

**34 "I myself have seen, and have testified that this is the Son of God."**

### **The New Covenant is Better**

So the Kingdom didn't come in Jesus and then vanish out of the world when He ascended up into Heaven. Jesus died for our sins- once and for all. He rose from the dead- once and for all. The Spirit was sent into the world as the Real Presence of Jesus among us- once and for all!

So the Kingdom of God is the present reigning Power of Jesus Christ in the world- subduing wicked hearts to the King and creating a people who believe Him and serve Him in faith and holiness. The Spirit of the Bridegroom is gathering and purifying a Bride for Jesus Christ. This is the Gospel of Christ and the “mystery of the Kingdom” that the Bible refers to. This is the “New Wine”.

And Jesus teaches that the “old wineskins” can't contain it. Something has to change. And in context- we cannot escape the connection here in Jesus' Words with fasting. There is no break in Jesus' thought in this Passage. And it is the same in all three accounts in all three synoptic Gospels. The old shrunken patch of cloth and the old brittle wineskins relate directly the inferior Jewish understanding of and worship of the one true living God in the Old Covenant- and that includes fasting.

Fasting was inherited from the Old Testament and had been used as a part of Jewish worship and life in relating to God. In **Luke 18:11&12**- we get yet another glimpse of how common it was for the “religious” people of the Old Covenant to fast when we read:

**11 "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.**

**12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.'**

This traditional fasting is part of the “old wineskin” that Jesus was talking

about. And Jesus was clear about this- the old wineskins cannot contain the “new wine” of the Kingdom of God that He is bringing in. At all. You cannot mix the old wineskins of the inferior Old Covenant with the new wine of the superior New Covenant.

So believers in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century (who were primarily Jewish) were taught to “leave” or “abandon” the shadowy and symbolic Revelation of God in the Old Covenant that collectively was called “**the elementary teaching about the Christ**”, and they were told to “press on” and “fully embrace” the “mature” and superior Revelation of God in the New Covenant.

### **Hebrews 6:1-3**

**1 Therefore leaving the elementary teaching about the Christ, let us press on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God,**

**2 of instruction about washings and laying on of hands, and the resurrection of the dead and eternal judgment.**

**3 And this we will do, if God permits.**

### **Fasting Remains Because Fasting Changed**

So doesn't that logic completely *eliminate* believers operating under the New Covenant from fasting altogether? It would if that is all that Jesus said about it. But it isn't. In **Luke 5:35** Jesus said this:

**But *the* days will come; and when the bridegroom is taken away from them, then they will fast in those days.**

Here Jesus says that His disciples will one day fast again- after the Bridegroom is “taken away”. And we have already discovered in previous Lessons that this “taking away” is *not* merely the three days that Jesus laid in the Grave- as some teach- but the “days” after His Ascension and before His Second Coming. So from that we see that Jesus Himself teaches that those who love and follow Him in the Revelation of the New Covenant during the “Church Age” are to fast.

And yet in the very next verse- Jesus seems to undo what He just said and teach that believers *cannot* add the new wine of the Kingdom into the old wineskins of the Old Covenant- which included fasting. So which one is it? Are believers who operate in the Kingdom of God supposed to fast, and if so- how did the New Covenant then replace the Old since fasting was done by believers under the Old Covenant?

The answer is that fasting remained as a viable “tool” of believers and as “means of Grace” because the very context and purpose of fasting changed. In other words- the disciples of Jesus will fast after He has been “taken away”, but the *kind of* fasting they have known under the Revelation of the Old Covenant is no longer suitable for the New Reality of the Presence and Power of the in-breaking Kingdom of God.

## New Wine Calls for New Fasting

The New Wine of Christ's Presence demands not *no* fasting but *new* fasting. And the new fasting is based on the Mystery that the Bridegroom has *already* come and that He will come again- *not* just that He will come. So the new wine of the very Presence of Jesus Christ calls for new fasting.

In other words- the yearning and longing and ache that was the foundation of the *old* fasting was *not* based on the glorious Truth that the Messiah had *already* come! The mourning over sin and the longing for deliverance from danger and the yearning for God that inspired the *old* fasting was *not* based in any way on the finished Work of Christ and the great Revelation of His Truth and Grace in history. All those things were still off in the future to all those who fasted under the Old Covenant. But now- the Bridegroom has come! And in His Coming He struck the decisive blow against sin, death, hell, and satan!

So what distinguishes Christianity from Judaism is that the longed-for Kingdom of God is now present with us in one sense, as well as a future Promise. The King *has come* and *will come* again. But to the Jew- it was *only* a future Promise. To the Jew- the King would only come at some point in the future.

Now it is true that the Kingdom of God is not *fully* come yet. It is not fully consummated. The Kingdom is yet to come in all its glorious Fullness and Power. At the Last Supper- Jesus said,

### **Luke 22:18**

**for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine from now on until the kingdom of God comes.**

... and yet as He was with His disciples, Jesus said,

### **Luke 17:20b&21**

**20 ...The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed;**

**21 nor will they say, 'Look, here it is!' or, 'There it is!' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst."**

So the "mystery of the Kingdom of God" is that, in one sense- the Kingdom of God is a present Reality, and in another sense- it is a future Promise.

This is the "Center" that we studied in previous Lessons. The Center is the decisive Triumph of the Son of God, the Messiah- entering history for the Salvation of His people and the Glory of His Father. Christians are a people who have been *already* captured by a great Hope that one day- we will see and be overwhelmed by the fullness of the Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ.

But what is *decisively* Christian in this- that no Old Testament Jew understood or possessed- is that the Hope of New Covenant believers (Christians) is rooted in the *past* historical Triumph of that very *same* God over sin and death and hell and satan through the Life and Death and Resurrection of the Lamb- Who offered Himself once for all as a Sacrifice for sin and then sat down (He was

finished!) at the Right Hand of God. And *this* is the New Wine!

#### **Hebrews 10:8-14**

**8** After saying above, "*SACRIFICES AND OFFERINGS AND WHOLE BURNT OFFERINGS AND sacrifices FOR SIN YOU HAVE NOT DESIRED, NOR HAVE YOU TAKEN PLEASURE in them*" (which are offered according to the Law),

**9** then He said, "*BEHOLD, I HAVE COME TO DO YOUR WILL.*" He takes away the first in order to establish the second.

**10** By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

**11** Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins;

**12** but He, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, *SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD,*

**13** waiting from that time onward *UNTIL HIS ENEMIES BE MADE A FOOTSTOOL FOR HIS FEET.*

**14** For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

So the great, decisive Act of Salvation for us today is *past*- not future. And on the basis of that past Work of the Bridegroom- nothing will ever be the same for the New Covenant believer- as it was for the believer under the Old Covenant. The Lamb is slain! Death is forever defeated! The tyrannical power of sin that dominated our lives when we were lost has now been forever broken! The Heavens are open! The Spirit is sent and now dwells forever- internally in every believer! The Wine is very new! And, therefore, the old fasting mindset is simply no longer adequate.

#### **The Newness of the New Fasting**

The *newness* of Christian fasting is that it rests on all this finished Work of the Bridegroom. And it operates in the assumption of it. It believes it. And it enjoys and rejoices in it!

Therefore, the aching and the yearning of Christians for Jesus and His Power and Mercy that drives us to fast is *not* the vague expression of "getting closer to God" that was common with the Old Testament Jew. Christ is already *in us*- the very Hope of Glory! So the Jew didn't have what we have and he didn't understand what we understand, and he had no context for the Sure Foundation from where our Confidence and Hope is based. Therefore, when he fasted- the Jew sought after things that Jesus has already accomplished and paid for and brought about. Thus, the fast of the Christian must be unique and new and different from that of a person who only had a shadow of what we have in reality in Jesus Christ.

## The Fasting of Faith

So we should look at New Testament fasting as “the fasting of Faith”. Because faith stands on the finished Work of Jesus Christ, and on that Foundation, faith becomes:

### Hebrews 11:1b

**... the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. (KJV)**

Faith is the spiritual feasting on Jesus Christ that causes the believer to become so satisfied in Him that the pull of all other created things is broken and fades away. And this “feasting” begins by trusting in the *past* Work of Christ- in His Life, Death, and Resurrection. And then it embraces all that God the Father promises to be for us in Jesus Christ by the Power of God the Holy Spirit.

So as long as we are here in a fallen and finite body- Christian faith means both *delighting* and *trusting* in the past Incarnation (and all that it entails) while constantly *desiring* and *looking forward* to the future Consummation of all things in Christ. And this “dual status” causes us to be both completely content and utterly dissatisfied. We are completely satisfied in Jesus and all that He has already done, and yet we walk in utter dissatisfaction because we long to be “**clothed**” by the fullness that will come with Jesus when He returns.

### 2Corinthians 5:1-4

**1 For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.**

**2 For indeed in this *house* we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven,**

**3 inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked.**

**4 For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.**

.. and this utter dissatisfaction grows out of the measure of our complete contentment that we already know and possess in our Lord. And yet because this dissatisfaction or this longing is holy and is “of” the Lord- it in no way belittles or minimizes our contentment in the past Work of Christ. To seek for what lies in the future by either belittling or ignoring what has already occurred would be to sin *against* true faith. For a New Covenant believer to fast so that he may possess what all Christians already have in Christ would be to ignore what the Lord has already done and would be to sin horribly against Him. That could hardly be called an act of faith.

So only to the degree that we truly understand and trust and rejoice in what Christ has *already* done- to that *same extent*- we should long and hunger for what is yet awaiting us! So Christian fasting is unique from Old Testament fasting in that it rejoices and celebrates the complete contentment that comes from understanding and trusting in the overwhelming past Act of Christ in Who He is



and What He has done and is continuing to do- while at the same time- hungering for what He is yet to do. So Christian fasting is the fast of faith.

## Recap

1. What is the "new wine" that Jesus was talking about in **Luke 5**? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. What is the "old wineskins"? \_\_\_\_\_

3. How are sinners justified? \_\_\_\_\_

4. Is fasting part of the "old wineskins" that Jesus was talking about? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Why or why not? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. In what way is the New Covenant superior to the Old? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. Does that make the Old Covenant to be evil or wrong? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Explain \_\_\_\_\_

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9. If the old wineskin is to be replaced how do we hold on to fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. In what way did fasting change? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. What is meant by the term, "the fasting of faith"? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Notes:**