

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

Sundays @ 10:00 a.m. Info: (651) 283-0568 Discipleship Training Ministries, Inc www.dtminc.org Today's Date: April 19, 2009

## Be Careful Mixing the New With the Old

by Dan Trygg

“And it came about that He was reclining *at the table* in his house, and many tax-gatherers and sinners were dining with Jesus and His disciples; for there were many of them, and they were following Him. <sup>16</sup> And when the scribes of the Pharisees saw that He was eating with the sinners and tax-gatherers, they *began* saying to His disciples, ‘Why is He eating and drinking with tax-gatherers and sinners?’ <sup>17</sup> And hearing this, Jesus said to them, ‘It is not those who are healthy who need a physician, but those who are sick; I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners.’ <sup>18</sup> And John’s disciples and the Pharisees were fasting; and they came and said to Him, ‘Why do John’s disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?’ <sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to them, ‘While the bridegroom is with them, the attendants of the bridegroom do not fast, do they? So long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast. <sup>20</sup> But the days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in that day. <sup>21</sup> No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment; otherwise the patch pulls away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear results. <sup>22</sup> And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the wine will burst the skins, and the wine is lost, and the skins *as well*; but *one puts* new wine into fresh wineskins.’”

Mark 2:15-22

**Do you remember the context? Earlier that day, as Jesus passed by his toll booth, He had called Levi, the tax collector, to follow Him.** Levi had immediately got up from his tax booth, left everything, and went after Jesus. He was so overjoyed at his new found freedom from past condemnation, and his new hope for the future, that **Levi made preparations to celebrate this momentous change in his life. He invited all his friends and associates,** the people who were seen as notorious sinners by most of the religious people of the day, ...other tax collectors, other collaborators with the Romans, prostitutes and other “fast” or disreputable women who had frequented the parties and social gatherings of such despised, notorious men like Levi. While he had been rejected by the mainstream society, these people had become his social network, his family and closest friends, ...an underworld of people who had been pushed away and marginalized by most people, but who had accepted and befriended one another. **Levi had something wonderful to celebrate, and he wanted to share it with the people who he loved and cared about.**

**Jesus’ presence at this dinner party was scandalous in the minds of the Pharisees.** They were all about trying to maintain personal purity. They would never *enter* such a “den of iniquity” to fellowship or eat with sinners like these! **Jesus, on the other hand, was quite comfortable there. He loved the people, even though He was not at all oblivious to their reputations or their lifestyles.** He knew that if He could win their *hearts*, they would be interested in following Him, and those negative behaviors would eventually fall away. Because they had been hurt or disillusioned by mainstream society, or the religious establishment, they had rejected the moral values that had been put upon them, and had given themselves over to sensuality, in order to try to find something to satisfy the longings of their heart. **Jesus knew that what they truly longed for could be found only in relationship to God,** but not through some empty religious rituals. **He saw Himself as a Physician who could help those who had been affected by evil,** however that may have come into their experience. They needed a Friend and a Healer, not a Judge or Know-it-all.

**This first objection had come from the Pharisees, but now they were joined by a second group in making another objection.** The alliance of these two groups is surprising, because they had no love for each other. Jesus’ behavior, and that of His disciples, was raising the hackles of people in *both* groups, so these former enemies found themselves aligned together in opposition to Jesus. **Who were these other people? None other than the disciples of John the Baptist!**

John Himself was in prison, but he had set in motion a religious revival movement, which was still being promoted by his followers. **John was a highly disciplined, deeply devoted ascetic. That is, he had given up much of what were common distractions and comforts of life in order to consecrate himself to God and serve Him.** Although his heart was pure, and he came to be one of the most powerful men of God in history, **his methods were not unlike what the Pharisees had advocated.** Remember what their name, “pharisee”, meant? It meant “separated one”. They, by their religious practices and attention to detail in their lifestyles were trying to separate themselves to God. **John, however, was even more extreme in his methodology and lifestyle choices than they were.** Did the Pharisees try to separate themselves unto God? You couldn’t get more “separated to God” than John was! Did the Pharisees avoid associations with sinful people? John had gone so far as to move *away* from people altogether, living as a hermit in the desert. Did the Pharisees fast and pray? John’s *entire diet* spoke of his devotion to God, eating only locusts and wild honey. We don’t know what his practice may have been regarding fasting, but it is clear from this passage that he had taught his disciples to fast. **The main difference between the two groups was that the Pharisees were still living within mainstream religious society, while John had moved away to the wilderness, separating himself almost**

**entirely from society.** Modern day counterparts for the Pharisees may be certain legalistic, Bible-thumper Christians, people who wear a lot of religious paraphernalia and readily quote the Bible, and who are very rigid and judgmental toward others, but are still hypocrites in certain areas. They especially are lacking in love, mercy and have little concern for social justice, looking down their noses at the poor and broken. Extreme ascetics exist today but are little heard from, for the most part. They tend to keep to themselves, so they attract little attention.

**What was this second objection, something both Pharisees and disciples of John questioned Jesus about? It had to do with fasting.** In the Mosaic Law, there was only one day each year when God required the Jews to fast, the Day of Atonement (Lev. 16:29,31; 23:27-32; Num. 29:7). During the exile of the Jews in Babylon, there were four other fasts which the Jews established in remembrance of some of the national calamities of their history (Zech. 7:5; 8:19). These had fallen into disuse by most Jews by the time of Jesus. The Pharisees, however, were known to fast twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays (cf. Lk. 18:12). Evidently, the disciples of John did the same, at least Mark lets us know that they were fasting on *this* day. So, **the offense was not only that Jesus was hanging out with sinners, but also that He and His disciples were eating on a day when others commonly recognized as devoted to God were fasting.** Thus the question was put to Jesus, “Why do John's disciples and the disciples of the Pharisees fast, but Your disciples do not fast?” There was an obvious discrepancy here in religious practice, and those who were abstaining from food wanted to know the reason why this was so.

**At this point, it would be appropriate to comment a bit on what fasting was all about.** If you were to look up the passages regarding fasting on the Day of Atonement, you will notice that none of them specifically mentions fasting. **The language means to “humble yourself” (NASB) or “deny yourself” (NIV), or even “afflict your soul” (KJV). Fasting was a commonly understood way of expressing one’s humility.** If you look at Isa. 58:3 you can see the association between fasting and “humbling ourselves” (NASB & NIV), or “afflicted our souls” (KJV). The idea was that denying food or drink from yourself was a way to show, and remind *yourself*, of your weakness and humility before God. **The entire purpose was to make you lowly-minded, humble and meek.** Unfortunately, when this practice is separated from this original purpose, ...when it becomes a ritual or religious act apart from this inner reminder of weakness and lowliness..., it can become a badge of spirituality, a practice that actually *feeds pride* and arrogance toward others. This was the problem that Isaiah addresses in the 58<sup>th</sup> chapter, **“What is a fast that pleases God?” Not a religious practice separated and compartmentalized from the rest of a person’s life.** A fast observed by people living lives in blatant disregard of issues of justice, integrity and helping the poor and oppressed is a *mockery* in God’s sight. **To fast, and still live for self-interest and self-gratification does not please God.** To fast so that you can be perceived as righteous in order to pull rank on others is equally offensive to God.

**Jesus’ response to the question, “Why do Your disciples not fast?” entailed three separate word pictures.**

The first response was, **“As long as the bridegroom is with his wedding party, they cannot fast.** The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast.” **What is He saying? This was a day of celebration, not for fasting.** Moreover, He is like the bridegroom. The celebration revolved around Him being with them. It was appropriate for them to celebrate, and enjoy His company while He was with them. **The word picture would have clarified the issue for everyone. No one would dream of fasting at a wedding feast. This was even better than a wedding feast.** Note, however, that Jesus did not exclude the need for fasting. The day will come when He will be taken from them. **Jesus indicates that expects His disciples will fast.** By saying this, He recognized the value of this spiritual discipline. It is not a legalistic ritual, however, to be mechanically performed without regard for one’s surroundings. Fasting is for humbling oneself and drawing focused attention toward God. **When God does things worth celebrating in your life, rejoice in the Lord!** He *has* drawn near to you with blessing. It is a time to celebrate that. To *not* celebrate is almost to *disregard* His blessings. **A legalistic observance of discipline can be counter-productive,** if you follow your schedule to the exclusion of what God is really doing in your life.

The other two responses seem to go together. **You can’t always mix old and new.** In the first example, a piece of unshrunk cloth will cause more damage if sewn over a hole in an old garment. When the patch shrinks, it will tear out a bigger hole than the original. The final example was of putting new wine into old wineskins. As the wine ferments, it produces gas, which a new wineskin can stretch to accommodate, but which would burst an old wineskin. **The point is that people often get into old, familiar patterns of thinking and living, and often cannot or will not adjust to the new activity of God.** Like the disciples of John and the Pharisees, we can find ourselves *opposing* the work of God’s Spirit, because it is not what we have grown accustomed to. We do not recognize the new thing that God is doing, and respond to Him appropriately. **We can be offended over things that are not wrong, just different.**