

Mark 2:18

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast: and they come and say unto him, Why do the disciples of John and of the Pharisees fast, but thy disciples fast not?

Analysis

This verse presents a question about fasting practices that exposes different spiritual approaches. 'The disciples of John and of the Pharisees used to fast' (imperfect tense indicating regular practice). Both groups emphasized ascetic discipline—John's disciples preparing for the coming kingdom, Pharisees demonstrating piety. The questioners contrast this with Jesus' disciples who don't fast, implying spiritual laxity. Jesus' response (vv. 19-20) redefines fasting's purpose: not mechanical ritual but appropriate response to circumstances. Reformed theology emphasizes that spiritual disciplines serve gospel purposes, not merit-earning works. Fasting expresses dependence on God and mourning over sin, but can become empty formalism.

Historical Context

Jewish law required fasting only on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16:29-31), but pious Jews added voluntary fasts. Pharisees fasted twice weekly (Monday and Thursday). John's disciples likely fasted in mourning and preparation, especially after John's imprisonment. Their ascetic practice reflected the Baptist's austere wilderness lifestyle. Early Christians adopted fasting as spiritual discipline (Acts 13:2-3; 14:23), but Jesus rejected fasting as religious requirement or merit badge.

Related Passages

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Study Questions

1. How do you discern between spiritual disciplines that foster genuine godliness and empty rituals?
2. What does the 'bridegroom' metaphor reveal about Christian balance between joy and sobriety?
3. Are your spiritual practices motivated by love for God or desire to earn His approval?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἦσαν οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου καὶ οἱ τῶν Φαρισαίων
And used G3588 **disciples** of John And G3588 G3588 **of the Pharisees**
G2532 G2258 G3101 G2491 G2532 G5330

νηστεύουσιν καὶ ἔρχονται καὶ λέγουσιν αὐτῷ Διατί^{τι}
fast And **they come** And **say** unto him **Why do**
G3522 G2532 G2064 G2532 G3004 G846 G1302

οἱ μαθηταὶ Ἰωάννου καὶ οἱ τῶν Φαρισαίων
G3588 **disciples** of John And G3588 G3588 **of the Pharisees**
G3101 G2491 G2532 G5330

νηστεύουσιν οἱ δὲ σοὶ μαθηταὶ οὐ νηστεύουσιν
fast G3588 **but** G1161 **thy** G4674 **disciples** G3101 **not** G3756 **fast**
G3522

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 6:18 (Parallel theme): That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.

Luke 18:12 (Parallel theme): I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

Matthew 6:16 (Parallel theme): Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces, that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward.

From KJV Study • kjvstudy.org