

# The Gospel of Matthew

**Title:** From the Old to the New

**Text:** Matthew 9:14-17

## POINT 1 - WHAT IS FASTING?

Fasting defined simply is a “voluntary abstinence” from food or other items. In the appointment of elders in Acts 14:23, **“When they had appointed elders for them in every church, having prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord in whom they had believed.”** The fast was **originally instituted** in Leviticus 16:29 **“This shall be a permanent statute for you: in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall humble your souls and not do any work, whether the native, or the alien who sojourns among you.”** This was done on the **Day** of **Atonement**, and **only required once**.

There is no doubt that **Jesus and His followers observed fasts as required by the law**, but they didn’t do all the “frequent” **fasts imposed by the Pharisees and others**. Jesus gave the purpose of fasting in the Sermon on the Mount, **“Whenever you fast, do not put on a gloomy face as the hypocrites do, for they neglect their appearance so that they will be noticed by men when they are fasting. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that your fasting will not be noticed by men, but by your Father who is in secret; and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you”** (Matthew 6:16-18). **Jesus taught the need of purity and simplicity as the motive to fasting.**

APPLICATION: You may fast today because you are enduring a trial, suffering and difficulties. You may be considering a job change or major decision in your life. Or maybe you just need to see God clearer in your life, and fasting will lead you into prayer and study. Paul and Barnabas were sent out, but not before they had prayed and fasted, **“Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away”** (Acts 13:3).

## POINT 2 - WHO ARE THE DISCIPLES OF JOHN?

According to Matthew 4:12, John had been arrested and taken to prison. John 3:28, **“You yourselves are my witnesses that I said, I am not the Christ, but, I have been sent ahead of Him.”** Furthermore in John 3:30, **“He must increase, but I must decrease.”** John is telling his disciples to follow Jesus. He isn’t the Messiah. But not all of his disciples followed Jesus, and in Acts 19:1-3, Paul encounters some of them, **“It happened that while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul passed through the upper country and came to Ephesus, and found some disciples. He said to them, Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? And they said to him, No, we have not even heard whether there is a Holy Spirit. And he said, Into what then were you baptized? And they said, Into John’s baptism.”** **And those disciples who had not begun to follow Jesus were left with the Jewish ceremonies and practices, thus ushering in their question of Jesus.**

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APPLICATION: These disciples came to Jesus directly, and scholars have two opinions as to their question. First, they came with **sincerity** to know why, second, they simply wanted to **trap** Him.

### POINT 3 - THE INTENTION OF THEIR QUESTION

With the inclusion of themselves with the Pharisees “why do we and the Pharisees” fast, **leads one to believe they were asking the question with a preconceived notion**. They took this very seriously. According to Luke 18:12 the Pharisee said in his prayer, “**I fast twice a week.**” When they gave alms they “blew trumpets” (Matthew 6:2), when they prayed “**for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men**” (Matthew 6:5). When they fasted they “**put on gloomy faces**” so they could be seen by men.

**Religious routines have always been a danger**. Over the centuries **bizarre rituals** have formed into **heretical behavior, praying to the dead or lighting a candle for the dead**. Even in our own church life we tend to **become ritualistic with praying, reading, and even worship**.

APPLICATION: Don't become **ritualistic** in your **service** to **God** by doing things to do them. They seemed to want to know why the disciples of Jesus didn't fast as they did, and that's all.

### POINT 4 - JESUS ILLUSTRATES AN ANSWER TO THEIR QUESTION

Jesus' answer to questions is always mind wrenching and often painfully true. The first illustration of the wedding is there's no need too fast as long as the bridegroom is here. Weddings weren't a time for mourning, but rejoicing, and often lasted seven days. The point is there's no need too fast while Jesus is here, and doing so would simply be an external act with no real significance. A fast today in our own lives doesn't mean anything if we do it just to do it, **but if it's connected to real spiritual significance, a real spiritual need, it's useful**.

APPLICATION: Fasting if you are considering **ministerial work**, a **family crisis**, a **job change** or some kind of **trial**. The purpose is to **replace something with prayer and seeking God**.

### POINT 5 - A DEEPER LOOK AT THEIR QUESTION

The “we” put them in the camp of the Pharisees, but I want to look at the “why” in their question. They weren't following Jesus as John had said to do, but the why do we do this and you do that, may have been a sincere seeking of the truth. Dr. John MacArthur raises this question in his commentary, “Being their question about fasting may have been a deeper concern about forgiveness. “Why” may have been if they were really wondering about do you emphasize internal things such as forgiveness, while our recognized religious leaders only external things?”

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Often unbelievers will seek out a believer, a friend, and ask the rather probing question. Why do you pray? How do you have peace in times of difficulty?

### POINT 6 - THE ANSWER TO THEIR QUESTIONS

Jesus was establishing a new way, and **doing away with the old**. But not the **law of God**, but doing **away with their traditions**, which they **had placed above the law**. Jesus affirms this in the Sermon on the Mount, **“Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill”** (Matthew 5:17).

Jesus illustrates this point by using two illustrations. First, the new patch and old garment. The fabric of this patch would shrink when washed. And if attached to an old garment, it would shrink and make the tear worse. In the same way Jesus is saying this “new” way of gospel forgiveness and cleansing cannot be attached to the old way of your tradition of external righteousness.

In the second example Jesus illustrates the use of the wineskin, made of animal skins. These would eventually be dried out and putting new wine into them would cause them to crack and burst. **In the same way you cannot put the new righteousness of Christ into an old legalistic tradition you have.**

### POINT 7 - THREE MARKS OF A TRUE BELIEVER

**First, you will follow Jesus and not any other or anything else.** These men were disciples of John, likely a part of the Pharisees in actions. They clearly held to the traditions of the Pharisees. Jesus said you can't and if you will put away the old and believe the new, you can be a true follower. Matthew arose from his booth and followed the Lord. The disciples all “forsook” and followed Him. You can't hold on to your “feelings” or “thoughts” of what truth is, you must follow the Lord and His truth. Stop trying to put the old into the new.

**Second, he has compassion on the unsaved.** The previous text illustrates this as Jesus had dinner with those tax collectors and sinners. The tradition of the Pharisees excluded those who didn't fit the criteria. 2 Corinthians 5:11, “Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men.” We tell me of the cleansing power of Jesus. **The true follower of Jesus has compassion on those bound by darkness and evil.**

**Third, he forsakes legalistic, man-made rules.** God has **standards**. The true believer fasts only when there's genuine spiritual concern, not for the sake of being seen. **The old and the new aren't compatible.** Although, many in the new modern day evangelical church have tried to marry the two together. Galatians 3:3, **“Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?”** **Don't assume that grace means no righteous behavior and living.** Or that there are no standards of behavior. The Bible clearly says there is a new you, 2 Corinthians 5:17

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**“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.”**

### CONCLUSION/APPLICATION

The conviction of the Holy Spirit will show you the failure of keeping a tradition or external righteousness. This is why the road is narrow. You can't bring your stuff along. Forsake the external works based righteousness and believe the new cleaning righteousness of the atonement of Christ. There's no room for you old ways of thinking into the new way of Christ.