

Mark 2:18-22

Distinctives of the Gospel

1

Introduction

The Gospel of Christ cannot coexist with any other system.

When True Christianity is mixed with other religion and philosophy, it loses its saving character. The religions of the world can coexist together in relative peace for they are all Satan's deadly deceptions. However, Christianity is viewed as intolerant because it exposes their error.

The calling of Matthew and eating with "sinners" violated the cultural and religious norms of Judaism. Jesus' love and grace exposed the hypocrisy of the Pharisee's self-righteousness.

2

Mark 2:18-22

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?”

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

3

The Accusation

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The Religious leaders were looking for reasons the accuse Jesus of wrongdoing as this provided a justification for them to reject Jesus’ teachings and offer of salvation. Throughout the Gospels, their accusations were addressed in the form of a question designed to show the crowds how Jesus violated their traditions.

John the Baptist had called the people to turn from their sin and to follow God. To many this would have called them to return to their known religion. Therefore, it is not surprising to see that some disciples of John joined with the Pharisees in their accusation.

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Their question did not express a desire for information. Rather, it was intended as a stinging rebuke. They asked Him, “**Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?**”

Fasting, prayer, and almsgiving were common expressions of piety in Judaism. All three were performed publicly, providing the Pharisees with a platform to flaunt their false devotion. Jesus directly confronted such superficial spirituality in the Sermon on the Mount, where He taught that fasting, prayer, and almsgiving were to be done in secret, to honor God and not to impress others (cf. Matt. 6:2–6, 16–18).

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God only required one mandated fast and that was on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31). This fast was to be done because of one’s remorse over their sin. There were other fasts mentioned in the Old Testament that were voluntary. All fasts were associated with grief, sorrow over sin, and the sincere pursuit of communion with God.

The Pharisees fasted twice a week and were motivated as a public display of their so-called piety and ritualism. This was not a worship of God, but a worship of themselves. Their disapproval of Jesus’ actions was not motivated out of a concern for God, but on their manmade traditions.

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The Correction

Mark 2:19-20

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

Their question deserved an answer. Jesus did not apologize but rather exposed the spiritual condition of those who asked. His response eliminated the ignorance that might have existed on the part of John's disciples and confronted the indignation that motivated the Pharisees and scribes. The Pharisees accused Jesus of being in conflict with the rules and rituals of Judaism. Jesus responded by pointing out that, in reality, they were the ones who were set in opposition to God's saving purposes. If they had recognized that Jesus was the Messiah, they never would have posed their question in the first place.

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Jesus used the illustration of a wedding celebration to make His point. He said to them, "**Can the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them?**" The rhetorical question underscored that fasting was for times of grief and sorrowful reflection, but a wedding was a joyful and festive event. To fast at a wedding would have been inappropriate and insulting, so much so that ancient rabbinic rules forbade the practice. Jesus' word affirm this, "**As long as they have the bridegroom with them they cannot fast.**" Just as a member of the wedding party could not mourn at such a joyous occasion, it was equally ridiculous to think that Jesus' disciples ought to fast and grieve while the Messiah was in their midst.

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Jesus went on to say, "**But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.**"

He spoke this speaking of His own death. The word "**taken away**" speak of a violent sudden removal.

When Jesus was taken away and crucified, the disciples were filled with grief. However, that grief was turned to joy when Jesus rose from the dead three days later. After Jesus ascended into heaven, the disciples did fast (Acts 10:30; 14:23).

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The Analogy

Mark 2:21-22

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."

Jesus explained "**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.**" Repairing an old tunic with a piece of new, unshrunk fabric would be ill-advised. Not only would the new cloth not match the faded color of the old (cf. Luke 5:36), it would shrink when washed and pull the garment, causing it to tear. The point was that His gospel of repentance and forgiveness from sin could not be patched into the legalistic traditionalism of Pharisaic Judaism. Apostate Judaism's rituals and ceremonies were beyond repair. Jesus did not come with a message to patch up their old system. He came to replace it.

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It is important to note that the old garment to which Jesus alludes is neither the Mosaic law nor the Old Testament as a whole. Jesus did not come to destroy the law but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17–19). Moreover, the apostle Paul explains that the law of God is righteous and good (Rom. 7:16). The Jewish leaders had added their own rabbinic stipulations and traditions to God's law to the degree that Judaism had more to do with keeping extrabiblical prescriptions than with honoring divine requirements. The old garment is the legalistic system of rabbinic tradition that had obscured the law of God (cf. Matt. 15:3–6). The good news of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus could not be combined with the works-righteousness of Judaism.

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Jesus' second analogy echoed that same point. He told His listeners, "**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.**" Wine was often stored in containers made from animal skin (cf. Josh. 9:4, 13). As new wine began to ferment, gas would be released, causing the leather skins to expand. An old wineskin, having lost its elasticity, could break during the process of fermentation. Consequently, the wine would spill and the flask would be destroyed. In order to avoid this, new wine had to be placed in new wineskins – containers that had the strength and flexibility to hold up as the wine fermented.

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So What ...

The point is that the Jesus' message of forgiveness could not be added to legalism. Let's take a look at what Mark is laying out.

Jesus came preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom.

He showed His authority over sin and its consequences through healing.

He showed His willingness to forgive by calling sinners (Matthew) to follow Him.

This brought His teaching and actions into direct conflict with the legalism of Judaism. He now states that He did not come to fix but to remove the legalism out of the way in order to restore people back to a proper relationship with God.

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So What ...

How about you?

It is human tendency to attempt to gain approval through our own accomplishments. It is important to understand that these accomplishments will never measure up.

We can try to hide behind the facades of ourselves that we present to the world. The reality is that we are all broken failures, hurting, and longing for something more.

This is where Jesus meets us. In the shame of our failure. He does not save us because we are worthy, but because of our need. This is what grace and mercy is about.

Have you come to the point of total surrender? Jesus is willing to replace your failure with His own Righteousness! Will you come to Him?

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