

## **The Parables of Jesus Lesson 18**

### **The Parable of the New Wine and Old Wineskins**

In this next parable Jesus gives two metaphors: sewing a patch from a new garment into a new garment and pouring new wine into old wineskins. This parable is in response to a question by John the Baptist's disciples on why Jesus' disciples do not fast like them or the Pharisees. This parable, though short, gives us great insight on Jesus' 'New Covenant' ministry as it relates to the Old Covenant Judaic Law and religious traditions. It will also speak, in application, to the many ideas and teachings of 'mixture' in the modern church today.

#### **The Text of the Parable**

Matthew 9:14-17 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?" <sup>15</sup> Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. <sup>16</sup> "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. <sup>17</sup> Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."

Mark 2:21-22 "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. Otherwise, the new piece will pull away from the old, making the tear worse. <sup>22</sup> And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the wine will burst the skins, and both the wine and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins."

Luke 5:36-38 He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. <sup>37</sup> And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. <sup>38</sup> No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. <sup>39</sup> And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"

#### **Background and Context**

This passage comes in the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew right in the middle of Jesus' healing and miracles ministry. After the Sermon on the Mount ends in chapter 7, Jesus starts healing, casting out demons, and performing miraculous feats like calming the storm. All of this causes Jesus' fame to rise and people start talking about him.

Beginning in chapter 9 we see controversies with the religious leaders. First Jesus forgives the sin and heals a paralyzed man, which causes the religious leaders to accuse Jesus of blasphemy. Then he calls Matthew, a tax collector to follow him, which sparks the question to Jesus' disciples, 'why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners.' Mark records the words, 'who can forgive sins but God himself?', adding to the accusation.

So it's in this context that now John's disciples come and pose the questions about why Jesus' disciples do not fast like John's disciples and the Pharisees. As we can see in the two previous stories Jesus is doing things a *little different* than the Pharisees and other religious leaders. He is able to forgive sins apart from the temple order, and he is turning the religious hierarchy on its head by calling 'sinners' to follow him. This context will be our clue when interpreting this parable.

In Mark and Luke's Gospel, immediately after the passage of fasting, Jesus has another question posed to him from the Pharisees about why his disciples pick grain on the sabbath. Then the story after that one is about Jesus healing a man with a shriveled hand on the sabbath, and again, the Pharisees take issue with this. Both of these stories address Jesus' differences with them concerning keeping the sabbath.

All of these accounts surrounding and including today's parable shows a stark contrast and difference between Jesus' ministry and the Jewish region and tradition. So with this context in mind, let's look at the parable.

## Exegesis of the Parable

For simplicity, we will examine the passage from Matthew's Gospel.

**Matt. 9:14:** Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast often, but your disciples do not fast?"

Here the main issue raised is the issue of fasting. In Israel, there were several kinds of fasts:

- Under the law only one fast was required, that was on the Day of Atonement.
- After Jerusalem's destruction (586 BC), additional 'mourning' fasts were observed to mourn national disasters and catastrophes in Israel's history (Zech. 7:5; 8:19). These included fasts remembering the siege, the fall of Jerusalem, the burning of the temple.
- The Pharisees made it a practice to fast twice a week as a badge of piety and religious duty.
- John's disciples linked fasting to repentance and preparation for God's kingdom.

So, fasting in this scene isn't just about missing meals—it's about mourning, repentance, and longing for redemption.

Here, John's disciples and the Pharisees see Jesus' disciples feasting instead of fasting. This likely seemed irreverent or a sign that they were not devoted or serious enough.

**Matt. 9:15:** Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast.

Here we see Jesus' response, which can at first seem odd. Jesus puts his answer in terms of an ancient wedding. Weddings in Jewish culture were times of supreme joy. Mourning and fasting were forbidden during a wedding celebration according to Jewish culture.

First of all, Jesus in identifying as the 'bridegroom' positions himself as Israel's messiah since God is seen in scriptures as Israel's 'husband'. Secondly, Jesus is in essence predicting his death when he says 'the time will come when the bridegroom will be 'taken' from them...' This is a veiled allusion to His coming death on the cross. The word 'taken' here is significant that Jesus wasn't just leaving but will be 'seized' from them. Mark's gospel adds "on that day they will fast."

Jesus is saying that this time when the Messiah is present in Israel is not a time of mourning, but joy for his disciples. They are seeing him do miracles, hearing his amazing teaching, and witnessing the breaking in of the kingdom... this is a joyous time. Now when he is seized, unjustly tried, and put to death... that is a time (that the pharisees might would rejoice) that that the disciples would mourn and fast., Jesus here redefines fasting as around himself and his work, while the Pharisees and others could not perceive all that was happening.

**Matt. 9:16:** "No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse.

Of course, this redefining of fasting centered on Jesus is indication of the 'new thing' that Jesus is doing through his death and resurrection (the same with the concepts of forgiveness of sin, calling disciples, and healing on the sabbath as seen in other stories.) Thus, Jesus expounds upon the 'new thing' and how it does not mix with the 'old thing'

The first example he uses is of cloth, a new patch of unshrunk cloth and a used, worn garment. Jesus' point is that you cannot mix the two together; it will just not work. The old garment has already been shrunk from use and washing, if you were to take a new piece of unshrunk, unwashed cloth and try to 'patch' the old, the patch would

shrink and tear. This is showing that what Jesus was doing was not to 'patch' the Old Covenant Judaic system. You can't 'sew' Jesus into the law and make it work. He isn't reforming the old, but inaugurating the new

**Matt. 9:17: Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."**

Here is the same point but a different analogy. Wine was stored in goatskin pouches. The old wineskin previously used was already stretched and had become brittle, with no more flexibility. When new wine is put in a new wineskin and begins the process of fermentation, it released gases, stretching the skin. However, if you were to put the new win in old wineskins, the old wineskin being brittle and hard, would burst wasting both the wine and wineskin.

Luke's gospel adds another detail, seeming to refer to the 'hardness' of the Pharisees' heart and mind. He says, *"And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"* In essence Jesus is saying that those who have been drinking and love the old wine will not want the new. This is certainly true of the Pharisees who rejected all that Jesus was doing.

Both of these illustrations show us that Jesus' kingdom and the New Covenant requires a new container. Trying to fit Jesus' work into the rigid framework of the Old Covenant law and Judaic traditions would lead to destruction of both.

The image ultimately communicates the incompatibility of old and new. The law cannot contain grace; legalism cannot contain the Spirit.

### Interpretation in Historical Context

At its heart, this parable addresses the incompatibility of the old way of relating to God under the law with the new way inaugurated by Christ and the New Covenant of grace.

Let's look at some of the differences and transitions that Jesus was making during his ministry:

1. **Jesus 'reconstitutes' Israel** – Jesus in his actions is reconstituting the nation under himself, and we see this in several parallels. Jesus chooses twelve disciples; Israel had twelve tribes. John the Baptist calls Israel to the *other side* of the Jordan to be baptized and they would reenter the land, similar to how Joshua and the Israelites stood on the *other side* the of Jordan as they crossed through the Jordan River to enter the promised land.
2. **Jesus as the New Moses** – Many scholars see Jesus positioning himself as the 'New Moses' leading his people out of captivity. Moses was the great lawgiver from the mountain; Jesus stands on the mountain to give the 'Sermon on the Mount' concerning the 'spirit' of the law and contrasting it with the Pharisees. He shows himself as the Passover lamb at his death which would lead to a new Passover, bringing freedom to Israel, not from Pharoah, but from sin. Instead of the Passover meal, Jesus institutes the Lords Supper and 'redefines' the elements of the Passover.
3. **Jesus as Fulfillment of the Sacrificial System** – Jesus shows that his sacrifice on the cross was the complete and ultimate sacrifice for sin. Whereas in Judaism animals were sacrificed continually to atone for the sins of the people, Jesus' once-for-all sacrifice ended that old system with the tearing of the veil in the temple. Thus now, forgiveness does not come through the blood of animals, but of Christ.
4. **Jesus as the Temple of God** – The Temple was the centerpiece of Israel's worship, but Jesus shows himself to be the true temple of God. With his famous saying of 'destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days', Jesus was not speaking of the Physical temple, but of his body. Jesus also leaves the temple and declares it to be 'desolate' (a similar picture to the 'glory departing' the temple in the Old Testament). He then pronounces judgement and destruction over the temple, establishing himself as the 'cornerstone' of the new temple, which the builders (Pharisees) rejected.

5. **Jesus establishes a 'New Command'** – Whereas Israel had 600+ commandments in the law (excluding the many manmade traditions), 10 major ones in the Ten Commandments, and two that summarized the law (love God and Love Neighbor); Jesus now gives one 'new command' to his disciples, "to love one another as I have loved you"
6. **Jesus establishes a 'New Covenant'** – When Jesus took the Passover meal and instituted the Lords Supper he said, 'this is the New Covenant' in my blood. This New Covenant was prophesied in Jeremiah and realized in Jesus. This would not be a covenant of law and religious performance, but of grace and spiritual rest. This New Covenant would be marked with true imparted righteousness by faith, as well as the giving of the Holy Spirit.
7. **Jesus establishes the Kingdom of God** – In Jesus' ministry we see God's Kingdom 'breaking into' this world. The Kingdom would not be an ethnic or national kingdom, nor would it be a physical and natural kingdom; but a spiritual kingdom where God rules and reigns in the hearts and lives of his people as evident through Spiritual power and authority taking dominion over Spiritual darkness. Jesus is the King in the Kingdom and displays kingdom power in his ministry.

So as you can see, the 'new' that Jesus was establishing would not 'mix' with the old way of the Jewish law and traditions. To force this new movement into an old system would ruin it.

### **Practical Application for the Church Today**

As we consider the 'new' of the New Covenant, this was not an immediate and complete transition from Old to New. Judaisers still invaded the church trying to bring Christians under the bondage of the law and Jewish traditions. Many chapters in the New Testament address this mindset. This can be seen as a 'mixture' of Old and New, and as we have seen, these two don't mix.

Even in our time, there remains a mixture of New Covenant truths along with church traditions, religious legalism, and Old Testament principles placed on the church and Christians. But we need to see that while many may 'sound religious' they are still a mixture.

For example:

**Mixtures in Forgiveness** – The church says that "You're forgiven in Christ... but only until your next sin. You need to continue to confess, repent, and turn from sin, and maybe God will forgive you again." **But the New Covenant truth is that** *"By one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified"* (Heb. 10:14). Forgiveness is once-for-all. If we live in this mixture we will have ongoing guilt, fear of losing God's love, and treadmill Christianity.

**Mixtures in Identity** – On one hand we will say "You're a child of God", but in the next breath declare "but you're also just a sinner at heart." The truth is that we *were* sinners, but in Christ we've become saints (2 Cor. 5:17; Eph. 1:1). Our identity is righteous, holy, blameless in Him. This mixture results in double-mindedness, insecurity, and never fully living out our new identity.

**Mixtures in Righteousness** – The church says, "God sees you as righteous in Christ... but you'd better keep living right, you better keep doing the religious works if you want to stay righteous." The truth is, righteousness is a gift, not a wage (Rom. 5:17; Phil. 3:9). It's received, not achieved. The results of mixture is either pride in performance or despair in failure.

**Mixtures in Sanctification** – The church says, "You're saved by grace... but you are made holy by self-effort, rule-keeping, and trying harder." The truth is that we do not get Holy by going back to religious works but realizing that *"Christ is made for us... our holiness"* (1 Cor. 1:30), and the remedy for waking holy is to *"Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh"* (Gal. 5:16). Growth is Spirit-led, not self-led. The result of this mixture is burnout, legalism, comparing yourself to others.

**Mixtures in Union** – The church says, *“You’re united with Christ... but sin, failure, or spiritual laziness can separate you from God. You need to pray more, fast more, and work harder to get close again.”* This can also apply to worship and prayer; we try to ‘get God to show up’ or talk to the sky as if he’s separated from us when he already lives in us. The truth is, *“Whoever is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him”* (1 Cor. 6:17). The result of this mixture is that believers live with a yo-yo relationship with God, feeling “in” when they’re performing well and “out” when they fail, or they have to pray more, worship more, be holy enough, to get God to ‘show up’. This creates distance and fear rather than intimacy and rest. They pray like David, ‘do not take your Holy Spirit’ from me, when the Holy Spirit lives in you forever.

**Mixtures in Judgment** – The church says *“Jesus died for your sins... but God is still judging you for your failures. Every hardship is Him punishing you, every blessing is Him rewarding you.”* The truth is that, *“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”* (Rom. 8:1), and *“Whoever hears my word and believes Him who sent me has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life”* (John 5:24). The result of this mixture is that believers see God as a harsh judge rather than a loving Father and live more in fear of judgment than in the assurance of Christ’s finished work.

These are just a few of the ‘mixtures’ that we see in our churches today. The problem is, you can’t put new wine in old wineskins. If we want to live in the fulness of our covenant with Christ we must get rid of the mixture and be ‘single minded’ on Christ and the New Covenant. To mix covenants will only lead to condemnation, religious performance, fear, and failure. We must come into a full understanding of our ‘new and better covenant’.