

New Cloth (Luke 5:33-36)

³³[Pharisees and teachers of the law] said to [Jesus], “John’s disciples often fast and pray, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours go on eating and drinking.” ³⁴Jesus answered, “Can you make the guests of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? ³⁵But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast.” ³⁶He told them this parable: “No one tears a patch from a new garment and sews it on an old one. If he does, he will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old.”

1. At Mount Sinai, God established a covenant with his Old Testament people, the Israelites. What do the following passages tell us about that covenant?

“[The LORD said,] ‘If you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation’ ” (Exodus 19:5,6).

“Therefore no one will be declared righteous in [God’s] sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin” (Romans 3:20).

“Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ” (Colossians 2:16,17).

2. As part of the Sinaitic covenant, God commanded that his people fast on the annual Day of Atonement. According to the following verse, for what purpose had God prescribed fasting?

“ ‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning’ ” (Joel 2:12).

3. In his parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus said, *“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 . . .’ ” (Luke 18:11,12).* Into what had the practice of fasting degenerated?

4. On the night before his death, Jesus said, “*Drink from it [the cup], all of you. This is my blood of the [new] covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins*” (Matthew 26:27,28). Explain the new covenant. How does it differ from the old?

5. Who are the “guests” and “bridegroom” of verse 34? What is Jesus saying in this verse?

6. When it comes to mending and patching, what does every experienced seamstress understand?

7. Check and discuss each correct conclusion to the following sentence: With his picture of sewing a new patch on an old garment, Jesus is teaching us that:

___ God likes fashion-conscious people.

___ it is difficult to add the new covenant of grace to the old covenant of the law.

___ mixing the two covenants can be tricky business and must be done carefully.

___ it is impossible to add the new covenant of grace to the old covenant of the law.

8. Synergism is from the Greek and means “working together.” When applied to salvation, it means that we work together with God for eternal life. What makes this thought so appealing to us and to others?

9. Can the following comment be understood correctly? Can it be misunderstood? Explain.

“I’m certain that I’m going to heaven. Jesus is my Savior, and I go to church every week.”

Helps: (1) The Sinaitic covenant was two-sided: If the Israelites obeyed the Lord’s laws and commands, then the Lord would be their God forever. The Israelites, however, broke the covenant through their disobedience and sin. Nonetheless, the stipulations of the law still served the good purpose of providing Israel with a shadow or picture of the promised Savior from sin. (2) Fasting was to be a sign and expression of true repentance, of heartfelt sorrow over sin, of the need for the Lord’s mercy, and of trust in the promised Savior. (3) Rather than a sign of repentance, fasting had become an act by which one earned God’s favor—a meritorious work—prompting self-righteousness and a feeling of moral superiority. (4) Note that many ancient manuscripts, as well as the gospel of Saint Luke, include the word new to Jesus’ words of institution. Unlike the old covenant, which was two-sided and dependent in part on Israel’s obedience, the new covenant is one-sided. It is a covenant of pure grace in which God freely promises and gives forgiveness, life, and salvation through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. (5) It would be improper and completely out of place for the guests of the bridegroom, that is, the followers of Christ, to fast and express sorrow while with him. Jesus has established a new covenant of peace, joy, and life. Feasting, not fasting! (6) A patch from a new piece of cloth will shrink when washed and will make the original hole even larger. (7) Because they are fundamentally opposed, it is impossible to add the new covenant to the old. Either salvation is a free gift of God’s grace or it is to be earned through obedience to the law; it cannot be both. Neither is it possible to mix the two to any degree without nullifying and destroying both. (8) It is called the *opinio legis*—the natural opinion in all people that through obedience to God’s law, through good works, godly decisions, and God-pleasing living, we can gain God’s favor. Naturally, this opinion will foster feelings of accomplishment and self-esteem. (9) The statement can be understood correctly. Regular worship (as well as prayer, good works, etc.) is a fruit and sign of saving faith in Jesus. Yet this statement may also be evidence of a synergistic viewpoint. Synergism is the false belief that we are saved by a combination of faith in Christ plus our good works.