

New Wine

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What do a patch of fabric, a leather bag, and wine have in common? They are all used by Jesus in three related parables—parables that Jesus used to tell us some very important truths about the kingdom of God. These parables deal with a subject that affects both the things we believe and the life we as Christians are to live. They are parables that, if rightly understood, will help us understand the Bible and help us grow and mature as Christians until we come to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. But misunderstanding these parables can stunt our spiritual growth.

In Luke 5, beginning with verse 36, Jesus said, “No one puts a patch of a new garment on an old one; otherwise both the new garment tears, and also the patch that was taken out of the new garment does not match with the old garment” (*English Majority Text Version* throughout, unless otherwise noted).

This is the first parable. Put simply, it doesn't work to cut a piece of cloth out of a new article of clothing to patch an old one. If you do this, you ruin the new clothing by putting a hole in it, and the new patch will not match the old clothing. Also, as Matthew 9:16 makes clear, the old cloth will eventually tear away from the new patch. So, you ruin both the old and the new garments. But, Jesus is not concerned with telling us something about patching clothes.

He continues in the next two verses to explain the same principle with the second, but similar, parable. “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins; otherwise the new wine will burst the wineskins and it will be spilled, and the wineskins will be ruined. But one must put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved together.”

Some of you might know that new wine gives off carbon dioxide gas. You might also know that new leather will stretch, but only to an extent. So, at the time Jesus was speaking, new wine was put into bags made out of new leather. The King James Version says “bottles,” but it doesn't mean glass bottles. It means these leather wine bags. As the wine gave off its gas, the leather would blow up like a balloon and stretch. As the wine aged, it would stop giving off gas, and it could be kept in the now old, stretched out wineskin.

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But if someone were to put new wine into one of these already stretched-out, old wineskins, what would happen? The gas from the wine would cause the old wineskin to burst. The wine would be spilled and the wineskin would be ruined.

Was Jesus trying to tell us how to make wine? No, Jesus was using common knowledge about winemaking to teach a spiritual principle. He then gives a third parable. "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

Wine connoisseurs know that old wine, aged wine, is better than new. After drinking aged wine, new wine is unpleasant. A person who has drunk old wine does not want to drink new wine.

So, what was Jesus getting at when He gave these parables? Let's look at the context. What had just happened before Jesus spoke these words?

The Context Before

Let's go back to verse 27 in Luke 5. We see that Jesus called Levi to follow Him. Levi, by the way, is also called Matthew—the very same Matthew who wrote the Gospel of Matthew. Matthew, or Levi, was a tax collector. The tax collectors collected money for the Roman occupational government. This made them very unpopular with the people. Not only did they collect taxes from the people, but also these taxes went to the Romans. The Pharisees considered this tax collecting for the Romans a sinful occupation, so, naturally, they did not hold Levi in very high esteem.

Now we see here in Luke 5 that after Jesus called Levi to follow Him, Levi held a banquet for Jesus, and Levi's fellow tax collectors came.

The Pharisees were suspicious of Jesus. They were looking for ways to accuse Him. So, they asked Jesus why He eats with tax collectors and sinners, the real low life of Jewish society. Jesus responded that, just as it is the sick who need a physician, He has come to call the sinners—not the righteous—to repentance. This is why he spends time with the sinners. By the way, Jesus was not meeting with sinners where sinful activity was taking place. God does not call us to evangelize the lost by going into bars or brothels or wild parties. We would risk, not only our reputation, but also Christ's reputation by being seen in such places. As Paul tells us in 1 Thessalonians 5:22, we are to, "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (King James Version,

hereafter KJV). But Levi's banquet was an ordinary, respectable activity.

Next, to nitpick even more, the Pharisees and disciples of John the Baptist asked Jesus why the Pharisees' disciples and John's disciples often fast, but Jesus' disciples do not. Fasting was considered a religious duty. By saying this, they were trying to imply that Jesus and his followers weren't as spiritual as John the Baptist and the Pharisees. Jesus answered them with a question: "Can you make the groomsmen fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days."

In other words, while Jesus was on the earth, it was a time for celebrating. After His death, then they will fast.

So, the Pharisees were trying to get Him in trouble for not living up to their standards of righteousness. They looked down on Him because He socialized with sinners and His disciples didn't fast. Jesus responded by saying new cloth patches tear old garments, and new wine bursts old wineskins.

The Context After

Right after this, in Luke 6, the Pharisees again criticized Jesus, this time because His disciples had picked some grain on the Sabbath. The disciples had picked the grain because they had nothing else to eat. But this did not figure into the Pharisees' way of thinking. Jesus responds with examples that show that mercy is more important than the legal question they have raised. Anyway, Jesus was the Lord of the Sabbath. I think you can see the general drift of what is going on. The Pharisees kept niggling with Jesus over points of tradition or points of law, and Jesus told them they were wrong.

Luke next recounts how, on another Sabbath, the Pharisees again tried to accuse Jesus, this time for healing on the Sabbath. But Jesus once again rebuts them by saying that doing good is more important than their Sabbath restrictions.

Do you see how all of these verses, going all the way back into Luke 5, are related? They all deal with Jesus correcting the Pharisees' worldview. They saw things one way; Jesus saw things another way.

Notice what comes next in Luke 6. Jesus calls His disciples and then delivers what has been called the Sermon on the Plain. This is either

Luke's account of Matthew's Sermon on the Mount, or it is a different sermon covering many of the same points as the Sermon on the Mount. Personally, I think it is the Sermon on the Mount. What I think happened is that when Jesus came down into the plain with His disciples and saw the multitudes, He went up the mountain. If you read Matthew 5:1 right after Luke 6:19, it makes perfect sense. The Gospels often are additive in this way. What one writer has left out, another has included. Just put them together. Anyway, what is really important to realize is that this sermon, and the longer version found in Matthew, is the most important sermon in the entire Bible.

Even a quick look at this sermon tells us that Jesus is here introducing something totally new and radical. I am not overstating the case. What Jesus is saying here is radical. First, He tells those who are poor, hungry, and hated that they are blessed. Then He says woe to those who are rich, full, and well spoken of. Talk about turning things upside down!

Next, Jesus tells us to love, bless, and pray for our enemies, to turn the other cheek and even to give to someone who takes from us. Then He gives us the Golden Rule: "And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise."

He continues in this vein, and then He tells us to, "Give, and it shall be given to you: good measure, pressed down and shaken and running over they shall give into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it shall be measured back to you."

Jesus then switches gears a little. He gives a parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into the ditch?" Who are these blind leaders of the blind that Jesus is talking about? Who does Jesus have in mind? Chapter 15 of Matthew answers the question without any doubt. These blind leaders were the Pharisees.

Yes, Jesus was saying that the Pharisees, who had been nitpicking with Him over tradition and points of the law, the Pharisees who would strain at a gnat and swallow a camel, were blind. They were spiritually blind. Why? Why were the Pharisees spiritually blind? Jesus told the Pharisee, Nicodemus, in John 3, verse 3, that unless "someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." The Pharisees were not born again. They could not see the kingdom of God, even when it was right in their midst, as Jesus told them it was in Luke 17:21. They were spiritually blind and did not understand what Jesus was doing. He was introducing something new, something radically new right before their eyes, but they didn't see it! There in His ministry, and especially

in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus was introducing something the Pharisees could not see because they were not born again. What could they not see because they were not born again? The kingdom of God! Unless "someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

The Parables Explained

So, now, let's go back to the three parables. What is the new garment that should not be patched to the old garment? It is the kingdom of God. What is the new wineskin, as opposed to the old wineskin? It is the kingdom of God.

What is the new wine that should not be put into an old wineskin? It is the teachings and laws of the kingdom of God. What is the new wine that people who are used to the old wine don't like? It is the teachings and laws of the kingdom of God.

But what is the old garment, what is the old wineskin, what is the old wine? To answer this, I am going to turn to the Old Testament.

In the Old Testament, the focus was on the kingdom of *Israel*. But like so many things in the Old Testament, the kingdom of Israel was only a type or shadow of the reality that would come in the New Testament. You could say that the kingdom of Israel was a picture of something in the New Testament. What did the kingdom of Israel picture? It pictured the kingdom of God. What was the old garment of the parable? It was the kingdom of Israel. What was the old wineskin that could not hold the new wine—the teachings—that Jesus brought? It was the kingdom of Israel.

During Jesus' ministry, His followers thought that at any time, He was going to restore the kingdom of Israel. They thought He was going to throw off the yoke of Roman occupation and become king of a restored kingdom of Israel. They didn't understand that Jesus hadn't come to re-establish the old kingdom of Israel, which was only a shadow. He had come to do something totally new. He had come to establish the kingdom of God. They were even thinking this way during the time after Jesus resurrection, but before Pentecost. Notice Acts 1, beginning with verse 6: "Therefore, when they had come together, they asked Him, saying, 'Lord, will You at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?' And He said to them, 'It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father has placed in His own authority.'"

In other words, it is as if He was saying, You don't know what season it is. It's not the time for the kingdom of Israel. The season for the

kingdom of Israel is past. Then He said, "But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." It is as if He had said, You asked about the kingdom of Israel. The time for that is over. Instead, you are going to receive power to spread the kingdom of God over the whole earth.

The contrast is always between the old and the new. The old was passing away, and the new was coming. The old was the kingdom of Israel, and the new is the kingdom of God. And, under these two main headings—"kingdom of Israel" and "kingdom of God"—we see more things that are old and new. For example, the people of the kingdom of Israel were the Israelites, also called the Jews. In the kingdom of Israel, the Jews were God's people. In the kingdom of God, people of all nations—Jews and Gentiles alike—can be God's people. We call these people the church. ("Church" is a mistranslation of the Greek *ekklēsia*, which literally means "called out." People were citizens of the kingdom of Israel by being born into it, and this was signified in males by circumcision. But the citizens of the kingdom of God are born spiritually (born again, see John 3:3), signified by a profession of faith in water baptism, and called out of all of the nations of this dark world into the light of God's kingdom. See, for example, 1 Peter 2:9, where the words "called" and "out" are the root words of *ekklēsia*.)

What Established Israel

And I also want to point out what established Israel as God's people. If we know what established Israel as God's people, we may see what establishes the church as God's people today.

Notice what God said to the children of Israel right before giving them the Ten Commandments. This is in Exodus 19 and verses 5 and 6: "Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel" (KJV). What established Israel as God's people? The covenant He made with them. God made a covenant with Israel, and this covenant made them "a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation."

Now listen in Deuteronomy 5, verses 1-3, to what Moses said later in rehearsing the events that led to the establishment of Israel as a nation before God:

And Moses called all Israel, and said unto them, Hear, O Israel, the statutes and judgments which I speak in your ears this day, that ye may learn them, and keep, and do them. The LORD our God made a covenant with us in Horeb. [Horeb is another name for Mount Sinai, where God gave the Ten Commandments.] The LORD made not this covenant with our fathers, but with us, even us, who are all of us here alive this day.

KJV

Now I want to point out something here. Moses said that God did not make this covenant with the fathers. "The fathers" here refers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God did not make this covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Yes, He made *a* covenant with them. But He did not make *this* covenant with them. *This* covenant was not the same as *that* covenant. This covenant was not part of some one, continuous, eternal covenant that stretches from Adam until now. The Bible never speaks of such a covenant, and here we see Moses saying that this covenant given at Mount Sinai was not the same covenant as that made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Furthermore, by saying this, Moses was saying that God made this covenant with Israel. He did not say that God made this covenant with the Canaanites, or with the Egyptians, or with the Greeks, or with the Romans, or with the English, or with the Scottish, or with the Dutch, or with the Americans. God did not make this covenant with anyone but Israel. The Old Covenant containing the Mosaic law was made with ancient, physical Israel.

Now some will say that the church is Israel, so God also made this covenant with the church. But that is not quite correct. Many people glibly say that the church is Israel. But this is imprecise and leads to many problems. Here is the correct relationship between Israel and the church, so please note it well. Israel was a type or shadow of the church. The church is the antitype or reality that was pictured by Israel. Old Testament Israel was a physical nation, but the church is a spiritual nation; it is spiritual Israel. As spiritual Israel, the church is not subject to the same covenant as physical Israel. I want to repeat that: As spiritual Israel, the church is not subject to the same covenant as physical Israel.

Physical Israel is only a shadow of the church. The covenant that God established with this shadow is, itself, also merely a shadow. A shadow of what? A shadow of the covenant God established with the church. The Old Covenant is a shadow of the New Covenant. And, again, we

see the contrast between the old and the new, the old that cannot contain the new. It is also the Old Covenant with its laws that the Pharisees preferred to the New Covenant Jesus was introducing. What was the old wine of the parable? It was the laws of the kingdom of Israel, the laws of the Old Covenant.

Quickly, I want to point out something in Deuteronomy 4. Moses is telling Israel to heed the statutes and judgments, the laws and commandments that God gave them that made them a nation. So, again, he is talking about the covenant. I want to particularly point out verse 13, where Moses says that God "declared unto you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, even ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone" (KJV). Moses here equates the covenant with the Ten Commandments. Yes, there were other statutes and judgments and commandments involved, but central to this covenant God made with Israel were the Ten Commandments. Central to this covenant that was only a shadow of the covenant God made with the church are the Ten Commandments. Bear this in mind as we go on. The Ten Commandments are part of the shadowy Old Covenant, but there is a real counterpart to them in the New Covenant.

The Church Established by the New Covenant

Now, let's read some further revelations in Hebrews 8 and 9. I encourage you to read these chapters completely, but for the sake of time, I am going to start with Hebrews 8:7: "For if that first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for a second." What is the "first covenant"?

Hebrews 9, verses 1-4, say:

Then indeed, even the first covenant had ordinances of divine service and the earthly sanctuary. For a tabernacle was prepared: the first part, in which were both the lampstand and the table and the showbread, which is called the holy place; and after the second veil, the part of the tabernacle which is called the Holy of Holies, having a golden altar, and the ark of the covenant having been overlaid on all sides with gold, in which were a golden jar having the manna, and the rod of Aaron which budded, and the tablets of the covenant.

What is the first covenant? Obviously, it is the covenant that included the tablets of the covenant, otherwise known as the Ten

Commandments written on the tablets of stone, and which we just saw, Moses equated with the covenant given at Mount Sinai.

Going back to Hebrews 8, beginning with verse 8, we read:

For finding fault with them, He says: "Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant which I made with their fathers, in the day when I took their hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt. Because they did not persevere in My covenant, and I disregarded them, says the LORD."

In this case, "fathers" refers to the Israelites whom God led out of Egypt. Notice that the New Covenant is not according to the covenant made on Mount Sinai. This is a quote from Jeremiah 31, and it uses Old Testament language. It says that God would establish the New Covenant with the "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah." The "house of Israel" and the "house of Judah" were the two kingdoms of the nation of Israel. But, remember that Israel was a shadow, or picture, or type of the church. By referring to the "house of Israel" and "house of Judah," God was saying that He would establish the New Covenant with the church.

Continuing now with Hebrews 8 in verse 10:

"For this is the covenant which I shall covenant with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind, and I shall inscribe them upon their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. And by no means will they teach each one his fellow citizen, and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their lawless deeds I shall by no means remember anymore." By the saying "new," He has made the first obsolete. And the one becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish.

Again, God was contrasting the old that was passing away with the new. And, with the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem in AD 70—that is, at the end of 40 years of testing Israel after Jesus' ministry—the Old Covenant completely ended. The church is established under the New Covenant.

We just read in Hebrews 8:10 that, under the New Covenant, God would put His laws in our minds and hearts. There is only one way that God's laws can be in our minds and hearts. That is through being born again. There is only one group of people who truly know of God from the least of them to the greatest. It is no physical nation on earth. This can only be referring to God's spiritual nation, the church.

So, going back to the parables once again, what was Jesus getting at when He said not to take a piece from a new article of clothing and use it to patch an old one? What was His point when He said not to put new wine into an old wineskin? When we looked at the context of these parables, we saw how they are surrounded by Scriptures in which Jesus tells the Pharisees they are wrong about something and then corrects them. And we see that it leads to His giving the Sermon on the Mount.

Okay, so what is the principle Jesus was giving by these parables? What is this information that Jesus is giving us that will help us rightly divide the Word of God? Jesus was giving us the principle that the old and the new do not mix. Specifically, although they are related as type and antitype, shadow and reality, the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of God are not the same. They must not be mixed or confused. Likewise, the Old Covenant and the New Covenant do not mix. We cannot just take something from the New Covenant and try to patch it into the Old Covenant. The New Covenant is not merely a patch, or just a new administration as some say, that can be patched onto the Old Covenant. That directly contradicts Jesus' teachings. We can't take Jesus' new teachings, the new laws to govern Christian living that He gave in the Sermon on the Mount and put them into the Old Covenant like putting new wine into an old wineskin. The Old Covenant cannot contain Jesus' new teachings and laws. It would burst.

Why am I telling you this? As a warning that there are those who will try to tell you just the opposite. They say that the New Covenant and the Old Covenant are just different administrations of the same covenant. They take laws from the Old Covenant and try to put them onto the church. They take the grace of the New Covenant and try to say that it also applies to the Old, even saying that the Old Covenant is a covenant of grace. Nonsense! Jesus said they are so radically different that they cannot mix.

Most of the Jews of Jesus' day could not accept Jesus' New Covenant teachings. They were firmly entrenched in the thinking of the Old

Covenant, and they liked it. Jesus had this in mind in the third parable I read earlier: "And no one, having drunk old wine, immediately desires new; for he says, 'The old is better.'"

But, in the case of covenants, the Old is not better. The Old Covenant was a covenant of law. Anyone trying to keep it was cursed, because it demanded perfect obedience, and no one could perfectly obey it. Paul said in Galatians 3:10, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all the things which are written in the book of the law, to do them.'" The Old Covenant was *not* a covenant of grace. It was a covenant of works.

But the New Covenant is a covenant of grace. John 1:17 clearly contrasts the two: "For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came to be through Jesus Christ." Those who say that the Mosaic Covenant at Sinai, the Old Covenant, is part of one eternal covenant of grace that includes both the Old and New Covenants are ignoring the plain teaching of the Bible. Paul states in Romans 6:14, "you are not under law but under grace."

The Old Covenant law only kills. The Bible says that sin is the transgression of the law. It also says that the wages of sin is death. But then it goes on to say, "but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Paul, in Ephesians 2, verse 8, says, "For by grace you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." And in Romans 3:28, we read, "Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the law."

In Galatians 5:4 Paul says, "You have become estranged from Christ, you who are justified by law; you have fallen from grace." Do not so fall from grace, for it will stunt your spiritual growth. To illustrate this, I'll tell you a little parable of my own. This parable is based on what is apparently historical fact. It has been reported that in ancient China there was practiced what has been called the art of molding men. A two or three year old child would be put into a porcelain vase. The vase did not have a top or bottom. The child's head and feet could stick out, but the rest of the child's body stayed in his little porcelain prison. As the child grew, his flesh and bones would grow to fill the contours of the vase. After a few years, the vase would be broken, leaving a malformed child the shape of the vase. This was done for the amusement of the nobility. Thankfully, this cruel and sick practice is no longer done. But think of the child as you. And think of the vase as the Old Covenant, with its works and laws. You are meant to *grow* under

the New Covenant. But the Old Covenant vase will stunt and warp the growth of any Christian put into it. Do not let anyone put that Old Covenant vase on *you*.

Both Jesus and Paul also likened the rules and regulations of the Old Covenant to a yoke. In Galatians 5:1 Paul says, "Stand fast therefore in the freedom in which Christ has made us free, and do not be loaded down again with a yoke of bondage." And how are we not loaded down again with this yoke of bondage? By not going to the law. Instead, Jesus said, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Do not run to the law, my friends, run to the Cross of Christ. When Jesus died on that Cross, He paid the penalty for your sins. But notice in Colossians 2:14-17 what else was nailed to the Cross. These verses are saying that by Jesus' death, God was blotting "out the handwriting of ordinances"—in other words, the law of the Old Covenant—"that was against us, which was contrary to us, and He has taken it out of the midst, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed principalities and powers, He mocked them in public, triumphing over them in it. Therefore do not let anyone judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or of a new moon or of sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the body"—that is, the substance or reality—"is of Christ."

Jesus established the new kingdom, the kingdom of God, with new laws and new people. And He established it with the New Covenant, which is not a patch on the Old Covenant. It is entirely new. And so, my friends, are you. If we are to properly understand the Bible, we must understand this difference between the old and the new. We can learn from the historical examples and types and shadows of the Old Testament. But God has not called Christians to live under the laws, ordinances, and statutes of the Old Covenant. We are new creatures, and we are to live according to the New Covenant. As 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things passed away; behold, all things have become new."