

## **Mark 2:19-22 – Fasting and Prayer**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ: If you talk to Christians about fasting you will get 2 distinct opinions. Some will say that fasting 禁食 is not necessary for the Christian as that was part of the old covenant. Others believe that we should fast, and we don't fast enough. To them, fasting is a sign of greater spiritual purity. So what is a Christian to make of fasting? Hear from God's Words!

Our headings are:

**Criticism for not fasting**

**Criticism Corrected by illustration #1**

**Criticism Corrected by illustration #2**

Our goals are: **That you will learn to pray in the best way possible so that you can get what you and your brothers need to work for Christ's kingdom.**

### **Criticism for not fasting**

18 The disciples of John and of the Pharisees **were fasting**. Then they came and said to Him, "Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?"

**1. Fasting is a sacrificing of the body in times of pestilence, famine, war, sieges flood, or calamity** so the soul could focus entirely on prayer. It was common for the leaders to call on the people to fast, especially if the early rains for the crops to grow or latter rains for the crops to ripen were delayed. Look at 2 serious occasions when fasting was necessary: demon, ordination.

Mark 9:29 So He said to them, "This kind can come out by nothing but prayer and fasting."

Acts 14:23 So when they had appointed elders in every church, and prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.

**Fasting is inextricably 千丝万缕 joined prayer.** You are never required to punish your body - penance 苦修 – like Roman Catholics or Hindus promote. Self-flagellation 自虐 does not bring you closer to God. Isolation doesn't bring you closer to God. Starving your body does not bring you closer to God. Fasting, which allows you to pray with focus, is good.

**2. The enemies of Christ were always trying to find ways to criticize Jesus in order to dissuade his disciples from following him.** And they thought they found something against him because Jesus's disciples did not fast like the Pharisees did - on Mondays and Thursdays – often skipping the noon meal. But they fasted for a show!

Matthew 6:16 "Moreover, when you fast, do not be like the hypocrites, with a sad countenance 愁容. **For they disfigure their faces that they may appear to men to be fasting.** Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward.

**3. But how did the disciples of John the Baptist get involved in this controversy?** The Pharisees wanted to weave dissension 纠纷 between the disciples of John the Baptist (whom they did not follow) and the disciples of Jesus (whom they did not follow either). We know that John the Baptist and Jesus called the Pharisees "brood of vipers."

### **4. Lessons:**

**a. There are always those who criticize many things they see in the church, but they themselves don't serve God.** They don't care about their own lives, but they are concerned about how you live and how the church should change. **These people don't care about being involved in the good things the church is doing...preaching the Gospel, leading godly families, helping the poor, etc.** But they fight over petty matters. Learn to challenge them to live better instead of criticizing. Wouldn't it be great to hear them say: "We will do more evangelism" or "we need to deliver invitations to every home in this neighborhood?" Wouldn't it be great to say to the elders: "May I join with a bunch of others and deliver flyers in the whole neighborhood for the kingdom?" Yes, criticism can be valid, but look at yourself first.

**b. The Pharisees were really demanding that Jesus and his disciples follow their custom of fasting.** So the lesson is to examine whether something is a custom or a requirement. Don't insist on a tradition. Ask yourself: Is this a tradition or is it God's requirement? Don't bind others by your traditions.

**c. Just as the Pharisees tried to cause division between the disciples of John and Jesus, watch out for those who want to break the "bond of faith" and the "unity of charity" (Calvin) that exists between Christians from different denominations.** You might disagree with doctrine, but don't disagree with hate.

### **Criticism Corrected by Illustration #1**

19 And Jesus said to them, "Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.

**1. Jesus told the accusers that it was foolish for his disciples to fast while he was right there with them.** It would be as foolish as if the friends of a bridegroom fasted during the days of feasting at a wedding. In this case, Jesus was the bridegroom in a wedding and his covenant people were his Bride. They (covenant people) were uniting in a joyous occasion.

John 3:29 "He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. **Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.**

And since **Christ's groomsmen 伴郎—his disciples - were with him,** it was a time of celebration – not of sacrifice. According to Jewish tradition, the groomsmen had **7 days of celebration.** They did not work, but ate and drank. If they wanted more wine, they simply asked the Bridegroom. There was no time of sadness. **Who mourns at a wedding – except maybe the father of the bride?**

**The point: Fasting was done in order to focus on praying.** ...to make sure that God heard their prayers for important things. So at the present time God was right there with them. There was no reason to fast and be dour. Access to God was 100% guaranteed.

**But the disciples were more than the groomsmen. They were also part of the bride.**

**2. See the loving relationship between the Bride and Bridegroom.** Would a bride fast to ask her husband something when he was right there? Would she pine for her husband when he was right there? Surely he would let her pour out her heart to him! This relationship you see typified in the Songs of Solomon and in **Psalm 45,** the Bridal Psalm.

Song of Solomon 2:8 THE SHULAMITE The voice of my beloved! Behold, he comes Leaping upon the mountains, Skipping upon the hills. 9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Behold, he stands behind our wall; He is looking through the windows, Gazing through the lattice 從窗櫺往裏窺探. 10 My beloved spoke, and said to me: **"Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away.** 11 For lo, the winter is past, The rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth; **The time of singing has come,** And the voice of the turtledove 斑鳩 Is heard in our land.

To put in another way, there is no need for lamps during the day time.

Song of Solomon 5:1 THE BELOVED I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse; I have gathered my myrrh 没药 with my spice; I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey; I have drunk my wine with my milk. (TO HIS FRIENDS) **Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!**

Rather, there was joy and music. To fast, rather than eating, would be contrary to the spirit of the times.

**3. The fact that there would be no fasting but feasting when Jesus came was prophesied 400 years before.**

Zechariah 8:19 "Thus says the LORD of hosts: `The fast of the fourth *month*, The fast of the fifth, The fast of the seventh, And the fast of the tenth, **Shall be joy and gladness and cheerful feasts** For the house of Judah. Therefore love truth and peace.'

So those who were upset (the Pharisees) were wrongly upset.

**4. This Pharisaic attack showed that they were denying that Jesus was God who could answer prayers.** It also showed that **they were viewing fasting as a ritual 宗教仪式—a superstition** ...not a sacrifice of the body so the soul can focus on the praying to the Lord.

20 "But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.

**5. And yet, Jesus pointed out that the time was coming when his bride would fast...when he returned to heaven to build a home for her.**

**6. Lessons:**

**a. Fast for things that are important, substantive, and in circumstances where you really want to see God's hand of help** for you and for your neighbor.

**b. Know that though the Bridegroom is in heaven, he is near to you by his Spirit.** Don't be afraid to pray. Don't be careless about praying.

**Criticism Corrected by Illustration #2**

21 "No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; or else **the new piece pulls away** from the old, and the tear is made worse. 22 "And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; or else the new wine bursts the wineskins, **the wine is spilled,** and the wineskins are ruined. But new wine must be put into new wineskins."

**1. While these are really 2 illustrations here, the meaning is the same, so we will treat them together.** Too many fantastic allegorical meanings 寓意 have been developed. The explanation is often tortured.

But let's consider them.

**2. Jesus said that “no one sews a piece of unshrunk (new) cloth on an old garment,” otherwise the new cloth shrinks and tears away from the old cloth, making a bigger hole.** Jesus also said that “**no one puts new wine in old wineskins**”, otherwise when the gas expands and with no room to go, it would **explode**. So what do these things mean?

**3. Some think that the old cloth is stable and therefore better.** Some like the new cloth and argue about the **robes of righteousness Jesus gives us**. But there is no mention of new robes. Some say that this **teaches you must be kind to new converts**...lest they be overwhelmed by old things. And regarding the wineskins, some argue that older wine is better. But that is not the point there. It is the old wineskins that are damaged. Some even teach that **this new wine is the Holy Spirit**. But that is dispensationalism时代论 – assuming that the Holy Spirit was not in the Old Testament Christians.

**4. To know what Jesus was teaching you have to consider the context and literary style.**

**a. Context?** Jesus was teaching that there was **no need to fast now** in this new time.

**b. What was the literary style?** **Luke calls this a parable, meaning that there is 1 meaning!**

**Keeping those 2 things in mind, Jesus was simply pointing out that if you have something newer (his presence) there was no need for fasting (old). IOW, why fast (old garment) when you have something better (new garment)?** This “new garment” symbolized direct access to the one who hears and answers prayer. Why fast (old wine skin) when you have something better (new wine)? The new wine symbolized direct access to the one who hears and answers prayer.

**5. That's the meaning. That's all. It is not that complicated.** If you interpret this passage in an allegorical way it would make no sense in the context of teaching about fasting and you will have an inconsistent meaning.

**6. Lessons:**

**a. Interpret a passage in context**上下文 and consider the literary style. If an interpretation doesn't fit the context or literary style, ignore it. This is especially important with parables. Don't use all the details about a parable and look for a meaning. (For example, in parable of the rich man and Lazarus, don't assume that you will be able have conversations from hell to heaven.)

**b. Stay away from allegorical preachers.**

**c. Look forward to your time in heaven when you will be with the Lord forever.** That's when fasting and prayer will cease – as you will have no more needs...and only praises will flow!

**Conclusion:**

Prayer is commanded duty. Sometimes, because of the seriousness of the situation, you may fast so that you can focus on your prayer. Your goal in fasting and prayer is **that you and your neighbor will be well-equipped to do God's service.**

Brothers and Sisters in Jesus Christ:

1. Do not ignore fasting. Fasting opens up your heart to focus on the great or serious needs you have.
2. But don't fast for a show or for superstitious reasons.
3. Fasting continues until Jesus returns again and takes you to be with him in heaven.
4. Fasting is only useful to you because you have access to God through the shed blood of Jesus.

Finally, if you are not a Christian, your fasting might only bring health benefits and save you some money. But I can guarantee you that God does not listen to your prayers and has a reservation in hell for you. He would only listen to your prayers and save you from hell if you are his child. And you can become his child if you rest upon the life and death of Christ.