

## A Fast Way to Complain Luke 5:33-39

Turn in your Bibles to **Luke 5:33-39**. This is a topic that is multifaceted and we are only going to scratch the surface. Let's read the passage, look at the story, and then draw some conclusions.

An opposing viewpoint

An obvious vindication

An allegorical verification

### I. AN OPPOSING VIEWPOINT – v. 33

There are a number of thoughts related to this passage about the time and participants. So let's consider for a few moments the accounts given in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Here are the three accounts from which we'll draw some thoughts.

**Matthew 9:14** “Then John's disciples came and asked Him, ‘How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’”

**Mark 2:18** “Now John's disciples and the Pharisees were fasting. Some people came and asked Jesus, ‘How is it that John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees are fasting, but Yours are not?’”

**Luke 5:33** “They said to Him, ‘John's disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but Yours go on eating and drinking.’”

There is some discussion about the timing of this event. Some scholars believe that it occurs as a follow up question from the call of Matthew and Jesus' response about calling the sinner to repentance. The question has to do with the word “they” in verse 33. **Who is it referring to? Is it referring to the Pharisees who were questioning Jesus' disciples in verse 30 or is it referring to John's disciples as Matthew points being the ones who question Jesus about fasting?** It could also be

an altogether different group who approach Jesus with the question as Mark's account seems to indicate. In **Mark 2** it seems that some people were making some general observations about the differences between the three groups as it relates to fasting. In that respect whether it is a question coming from John's disciples or from others in general, the question they pose could be taken as one of curiosity and meant only for clarification on the matter. If, on the other hand, it is the Pharisees asking the question, Luke insinuates a tone of criticism behind the question. The question even suggests that the disciples of John are in agreement with their own assessment of Jesus and that He doesn't care about keeping the Law.

Notice that whoever is asking the question it centers on the topic of fasting and the frequency of when fasting should occur. But to understand the question let's understand what the Bible has to say about fasting.

The word fast or fasting in Hebrew means to cover, as in to cover the mouth. In the Greek it means to abstain. In the early ages of mankind, man lived off whatever the land produced or the spoils of the chase. Because there was always an element of uncertainty about either, fasting was often compulsory. If you didn't have it, you couldn't eat it. Stemming from a purely superstitious ignorance, many pagan cultures assumed this was the divine will of the gods they served and so viewed fasting as a religious duty to appease their gods. They believed that the gods were jealous of the pleasures that man enjoyed so man fasted to gain their favor.

When it comes to the Bible and specifically to the Old Testament, there was only one fast that was sanctioned by God.

### **Leviticus 23:26-32**

Here, the Mosaic Law as directed by God called for one fast a year that would take place on the Day of Atonement. It was to be a day for all Israelites to

abstain from everything – eating, work, play – everything. It was a national day of mourning for their sin. It was a day in which the sins of the nation were atoned for by the sacrifice of the bull. That was the only occasion in which Jews were required to fast.

Now we find in the Old Testament other occasions when a fast was either called for or done spontaneously as a means of calling on God. In **I Samuel 1:7** we find that Hannah was in such distress over not having a child and the taunting of Peninnah that Hannah would fast. It seems that others also on an individual basis would fast of their own volition. It was not required but done voluntarily during hard and trying circumstances.

Fasting occurred because of great grief or bereavement. In **I Samuel 20:34** Jonathan was deeply grieved over his father's ill treatment toward David.

In **I Samuel 31:13**, when the people of Jabesh Gilead heard that King Saul was dead, they retrieved the body, buried the King and fasted.

In **II Samuel 1:12** when David and his men heard that King Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle, even though they had been hunted by the King, they mourned and fasted.

In **II Samuel 12:16-23** David fasted for the child born to Bathsheba in their sin hoping his actions would keep God from bringing judgment because of him.

Ahab fasted in **I Kings 21:27** when Elijah warned him of God's judgment on him for his wickedness.

**Ezra 10:6** speaks of fasting in times of grievous sins.

Or we read that to avoid great calamity, fasting was called for that lasted three days in **Esther 4:16**.

The Old Testament also records occasions when kings called on the entire nation to fast because of their sins. In their fast they were to humble themselves and repent in hopes that God's favor would rest on them and avert His judgment.

So, while fasting was only required once a year, many used it as an occasion to petition God for some need or for their own or national sin or some personal, tragic event that God might intervene.

Over time the practice of fasting took on an entirely different meaning. So it is that we come to our text. We read that John's disciples often fasted. How frequent we don't know for sure. We also see that the disciples of the Pharisees fasted. Now let me say here quickly that some people have a problem with this. They claim that Pharisees did not have disciples. They were guardians of the law; however, among their group there were also Scribes who were teachers of the law and generally teachers had disciples.

At any rate both groups fasted on a regular basis and Mark's account states that both groups were fasting. Both groups wanted to know why on a day they were fasting, the disciples of Jesus did not.

Remember that John the Baptist lived out in the wilderness and subsisted primarily on honey and wild locusts. More than likely by this time in the ministry of Jesus John was either in prison or had been killed so in either case it's possible their fast was a fast out of mourning for John or because of what John had taught them from his own example. We read in Scripture that Pharisees themselves had the practice of fasting twice a week. When the Pharisee went to the Temple we read in **Luke 18:11-12** **“The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’”**

Fasting, praying and the giving of alms were three major practical expressions of Jewish piety and in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus condemned the religious elite for their showy, hypocritical display. They would make their face look sad and gloomy. They would powder their face to give the appearance of being pale and gaunt.

The Old Testament only required fasting to take place one time a year, every other time was voluntary and spontaneous. Over time, the religious rulers added additional fasts. There were fasts from sunrise to sunset. There were fasts for 7 days and fasts for 3 weeks and fasts for 40 days. Then fasting was to occur on the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> day of the month and finally as we have noted fasting that occurred twice a week on Monday's and Thursdays.

Such frequency was to give the pretense of being pious, religious, and righteous. And so it was that on this occasion a group of people came to Jesus and asked the question: Why don't Your disciples fast like the disciples of John and the disciples of the Pharisees.

Here's the essence of what they were saying, whether they were curious or critical in the question. Your disciples aren't like us. They're different. They don't do what we do therefore they must not be as spiritual as we are. They don't take their spirituality seriously if You allow them to party all the time.

**Have you ever heard that before? Well, maybe not that question specifically?** But dollars to donuts, as Uncle Johnnie used to say, you probably heard something similar.

You don't dress like we do.

You don't attend 12 Bible studies each week like we do.

You don't use the Bible we do.

You don't underline or highlight in your Bible with fluorescent yellow, green or pink highlighters like we do.

You don't sing the right songs.

You don't play the right instruments.

You don't belong to the right denomination.

You don't (and you fill in the blank)

The question wasn't really about fasting, it was about activity they considered would bring spiritual favor. These folks were making an observation about the difference between themselves and Jesus' disciples. They were accusing Jesus and His disciples of refusing to fast. Had they really understood what was required by the Law this question would not have even come up for consideration. But as it was, because of their own personal practice and prejudice they had an opposing viewpoint regarding His disciples. **So who is right?**

The response Jesus gives is an obvious vindication of His disciples.

## II. AN OBVIOUS VINDICATION – v. 34-35

Now I want you to notice right away that Jesus does not condemn their practice of fasting or even the frequency. Instead He cuts right to the heart of the issue. Instead He vindicates the actions of His disciples with an obvious answer. He uses the example of a wedding feast. Now Mike and Hannah have a wedding coming up at the end of this year and the ceremony will be relatively short. I'm assuming there will be some type of reception following the ceremony. Most weddings whether small or large in scale typically last for a few hours then the happy couple is off to enjoy some honeymoon.

I love weddings. I like getting dressed up. I like everyone else getting dressed up. The bride and groom with their wedding party are dressed to the nine's. I like the reception that follows. I think I

have the best seat in the house because I am right there. Oh, you can see them smile and hear them exchange vows and see them exchange rings and light candles or pour out sand into one container. But I get to hear some of their little conversations when a soloist is singing or give a little wink or squeeze a hand when I say something in my remarks that come from our time of counseling. It's a real joy to celebrate with them and I can't imagine wanting to fast before, during or after. Soon enough the party is over for me and the other guests, but during it is a great celebration. I know it's still about seven months away for Mike and Hannah, but I'm looking forward to it with eager expectation.

In Biblical times weddings lasted for seven days or even longer. It was a happy occasion and couples didn't go on a honeymoon, the celebration with their friends was the honeymoon. It was a lot of fun and feasting. The wedding involved getting dressed up, the bride was adorned like a queen. She would bathe (that was probably pretty important). Her hair was braided with as many precious stones as the family possessed or could borrow. The girls who helped her dress, became her companions. The bridegroom also dressed up for the wedding including the wearing of jewelry (he probably took a bath too). He was accompanied by a friend. Dressing up for the wedding was so important that according to **Jeremiah 2:32** it was an unforgettable experience. Both bride and groom looked and acted like a king a queen.

Another important part of the wedding was the procession at the end of the day. The bridegroom set out from his home to get his bride from her parents' home. At this point she wore a veil and at some point the veil was removed and laid on the shoulder of the bridegroom, and a declaration was made: "the government shall be upon his shoulder." The procession then set out to where the couple would live and the dark roadway would be lit with oil lamps held by the wedding guests who lined the

streets. There was singing and music along the way and sometimes the bride herself would join in the dance.

At their new home they would sit under a canopy. From there they presided over all the festivities of the wedding feast at which time there was a great deal of eating and drinking. Remember that at the wedding feast of Cana Jesus provided 120 gallons of wine for the guests. Wealthy families often provided wedding garments for the guests.

A wedding ceremony was a big event and Jesus gives a sharp contrast between the sober event of the fast and the celebration of the wedding feast. Jesus uses this simple illustration to say that He was the bridegroom and as long as He remained on this earth it was appropriate for His disciples to enjoy life because there would come a day when He would leave and then they could fast. Feasting was the right thing to do while the bridegroom was present, after that fasting was appropriate. Besides, why should His disciples fast when Jesus was performing such great miracles.

One author suggests that Jesus was telling His critics that He came to make life a wedding feast. If you know the bridegroom, celebrate and share His joy. Life doesn't have to be lived by eating lemons.

Jesus gives an obvious vindication to their opposing viewpoint. To further support this Jesus gives two parables. They serve as an allegorical verification.

### III. AN ALLEGORICAL VERIFICATION – v. 36-39

Each parable speaks to the same thing and they are a series of contrasts.

There is the parable of the new patch and the old torn clothes.

There is the parable of the new wine and the old wineskin.

And then He concludes by making this statement:  
**“No one after drinking old wine wants the new, for he says, ‘The old is better.’”**

Jesus sums up His answer to the objections being raised by making a simple, yet profound statement. It seems to make sense that the old ways are better, but His statement challenges their thinking.

I can well remember growing up where Mom’s made clothes stretch. If you were the firstborn you were probably lucky enough to get all the new clothes, but even then and especially for boys who could be hard on clothes from all their adventurous playing, a hole might appear in a knee. Patches were then attached to the ripped area. How many remember when iron on patches came out and mothers didn’t have to sew on a new patch, they just had to plug in the iron and apply heat. Then mom’s got the idea to apply the patch while the pants were new so they would last longer.

Maybe Jesus was thinking back to His growing up years and the brothers who came after Him in the family and then watching His mother, Mary, adding patches but later being frustrated that the rips got bigger. He probably saw it in His travels, perhaps even among the group He was talking to. A patch that was supposed to help the problem often made it worse.

The same thought is brought out in regard to new wine and old wineskins. Old wineskins would have lost much of their pliability. They would become cracked with age and putting new wine that had just begun the fermentation process would burst the old wineskin when the gases from fermentation stretched the wineskin.

The old garment and the old wineskin are one and the same thought.

The new patch and the new wine are one and the same thought.

The old garment and the old wineskin refer to Judaism and their teachings.

The new patch and the new wine refer to Jesus and His teaching.

Jesus is saying that His way and the way of the Pharisees did not mix. Let me be clear that Jesus is not saying the Old Testament is no longer valid or outdated. Remember that Jesus did not come to do away with the law but to fulfill the law. He made that abundantly clear.

The Pharisees refused to accept Jesus and what He was teaching because they were quite happy with the system they had come to accept and assumed it was better. They wanted no part of what Jesus had to offer. They didn’t even want to try because they were quite satisfied with the old. They resisted change, change that would have given to them the same eternal life that we enjoy, change that would have given them internal peace, peace with God, peace and life they already thought they had. They were opposed to and prevented progress that Jesus was trying to teach. Last week we saw that Jesus objected to their religious prejudice because they associated with sinners. In today’s passage Jesus ignored their religious practices because they had become legalistic, empty rituals.

Jesus did not come to “patch up” Judaism by adding some new religious idea. The Judaism loved by the Pharisees was beyond repair. It was too far gone for reform. **One author states that it was steeped in “dead ritual, hairsplitting controversies and endless manmade rules and regulations. The Lord had no intention of pouring [anything new] into their old wineskins of legalism, prejudice and exclusivism.”**

Jesus brought an entirely new garment to give. His teachings came from the Word not from tradition. His teachings were new, vital, refreshing. Old Testament Judaism died the day Jesus was crucified and the Temple veil was torn. When the Temple was destroyed in 70 A.D. the Old Testament

sacrificial system was no longer able to be practiced because the altar was destroyed. The priesthood ceased. Everything about the Old Testament system ended. They could no longer practice their religion. In Christ though, the ceremonial law was fulfilled, Jesus brought something new. The Old Testament system was never intended to save anyone. It was just to be a picture of what Jesus taught and had to offer through His death and resurrection.

We are told that in Christ, not in the Old Testament are we made new and that the old has ceased. The gospel cannot be patched into a works based salvation. Paul addressed that multiple times when the Judaizers came into town and taught that you had to practice the rituals of the Old Testament as well as believe that Jesus died for sins. Paul would simply declare in **Ephesians 2:8-9** “**For by grace are you saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God – Not of works, lest any man should boast.**”

What they believed and taught clashed with what Jesus taught that we needed to believe.  
 The religious elite thought they were righteous.  
 Jesus preached repentance.  
 The religious elite were proud of their religious status.  
 Jesus preached humility.  
 The religious elite focused on the observance of external rituals.  
 Jesus focused on the heart.  
 The religious elite loved man’s approval.  
 Jesus offered approval by God.

Jesus came to do away with the old garment that is the legalistic, ritual laden traditions of the religious elite with its manmade regulations. That system overshadowed and replaced God’s law. He didn’t come to patch up their system. He came to replace their system with the garment of salvation. His gospel of grace does not mix with the gospel of works. The latter will not save anyone, but many are seduced by it and succumb to it. There is no

hope of salvation for anyone who is unwilling to hold on to their false religion.

I wonder if we have a patchwork religion where we add to what people need to do to be saved.

**Have we given an unwritten code of do’s and don’ts to people in order to accept them into our circle?**

**Do we force a form of legalism on others that is not intended by what the Bible teaches as a means of acceptance?**

**Do we judge others by what they wear, the length of their hair, what translation they use or don’t use?**

We tend to think that others are legalistic, and that we are not. The fact is that we tend to have our own standard by what is acceptable and judge people by those standards.

Legalism is highly contagious. It’s easy to get others to go along with “thus sayeth the Lord” even when it’s not in the Bible.

Legalism leads to hypocrisy. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for requiring people to adhere to rules they themselves didn’t keep.

From the example of the Pharisees, we see that legalism can take a vibrant faith and make it dull and lifeless. It can sap joy and stifle spiritual growth in an individual.

Legalism produces self-righteousness instead of humility; judgment instead of grace. For example, there are some who on occasion like to raise your hands when you sing. If a visitor came in and witnessed that would they conclude that we were a charismatic church and not come back? What would you assume if I were to do that? Would you make a similar assumption about me? What would you think if I told you that there are times when I have been drawn into worshipping the Lord in such a way that I wanted to raise a hand, but I did the Baptist salute instead by stuffing my hands in my

pockets because I didn't know how others would respond?

Legalism can stifle an expression of worship and greatly diminish spiritual growth.

Legalism brings divisiveness instead of unity. A holier than thou attitude turns people off and pushes people away.

Let us learn from Jesus through this passage how careful we must be and how easy it is to become legalistic in our lives and church. Let us refuse to judge by externals. Let us reject false authority. Let us put off religious rules that have no basis in God's Word.

A bishop once came to King Louis XI of France and told the king that he should make an iron cage for all those who did not think like them, an iron cage in which the captive could neither lie down nor stand straight up. The king agreed and had it constructed. A short time later, the bishop offended the King and for 14 years he was locked in that same cage.

That's legalism and Jesus teaches us that it's okay to enjoy life without being tied to a list of do's and don'ts that are not founded in the Bible.

Jesus came to set us free, not free to do what we want, but free not to be bound by rules that we set up thinking that in some way they make us more spiritual than others who don't adhere to them.

**What old rules might you be holding onto today?**