

Matthew 9:14

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Then came to him the disciples of John, saying, Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?

Analysis

John's disciples question Jesus about fasting: 'Why do we and the Pharisees fast oft, but thy disciples fast not?' (διατι ημεις και οι Φαρισαιοι νηστευομεν πολλα οι δε μαθηται σου ου νηστεουσιν). Fasting was central to Jewish piety, practiced twice weekly by Pharisees (Luke 18:12) plus special occasions. John's disciples practiced rigorous asceticism following their teacher's example. Jesus' disciples, by contrast, feast. The question reveals confusion about appropriate religious expression. Jesus will answer by distinguishing between old covenant preparation and new covenant celebration. The question assumes fasting demonstrates superior spirituality. Jesus challenges this assumption, teaching that external practices matter less than the heart's orientation and recognition of God's redemptive presence.

Historical Context

Jewish fasting had multiple purposes: mourning, repentance, petition, and preparation for God's action. The Pharisees fasted Mondays and Thursdays. John the Baptist's ascetic lifestyle (Matthew 3:4) naturally led his disciples to practice similar disciplines. First-century Judaism emphasized fasting as demonstrating devotion and humbling oneself before God. Jesus doesn't condemn fasting (Matthew 6:16-18) but insists it serve appropriate purposes. Fasting expresses longing for God's presence; when the Bridegroom is present, fasting is inappropriate. Early Christians fasted (Acts 13:2-3, 14:23) but recognized it as means, not end.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. What is the proper role of spiritual disciplines like fasting in Christian life?
2. How do we avoid legalism while maintaining spiritual practices?
3. What does this passage teach about the difference between old and new covenant spirituality?

Interlinear Text

Τότε προσέρχονται αὐτῷ οἱ μαθηταί Ἰωάννου λέγοντες
Then **came** **to him** G5119 G4334 G846 G3588 **disciples** **of John** **saying**
G3101 G2491 G3004

Διατί ἡμεῖς καὶ οἱ Φαρισαῖοι νηστεύουσιν πολλά οἱ
Why **do we** **and** G3588 **the Pharisees** **fast** **oft** G1302 G2249 G2532 G5330 G3522 G4183 G3588

δὲ μαθηταί σου οὐ νηστεύουσιν
but **disciples** **thy** **not** **fast**
G1161 G3101 G4675 G3756 G3522

Additional Cross-References

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.

John 3:25 (References John): Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying.

