



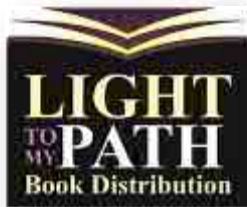
# **Fresh Wineskins**

**An Examination  
of the Teaching of  
Jesus in Luke 5:36-39  
about Law and Grace**

**F. Wayne MacLeod**

# Fresh Wineskins

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**Light To My Path Book Distribution**  
Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, CANADA B1V 1Y5

Fresh Wineskins

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## Preface

This is the story of an encounter between Jesus and the religious leaders of His day. Levi, the tax collector, had invited Jesus to a great banquet he had prepared. Present that day were other tax collectors and friends. They were not a religious group but were interested in what the Lord had to say.

News of this gathering reached the ears of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Their understanding of religion prohibited them from associating with the kind of people who had gathered with Jesus that day. Angered that Jesus ate with “tax collectors and sinners,” these religious leaders stood nearby and publicly objected to His behaviour. They asked Him why He and His disciples were not fasting and praying instead of feasting with questionable people.

The answer Jesus gave to these objections comes in the form of three parables. In these parables, Jesus unapologetically declared that the faith He proclaimed was not that same as that of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He came to offer something different.

Luke 5:36-39 challenges us to examine our faith. The temptation to maintain the religion of the Pharisees and Sadducees is very real even in our day. In this study, we will discuss the response of Jesus to the religious leaders of the day. We will compare their understanding of religion with the faith Jesus proclaimed.

I hope that this study will challenge the reader to consider carefully the difference between a religion of law and works and the faith Jesus taught. May the Lord be pleased to use this study to show us the difference.

F. Wayne MacLeod

## Chapter 1 - The Religion of the Pharisees and Scribes

The focus of this study is the words of Jesus to the Pharisees and Sadducees of His day, as found in Luke 5:

*[36] He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. [37] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. [38] But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. [39] And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'"* (Luke 5)

Before we look at what Jesus told these religious leaders, let's take a moment to consider the context and what led up this proclamation.

In Luke 5:27, Jesus is at the home of Levi, who would become more commonly known as Matthew, the disciple of Jesus. Earlier that day, the Lord Jesus passed by a tax booth where Levi, the tax collector, was sitting. Tax collectors were despised in those days. This was not just because they collected taxes but because they profited from those taxes off the backs of those who could not afford to pay.

As He passed by the booth, Jesus spoke to Levi and said: "Follow me" (Luke 5:27). What is particularly surprising is that when Levi heard those words, he not only left everything but also prepared a "great feast" for Jesus. Levi was a man of



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some means and had the resources to provide such a feast. Speaking about this feast, Luke 5:29 says:

*[29] And Levi made him a great feast in his house, and there was a large company of tax collectors and others reclining at table with them.*

Notice the references to a “great feast” and “a large company of tax collectors and others” at the table. This was no small event. Levi’s tax collector friends and others had come not only to enjoy the feast but also to listen to Jesus who appeared to be the guest of honour.

As they were eating, the Pharisees and scribes expressed their disapproval saying, “Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” It is not likely that these religious leaders were invited to the feast. By their own words, they indicated that had they been invited, they would not have accepted because of the people present. They refused to eat with “sinners.” Likely, the Pharisees and scribes stood nearby while the feast was taking place and spoke their disapproval to Jesus in a loud voice, protesting His association with these individuals.

The religion of the Pharisees was one of laws and regulations. It shunned those who did not measure up to their standard and had very little tolerance for the sinner. It was a religion of works and traditions. Jesus, however, was not only willing to associate with sinners but actively sought them out. In this case, Jesus had initiated the conversation with Levi and asked him to follow Him.

In response to the disapproval of the Pharisees, the Lord Jesus said:

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*[31] And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. [32] I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."  
(Luke 5)*

The faith of Jesus clashed with the religion of the Pharisees. Jesus reached out to those who were sick; the Pharisees avoided them. Jesus saw Himself as a Great Physician, seeking to heal the wounded and dying. The Pharisees judged them and saw them as inferior. Their concept of what it meant to be a follower of God was radically different.

As the dialogue between Jesus and the Pharisees continued, the Pharisees and scribes asked another question. Both Matthew and Luke indicate that this question was in the context of this banquet with Levi (compare Matthew 9:10-17 with Luke 5:27-35). Listen to the question as recorded in Luke 5:

*[33] And they said to him, "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." (Luke 5)*

This question is a follow-up to their objections to Jesus eating with tax collectors and sinners. It pertained to the religious practices of Jesus and His disciples. The disciples of John the Baptist and the disciples of the Pharisees often fasted and prayed. The disciples of Jesus, however, were eating, drinking and celebrating with tax collectors and sinners. This did not seem to fit the Pharisaic concept of true religion.

For the Pharisees, religion was a serious and sombre matter. They saw the spiritual person as one who fasted and deprived himself or herself of the luxuries and privileges of life. They

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measured true religion by how often a person prayed or by how much he or she sacrificed for the Lord. How close a person was to God was demonstrated, in their view, by their outward actions and associations. If they did the right things and associated with the right people, then they were in a right relationship with God.

Jesus clashed with this legalistic faith of the Pharisees. He did not seem to fit their concept of true religion. He ate with sinners. He did not spend all His time in repentance and fasting. He challenged the traditional views of the day. The Pharisees saw this as blasphemous and determined in their heart that they would kill Him and rid the nation of His influence.

The faith Jesus proclaimed, however, when much deeper than the surface. It reached into the heart and transformed attitudes. It shattered prejudices and replaced them with love and compassion. It broke the proud and self-seeking heart and cast the sinner to the ground, humbled by the grace of God to save and forgive. It tore out selfishness and replaced it with an overwhelming desire to share the goodness of God with those in need. It did not see the practice of religious traditions as the measure of one's sincerity. The faith of Jesus was life-transforming. It offered forgiveness to the unworthy. It reached out to the unlovely. It changed a person from the inside.

The discussion between the Pharisees and Jesus shows that they had opposing concepts of faith. The self-righteous Pharisees with all their religious traditions, fasting and prayers, looked down on the Son of God because He ate with sinners and preached the Gospel to them at a banquet offered by Levi.

## The Religion of the Pharisees and Scribes

The faith of the Pharisees was a faith of works, tradition and separation from anything or anyone that didn't follow a set of rules and behaviours. The life of Jesus was one of compassion and love for those in need. Jesus went where the religious person would not go. He spoke to those the religious leaders shunned. His faith had more to do with the transformation of the heart than an outward show.

Speaking about the Pharisees in Matthew 5, the Lord Jesus said:

*20 For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5)*

Jesus would go on to condemn the Pharisees in Matthew 15, saying that they broke the commandments of God for the sake of their traditions.

*3 He answered them, "And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? 4 For God commanded, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.' 5 But you say, 'If anyone tells his father or his mother, "What you would have gained from me is given to God," 6 he need not honor his father.' So for the sake of your tradition you have made void the word of God. (Matthew 15)*

While the Pharisees were keen on practising the letter of the law, they showed no compassion. Jesus rebuked their heartless religion in Matthew 23 when He said:

*23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe the mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and*

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*faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others. 24 You blind guides, straining out a gnat and swallowing a camel! 25 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and the plate, but inside they are full of greed and self-indulgence. 26 You blind Pharisee! First clean the inside of the cup and the plate, that the outside also may be clean. (Matthew 23)*

The religion of the Pharisees was all about an external show. They did all the right things, but their heart was full of greed and pride (verse 25). Jesus described them as hypocrites.

Jesus proclaimed a faith that was from the heart. Those who came to Him were changed on the inside. The apostle Paul put it this way:

*17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. 18 All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5)*

Genuine faith in Christ is not about traditions and rituals but about becoming a new person. Those who experience the salvation of Christ are transformed people. They love Christ and serve Him from the heart. Speaking to the Galatians who were caught up in a legalistic faith, the apostle Paul said:

*15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation. (Galatians 6)*

You can go to church as much as you want. You can do good to your neighbours and read your Bible every day. You can live a good life and speak only kind words to those you meet,

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but according to Paul and Jesus, if you have not experienced this new birth and what it means to become a new person in Christ, all of these things are mere religious activities and count for nothing in regards to your salvation and relationship with God.

The contrast between the faith of Jesus and the religious practices of the Pharisees is very powerful in these verses. The Pharisees measured their spirituality by what they did. Jesus taught that rituals and traditions were not what was necessary but rather a transformation of the heart through the work of His Spirit.

The legalistic faith of the Pharisees was very clear. You knew you were on the right path if you followed the rules. Everybody believed the same thing and lived the same way. They condemned those who ate with sinners. They judged how spiritual a person was by how many times they fasted and prayed. Jesus looked beyond these externals to the heart. He saw the hypocrisy of those who refused to associate with people they did not like. He saw the evil of the hearts of those who fasted and prayed.

There at Levi's table, as the Pharisees shouted their disapproval, the Lord Jesus, feasted with tax-collectors and sinners who came with an open heart to hear what He had to say. Among them was one who had left his profession to follow Him. While Levi would become a disciple of Jesus, the Pharisees would deny him to follow their traditions and rituals.

Among those present at the banquet were those whose lives would be radically transformed. This is why Jesus came. He came to offer us a faith that was much deeper than outward show. It is a faith that penetrates to the very core of our being

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and transforms us to such an extent that we are no longer the same. The work of His Spirit in us empowers and changes us. We are born again as His children and live in fellowship with Him. While the religious around us continue in their rituals and traditions, we experience the reality of Christ and His Spirit. Our prayers are not empty words but an expression of our relationship with a God we experience and know personally. While the religious worry about whether they have done enough to merit a place in heaven, we live with the assurance that what Jesus has done is sufficient. Our faith is not about what we have done but about what Christ has done for us. That reality has transformed our lives and set us free.

#### For Consideration:

Notice that it was Jesus who called Levi. What encouragement do you find in the fact that Jesus seeks out sinners? Where would you be today if the Lord Jesus had not sought you out?

Describe the religion of the Pharisees and scribes? Why did they have a problem with the Lord Jesus and the expression of His faith?

What is the difference between a religion that focuses on rituals and traditions and a faith that focuses on a new life and a transformed heart?

### The Religion of the Pharisees and Scribes

Take a moment to consider your faith. Do you see evidence of the work and life of God's Spirit, transforming you and making you a new person? How much of your faith is about what you do, and how much is about what God is doing in and through you?

For Prayer:

Thank the Lord that He came to seek and to save the sinner.

Take a moment to ask the Lord to show you the work He wants to do in you.

Ask the Lord to forgive you for making faith all about what you do and not about what He has done and is doing in you.





## Chapter 2 - A New Patch on an Old Garment

*36 He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. (Luke 5)*

Jesus was engaged in discussions with the Pharisees and scribes. The conversation revealed the difference between their understanding of God and His expectations. The Pharisees questioned Jesus' association with tax collectors. They also wondered why He was not spending His time in prayer and fasting rather than feasting with sinners.

Jesus answered the Pharisees by telling them a series of parables. The first of these parables is in verse 36. Here the Lord Jesus spoke about patching an old garment with a piece of new cloth.

*36 He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. (Luke 5)*

Let us take a moment to consider what Jesus is saying in this passage.

To understand the parable, we need to make a few comments about the garments Jesus speaks about here. Both Matthew and Mark record this parable of Jesus but expresses it in a slightly different way:

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*16 No one puts a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch tears away from the garment, and a worse tear is made. (Matthew 9)*

*21 No one sews a piece of unshrunk cloth on an old garment. If he does, the patch tears away from it, the new from the old, and a worse tear is made. (Mark 2)*

Notice a few details about the old garment in these passages. It had faded in colour so that when a new piece of material was added, it did not match. This old garment had shrunken, was worn out and ripped.

As we examine the context of the parable, we understand that Jesus was responding to the questions of the Pharisees and scribes. They had asked Him why He ate with tax collectors and sinners. They also questioned why He and His disciples were not fasting. In this response, Jesus compares their religion to the Gospel He was proclaiming to the sinners who sat at table with Him.

The old garment is the religion of the Pharisees and scribes. It was faded and worn out. It had holes and tears that needed to be repaired. Jesus often accused the Pharisees of hypocrisy and pride. Their religion fell short of God's standard. Jesus went as far as to say that the Pharisees, with all their religious practices, were "children of hell." Their religion, with all its traditions and rituals, did not bring them closer to God.

*15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves. (Matthew 23)*

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In direct contrast to the old worn out and torn religion of the Pharisees was the new garment Jesus spoke of in this parable. This new garment was, according to the writer of Hebrews a “new and living way” that had opened through the blood of the Lord Jesus:

*19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.*  
(Hebrews 10)

While the old religion of the Pharisees left them separated from God, this new and living way provided direct access to God. When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Table, He encouraged His disciples to take the bread and wine as a remembrance of what He had done for them on the cross. At the first celebration of the Table of the Lord Jesus told those present: “This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood” (Luke 22:20).

The apostle Paul told the Romans that they had been released from the Law so that they could serve in the “new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.”

*6 But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.*  
(Romans 7:6)

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All who accepted the Lord Jesus became new people. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul declared:

*17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (1 Corinthians 5)*

It is quite clear from these passages that the Lord Jesus came to set us free from the way of the Law. He declared a new and living way through His death. This new and living way was different from what the Pharisees and scribes taught.

What was the difference between the Gospel of Jesus and the religion of the Pharisees? Let us consider this under several headings.

### *Legalism versus Grace*

The religion of the Pharisees was a religion of works, rules, and traditions. Those who followed this religion needed to measure up to a certain standard to be accepted. Outward actions and beliefs measured spirituality. To be accepted by God, a person needed to live a certain way, obey a certain set of rules, and believe some very particular doctrines.

Jesus, on the other hand, taught that none of us can ever measure up to the standard of God. Salvation was not a matter of what we did or what rules we followed. A right relationship with God did not depend on us at all. Salvation was a work of Christ on our behalf. Even the worst sinner could come to Christ and be forgiven. It is not our efforts to be good that saves us but the good work of Christ on our behalf.

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In this passage, we see the contrast between the Pharisees who rejected the tax collectors and sinners because they did not measure up to their standard, and Jesus who accepted them despite their unworthiness.

### *Human-Centred versus Christ-Centred*

The second difference between the religion of the Pharisees and the Gospel of Christ had to do with focus. The faith of the Pharisees based on human effort. To determine if an individual merited salvation, the Pharisees looked to his or her lifestyle and beliefs. If a person fasted and prayed enough, this would make them more deserving of heaven. Salvation depended on how much effort you put into pleasing God. A person was saved from their sin because they delighted God by the life they lived. Salvation and acceptance before God depended on the individual and his or her effort.

The Gospel of Jesus, however, taught that salvation could never be found by looking to ourselves and our efforts. Forgiveness is not merited. It is only possible because God, as a gracious and compassionate Saviour, is willing to pardon the undeserving at the cost of His Son. While the Pharisees looked to themselves and their efforts for salvation, the disciples of Jesus trusted the work of Christ and His gracious forgiveness.

Before us are two radically different beliefs. Listen again to what Jesus told the Pharisees and Scribes that day when they accused him of not living up to their idea of true religion:

*36 He also told them a parable: "No one tears a piece from a new garment and puts it on an old garment. If he does, he*

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*will tear the new, and the piece from the new will not match the old. (Luke 5)*

Notice that Jesus speaks here about two garments. These garments may look similar, but they are quite different. The old garment was worn out and had developed holes. How was one to fix this old garment? It could be patched by taking a piece from a new garment and sewing it on to the old, but this would be foolish for three reasons.

First, if I tear a piece of cloth from a new garment to patch an old one, I destroy the new garment. Consider the context here. These individuals could not go to the store to buy cloth as easily as we do today. They had to use what was available to them. In this case, all they had for the repair of the old garment was a new garment. The question they had to consider was this: Will I give up my new garment to repair my worn-out old garment? The hole in the old garment forced the wearer into a decision. He could not have two garments. He could sacrifice the new to repair the old, or he could throw away the old and wear the new.

The second factor in this decision had to do with the fact that the old garment had faded with time. The cloth on the new garment did not match the old. The distinction between the old and the new would be quite noticeable. The user could not hide the repair. While the hole may be repaired for a time, the garment would never be the same again. It would be evident to all that the garment was old and worn out. The new patches made this apparent. The new patch would never match the old garment but only serve as a constant reminder of how old and faded the garment was.

### A New Patch on an Old Garment

The final factor to consider had to do with the fact that the cloth used to make the old garment was not as durable as it once was and had deteriorated over the years. When a new patch was sewn onto the old garment, the new cloth would shrink and tear away from the old cloth. The result would be that the rip in the garment would be bigger.

Jesus was telling the Pharisees that their religion was not compatible with the Gospel He preached. His Gospel was not a patch to repair the Old Testament law. It is the solution to the problem the Law revealed. We all stand before God in tattered and torn garments. These garments are dirty, filled with holes and faded. We stand ashamed before the King of kings. Isaiah, the prophet describes this old garment we wear in the following words:

*[6] We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away. (Isaiah 64:6)*

The psalmist explains the nature of our robe further when he says:

*[6] Therefore pride is their necklace; violence covers them as a garment. (Psalms 73)*

Writing in the New Testament, Jude challenged his readers to hate the garment “stained by the flesh.”

*[21] keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. [22] And have mercy on those who doubt; [23] save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh. (Jude)*



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The Pharisees stood before Jesus that day in polluted garments, stained by hypocrisy and human failures. They judged Jesus by their standards. They felt He needed to put on their religious garments and live like them. Jesus, however, rejected their way. In fact, He unapologetically proclaimed that their faith was not the faith He proclaimed. It was incompatible with the Gospel He taught.

What do you do if your old garment is worn out? If you patch it, the patch will only reveal how old and worn out the garment has become. The new cloth you use will only make the hole in your garment worse when it shrinks. You have one of two choices to make here. You can continue to patch the old, but it will be to no avail in the end, or you can take off that old garment and put on a new one.

There is a beautiful description in Zechariah 3 of Joshua, the High Priest:

*[3:1] Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right hand to accuse him. [2] And the LORD said to Satan, "The LORD rebuke you, O Satan! The LORD who has chosen Jerusalem rebuke you! Is not this a brand plucked from the fire?" [3] Now Joshua was standing before the angel, clothed with filthy garments. (Zechariah 3)*

The picture here in Zechariah 3 is one of the High Priest standing before God dressed in filthy garments. Satan is standing beside him, accusing him of sin and shortcomings. What could Joshua say to this? He could not deny the fact that he was dressed in filthy robes standing before the Lord. What Satan said about him was right –he was unworthy to

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stand before the Lord of lords. Joshua had no choice but to recognize that he was filthy and unworthy of God.

Notice, however, the response of the angel of the Lord to the accusations of Satan.

*[4] And the angel said to those who were standing before him, "Remove the filthy garments from him." And to him he said, "Behold, I have taken your iniquity away from you, and I will clothe you with pure vestments." [5] And I said, "Let them put a clean turban on his head." So they put a clean turban on his head and clothed him with garments. And the angel of the LORD was standing by. (Zechariah 3)*

The angel took off Joshua's old filthy garment and clothed him in a new and pure one. He also put a priestly turban on his head. The old filthy garment could not be patched. Joshua needed a new garment. The Lord God was willing to give him a new one. All Joshua needed to do was to surrender the old and receive the new. A clean robe was placed on an unworthy man and gave him a new standing with God. It was a garment of forgiveness and mercy.

All who come to Christ must be willing to come just like Joshua. We come in shame and sinfulness and stand unworthily before a holy and just God in our tattered and filthy rags. We recognize that all our efforts to please him have fallen short. Our religion, with all its rules and traditions, is like a worn out and filthy garment full of holes. Like Joshua, we bow in shame as the devil points out our shortcomings and failures.

The Lord Jesus, however, is willing to meet us in this place of shame. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden,

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they experienced shame as they stood naked before each other and before God. Genesis 3:7 tells us that they found some fig leaves and made loincloths from them to hide their nakedness. When the Lord God came into the garden to speak with them, they hid from Him in shame. As the Lord spoke to them, they covered themselves with those leaves, ashamed of who they had become. In Genesis 3:21, we read:

*[21] And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. (Genesis 3)*

Consider what it would be like to wear a fig leaf. It is hardly the best material for clothing, but this is the best they had. They stood before their All-Powerful Creator with only fig leaves to cover their shame. God, however, reached out to them and gave them new garments made from the skins of an animal that had to die for their shame.

The best we can do in our effort is like a worn-out garment or fig leaf. These are unworthy of the Lord God, but they are the best we can offer. God, however, will meet us in our shame and provide us with a new garment. This new garment of forgiveness and mercy is provided for us through the work of Jesus Christ His Son. He wants to cover your shame and cleanse you of all your sin. He covers you with the righteousness of Christ. Now you stand before Him in the robe of Christ's forgiveness and righteousness.

You can try to patch up your old religion by your human effort, but your old garment will never be acceptable to God. You need to throw away that old robe and let Christ clothe you with His new robe. You need to stop trying to mend your old religion and trust no longer in your own ability to merit the favour of God. The Gospel requires that we put our full and

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total confidence in what Christ has done. He will clothe us with the only garment that makes us worthy to stand before the Father. It is a garment that He has made particularly for you—a garment of forgiveness and cleansing.

Notice one more thing in this verse. Jesus tells us that if we try to patch the old with new cloth, we will make the tear worse. Let us take a moment to consider this.

### *Hypocrisy*

In the context of this verse, the Lord Jesus was speaking with the Pharisees. They claimed to be the children of God, but of all religious leaders of His day, Jesus clashed most with this group. Listen to what the Lord Jesus says about the Pharisees in Matthew 23:

*[27] "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which outwardly appear beautiful, but within are full of dead people's bones and all uncleanness. [28] So you also outwardly appear righteous to others, but within you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. (Matthew 23)*

The Pharisees had a show of piety, but they lived a life that was far from God. People saw through this. People see beyond the outward appearance to the actions and attitudes of our hearts. They understand when our faith is merely a spiritual patch on an old fleshy garment. They see what happens when we become angry and impatient. They hear the words we speak. They understand that we are not what we want them to think we are. The patch does not fool them. They see our hypocrisy and turn from the faith we proclaim.

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If there is one thing that has damaged the witness of the church of our day, it is hypocrisy. When we profess one thing and do not live up to our profession, we make it easy for people to turn their backs on the Christ we claim to follow. Our old fleshly nature patched up with Christian doctrine and traditions will never bring people to Christ. The stench of the flesh overpowers the patches of spirituality we wear and repulses those around us. Those who seek to patch an old garment with a new patch will never demonstrate in their lives the character of Christ. We cannot live a powerful or spirit-filled life in the flesh. If we do not renounce the old fleshly garment and cast it off, we cannot live the life God calls us to live. Our poor example will turn people away, and like the Pharisees, we will be judged by God.

### *Denial of the Lord Jesus and His Work*

Another devastating consequence of attempting to patch up the old fleshly garment is that it denies the work of Jesus Christ. You see, the Lord Jesus came because we could not live the life we were called to live. We were sinners in need of a Saviour. The human heart was beyond repair. Our hearts were evil and could not reach God.

The Lord Jesus came to offer us a new way. He came to forgive our sin and to place His Spirit in all who would confess Him as Lord, trusting in His work on their behalf. While all true Christians accept this reality, not all Christians live in its light. If the flesh is incapable of serving God, why do we still trust it? If God has placed His Spirit to guide and enable us, why do we not commit ourselves to know Him and His leading in our lives?

### A New Patch on an Old Garment

All too often, we do not live the truth we profess with our lips. We believe that our fleshly garment is unworthy of Christ, yet we refuse to put it off. We still trust our instincts, education, and experience. Christians often depend on their fleshly efforts as much as the people of the world. They patch up their flesh with Christian words, traditions, and prayers, but they still trust in themselves. They ask God to bless their fleshly efforts, but they do not die to the flesh and its ways.

What does this tell us about our true beliefs? If our beliefs do not affect our actions, attitudes and words, then we do not believe what we think we do. Jesus is telling us here that patching up the fleshly garment will only make things worse. Could it be that the reason for the state of the church today has to do with the fact that we do not believe what the Scripture tells us –you cannot patch up the flesh. The truth Jesus proclaimed was incompatible with the religion of the Pharisees. You cannot patch up your old garment –you need a new one. If you attempt to patch it up, you do not understand the sinfulness of the flesh and the purpose for which Jesus came. You deny the work of Christ through your actions.

### *An Offense to God*

Consider the words of the Lord Jesus to the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3:

*[15] “I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! [16] So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. [17] For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I*

### Fresh Wineskins

*need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked. [18] I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire, so that you may be rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself and the shame of your nakedness may not be seen, and salve to anoint your eyes, so that you may see. (Revelation 3)*

As the Lord Jesus examined the church of Laodicea, He found that they were neither cold nor hot. They had one foot in the flesh and the other in faith. He told the church that because they were lukewarm, they were an offence to Him. They believed they were rich and powerful in themselves. God told them that they were “wretched, pitiable, poor, blind and naked.” He counselled them to recognize their poverty and receive from him “white garments” so that they could cover their nakedness and shame. Until they realized how offensive their fleshly garments were to God, they would never experience the fullness of His purpose for their lives. These old rags of flesh needed to be stripped from them if they were to be pleasing to God.

### *Name of the Lord Blasphemed*

In Romans 2, the apostle Paul speaks to the religious Jews of his day who claimed to be observers of the Law of God. They looked down on those who did not follow these laws. Listen, however, to the words of the apostle to them:

*[21] you then who teach others, do you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? [22] You who say that one must not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? [23]*

### A New Patch on an Old Garment

*You who boast in the law dishonor God by breaking the law. [24] For, as it is written, "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you." [25] For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. [26] So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? (Romans 2)*

Like the Pharisees of Jesus day, these religious Jews claimed to observe the Law of God. The problem was that what they claimed was not what they did. They put on a front of religion, but their hearts were not changed. Living in the flesh, they continued to break the law of God, proving to be hypocrites. The result was that the name of the Lord was blasphemed because of their actions. The old fleshly garment ripped away from their spiritual patches, and they were exposed for who they were.

The Lord Jesus makes it quite clear that those who follow Him must deny themselves and their fleshly ways:

*[24] Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. [25] For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. (Matthew 16)*

We have often heard messages on these verses, teaching that if we are to follow the Lord Jesus, we must be willing to leave our families and treasures. This, however, is not what Jesus says in these verses. He tells us here that what we need to deny is ourselves. We cannot trust ourselves or our way of thinking. We cannot trust our hearts or our efforts. You



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cannot patch up the old flesh with a veneer of religion and expect that it will please God. If you are going to follow Christ, you will need to die to yourself. You must walk in His Spirit, denying your flesh. You must trust His leading more than your fleshly wisdom, education, and experience. You must allow Him to be your Master in every detail. You must take off that garment of flesh and put on the garment of faith.

The apostle Paul put it this way in Romans 8:

*[6] For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. [7] For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. [8] Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. (Romans 8)*

If you trust your flesh, you are on the pathway to death. If you are expecting to please God by your fleshly religious efforts, you are deceiving yourself, for the flesh is “hostile” to God and will not “submit to God.” That is why you cannot patch up the flesh. It will always rip away from the spiritual patches we seek to sew into it. It is an enemy to all that God represents. The old garment cannot be patched. It must be thrown away. Jesus offers a new way –the way of the Spirit.

The religion of the flesh trusts its own wisdom. It elevates the human being and makes God a debtor to for the service we offer Him. That service, however, is stained with sin and pride. It is an offence to God. Only those who cast off this religion and die to everything it represents can honour God. He will clothe the humble with the garment of forgiveness and empower them by His Spirit. We have been released from the old way of the law through the work of the Lord Jesus on the

### A New Patch on an Old Garment

cross. Those who want to live for Christ today must, according to Paul, learn to live in the “new way of the Spirit.”

*[5] For while we were living in the flesh, our sinful passions, aroused by the law, were at work in our members to bear fruit for death. [6] But now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. (Romans 7)*

In Luke 5:36, Jesus calls us to recognize the old fleshly garment of human religion and effort. He shows us the futility of trying to patch up a garment that is hostile to God and His purpose. Jesus reminds us that the path to true faith lies in dying to ourselves and taking off that old garment. Our flesh and its ways must no longer guide us, but instead, we must put on the garment of forgiveness and walk in the new way of His Spirit. This, of course, is not something we will achieve in a moment but must be a daily focus. He will clothe us with His wisdom and enabling if we are willing to deny the flesh.

For Consideration:

What is the problem with sewing a new cloth on an old garment? What is the result?

What does the Bible teach about the flesh and its hostility to God? Can this flesh please God?

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What is the difference between trying to please God in our flesh and walking in the “new way of the Spirit”?

Why is human religion displeasing to God? Why does it fall short of His standard?

What does it mean to die to ourselves? Can we truly serve God if we do not die to ourselves?

Is your faith about trying your best to please God in the flesh or about walking in the power and forgiveness of the Spirit?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to bring you to the point of trusting the leading and guidance of the Spirit of God more than your education and fleshly wisdom.

Ask the Lord to help you to understand the nature of your flesh and its hostility to God.

### A New Patch on an Old Garment

As God to show you how to take off the robe of human religion and put on the robe of the Spirit.



## Chapter 3 - Old Wineskins and New Wine

*[37] And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. If he does, the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. [38] But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. (Luke 5)*

Jesus has been answering the objections of the Pharisees and scribes by telling them a series of parables. We examined the first of these in the last chapter. Jesus moves now to the second illustration in His answer. In verses 37-38, He tells a parable about new wine and old wineskins.

In those days, wine was kept in containers made from animal hides. These wineskin containers had the advantage of being quite stretchable. New wine went through a fermentation process, which expanded the wine and stretched the animal skins. Because of their flexibility, these skins provided a safe place to store new wine as it fermented.

The problem with animal hide, however, was that over time it began to dry out and lose its flexibility. As the skins deteriorated with age, they could easily crack. If new wine were put into these old skins, they would no longer have the flexibility and strength needed to contain the wine. They would break under the pressure of fermentation, and the wine would leak out and be lost.

Jesus reminded the Pharisees and scribes of the result of putting new wine into old brittle wineskins in verse 37 when He said:

### Fresh Wineskins

*[37] ...the new wine will burst the skins and it will be spilled, and the skins will be destroyed. (Luke 5)*

The gospel writer Mark adds another dimension when he records Jesus to say:

*[22] If he does, the wine will burst the skins—and the wine is destroyed, and so are the skins. (Mark 2)*

What is the result of putting new wine in old wineskins, according to Jesus? The new wine bursts the skins, and both the wine and the skins are destroyed. New wine and old wineskins are incompatible. If you put them together, the consequences will be disastrous.

The illustration of Jesus is simple enough to understand in the physical world, but what was Jesus telling the Pharisees and scribes who were criticizing His actions that day? To understand this, we need to break down the verse and examine its individual components.

### *Old Wineskins*

We will begin with the old wineskins of Jesus' parable. Notice that the wineskins Jesus refers to here are old. The context of the verse indicates that because these skins were old, they had lost their flexibility and strength. These old wineskins perfectly described the religion of the Pharisees and scribes. It was old and inflexible and could not accept the teaching of Jesus. It was also full of cracks and inconsistencies.

## Old Wineskins and New Wine

### *New Wine*

The new wine is the truth of the Gospel as taught by the Lord Jesus. Consider the words of the Lord Jesus as recorded by Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

*[25] In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11)*

The context of 1 Corinthians 11 is the Lord's Supper. Jesus took a cup of wine and held it up before the disciples and spoke these words. The wine in the cup was a symbol of His blood shed for the forgiveness of sin. Jesus told His disciples that it was a sign of a new covenant that He was establishing. Under this new covenant, those who came to Him could experience salvation and forgiveness apart from the Law and human effort. The new wine is the good news that we can be accepted by God and forgiven through the death of Jesus on the cross. The wine represents the work of the Spirit of God to give us new life. Paul put it this way in 2 Corinthians 5:

*[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2 Corinthians 5)*

Those who are in Christ are new creatures. The former has passed, and the new has come. Those who experience this work of Christ have a new life, new hope, new passions. They are not the same because of the work of the Spirit of Christ in them. The new wine represents the new life Jesus gives to all who come to Him for forgiveness and cleansing.



*The Breaking of Old Wineskins*

Jesus told the Pharisees and scribes that new wine would destroy old wineskins. Consider this for a moment. Of all the people in the New Testament, the Pharisees were likely the most “religious.” Their religion, however, was all about their efforts. Consider the parable of the Lord Jesus about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:

*[10] “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. [11] The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. [12] I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ [13] But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ [14] I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.” (Luke 18)*

In the prayer of the Pharisee, it is evident that he is trusting his efforts to gain favour with God. Notice the repetition of the word “I” in verses eleven and twelve. “I thank you.” “I am not like other men.” “I fast twice a week.” “I give tithes of all I get.” The tax collector, however, feeling unwilling to draw near simply cried out, “God be merciful to me a sinner!” He had nothing to offer God. He knew that if the Lord did not forgive him, he was doomed.

What is crucial for us to see here is the response of Jesus to these two men. He rejected the boasting of the Pharisee with all his religion but accepted the humble plea of the tax collector. There was no place in the heart of the Pharisee for

## Old Wineskins and New Wine

the new wine of the Gospel. He would be condemned. The Gospel would be his downfall. His hard heart, like the old wineskins, could not receive this message of the Gospel. He would be judged and condemned to an eternity without God.

Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul reminded them that the preaching of the cross was foolishness to those who were perishing:

*[18] For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. [19] For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (1 Corinthians 1)*

People reject the simple message of the Gospel because it does not make sense to the human mind.

In 2 Corinthians 2, Paul said:

*[15] For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, [16] to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? (2 Corinthians)*

The new wine of the Gospel, according to Paul, was a fragrance of death to those who rejected its message. The Gospel condemns us in our pride. The new wine of God's Spirit through the Gospel will break the proud and rebellious heart. The apostle Paul, who rebelled more than most against the truth of Jesus Christ, experienced this overwhelming power of the Gospel on the road to Damascus. As he pushed forward with his campaign to destroy Christianity, the Spirit of God took hold of his spirit and broke him. There on the road

### Fresh Wineskins

to Damascus, the proud and rebellious heart of Saul lay broken. The new wine of the Gospel of Jesus shattered his religious pride. The hardened old wineskin was broken, and Paul's worldview was radically transformed.

If the Gospel is to have its effect on our lives, the old wineskins will have to be broken. Our pride and belief that we can merit the favour of God must be shattered. All self-centredness must be replaced with total dependence on Christ and the work of His Spirit in us. Our intellectual minds must come to an awareness that some things must be taken by faith and trust in God's word. The new wine of the Gospel will break down these hindrances. Like burst wineskins, we will be exposed for who we are. The hardness and pride of our hearts will be revealed. The new wine of God's Spirit will leave us broken and shatter all confidence in ourselves or our efforts.

### *Fresh Wineskins*

The new wine of the Gospel cannot exist in old wineskins. If we want to experience the power of the Gospel, our lives must be transformed. New wine must be put in new wineskins. The apostle Paul experienced this transformation of heart on the road to Damascus. Writing to the Corinthians, the apostle would say:

*[17] Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.  
The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. (2  
Corinthians 5)*

This was the reality Paul experienced. After meeting the Lord Jesus, he was a new person. The persecutor of the church

### Old Wineskins and New Wine

become its greatest ambassador. His desire to destroy the church was ripped from his heart. His hatred of the cause of Christ was changed into a passion for Christ and a willingness to lay down his life to know Him and His purpose.

The Lord Jesus taught that to become His child, we need to be born again:

*[6] That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. [7] Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' [8] The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit." (John 3)*

This new birth is a spiritual birth. The life of Christ is implanted into us. This is a powerful work of the Spirit of God. Through this work of the Spirit, our lives are changed. This is what Jesus refers to as fresh wineskins. These wineskins are soft and flexible to the Gospel and the work of God's Spirit. We receive this new life as a miracle of God, who gives us a new heart and mind. The Spirit of God comes to dwell in us, empowering us to live in His purpose. It is in this transformed life that the power of the Gospel will have its full effect. Only in this new life can we experience the fullness of God's purpose.

There are some valuable lessons for us in these words of Jesus. The first lesson is this—the Spirit and the flesh are incompatible. The great hindrance to the work of the Spirit in our lives is the old wineskin of the flesh. In Galatians 5, the apostle Paul compared the actions of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit.

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*[19] Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, [21] envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. (Galatians 5)*

Notice that the apostle speaks of the works of the flesh but the fruit of the Spirit. The word “works” indicates that the effort is of human origin. The term “fruit,” however, is different. The fruit cannot make itself. It is dependent on the vine. It is a result of the work of the tree. The fruit Paul speaks about here is not human fruit but the “fruit of the Spirit.” It is a result of the presence of God’s Spirit in us and originates in Him. He does the work.

Notice also that there is a difference between the works of the flesh and the fruit that the Spirit of God produces in us. The flesh and the Spirit are enemies.

*[17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do. (Galatians 5)*

You cannot serve the Lord in the flesh. Sadly, however, many believers have never come to realize this. Some years ago, I was travelling in a car with a group of pastors. We were at a stoplight when a beggar came by with a somewhat dirty cloth

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to wash the windscreen of the vehicle. The hope was that the pastors would give him a bit of money. One of the pastors, seeing this, became angry. He got out of the car and scolded this beggar for his actions. What I saw that day was not the fruit of compassion or love but the works of the flesh. There was no patience or understanding in his words, only anger for the inconvenience of having his windscreen washed with the only dirty cloth the beggar had. As I watched this unfold, I began to realize that all too often, we are still living in the flesh. We are trying to minister with hearts that are as hard as old wineskins.

I have also seen how little we depend on the guidance of God's Spirit in the work of the church. There are all too many churches where the Spirit of God is not the leader. The pastors, elders and deacons formulate their business plan. They then pray the God would bless that plan. The administration of the church is no different than a secular business. We are trying to put the new wine of God's Spirit into old hardened wineskins. We are not sensitive to the Lord's leading and where He wants to go. Instead, we demand He bless our human ideas. The results are often devastating. The church may have lots of members and programmes, but it is devoid of the new wine of God's Spirit and the life He brings. The work of God done in the flesh is not what God desires. If we are to see the fullness of His blessing, we must cast off the old wineskins of human ideas and agendas and clothe ourselves with the new wineskins of humility, absolute dependence and faith in what God is doing. I have seen churches push forward with their plan but fail to see the work that the Spirit of God was doing already. For the new wine of the Gospel to have its effect in our lives and community, the Lord is looking for people who will reject the

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old wineskins of the flesh and allow Him to transform them into new and flexible wineskins that can expand as He moves within them.

There is one more point I would like to make here. When God wants to pour out His new wine, He will first prepare a fresh wineskin.

*[38] But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. (Luke 5)*

What is true for our salvation is also true for our ongoing Christian life. You see, even as believers, our wineskins can become hardened to the new wine of God's Spirit. I have had times in my life when I have settled into a pattern and been content to remain there. When this happens, our Christian lives stagnate, and the Lord God becomes distant. We find ourselves getting off track and losing the joy of the Lord.

I have experienced times in my Christian life when the Lord shattered my hardened wineskin. In its place, He prepared a new and more tender wineskin. The process of having our old wineskin broken is not an easy one. We find ourselves coming to the end of ourselves and confessing before God our helplessness to accomplish what He has called us to do. We realize that we need to be transformed, and the hardness of our hearts needs to be broken. We stand before Him in utter helplessness, recognizing that unless He gives us a new heart and mind, we cannot go a step further. As painful as the shattering of our old wineskins is, the work of His Spirit in renewing and transforming our hearts and minds makes up for any pain we might feel. As He changes our hearts, we experience victory, intimacy, and empowerment. The Spirit of God moves again in these new wineskins as we surrender to Him and His work.

## Old Wineskins and New Wine

I suspect that if you have been walking with the Lord, there have been times when He has had to replace your old wineskin. I remember a time when I stood before Him having to confess that I did not genuinely believe what His Word told me about who I was in Him. I had to admit my disbelief and surrender to His love. I also remember a period of my life when the Spirit of God made me aware of just how much I needed Him and His work. These were life-changing moments for me. In those times, the Lord transformed my whole outlook, and His Spirit was released to work in new ways.

I am so thankful that the Lord God is patient and never tires of replacing my hardened wineskin with one that can expand again with the new wine of His Spirit. One thing is sure; if you want to experience the fullness of the Gospel and the power of His Spirit in your life, you will need to have Him give you a fresh wineskin that is tender and sensitive to Him and His work. This is not a one-time event for us as believers. I believe that often when the Lord wants to do a new work in us, He will deal first with the hardness of our hearts. He will bring to our awareness just how much we need Him. He will prepare us for the new wine He wants to pour out by giving us a new wineskin.

The religious leaders of Jesus' day were unaware of their need. They were proud of their efforts and believed that they had all that it took to please God in themselves. They were so focused on their "religion" that they rejected the Lord and the salvation He offered. They saw no need for the New Wine of God's Spirit. New wine is incompatible with our selfishness, pride and independence. The new wine of God's Spirit will shatter our old wineskins and leave them broken and



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humbled before God. The Pharisees were not ready for that. They were unwilling to surrender their old wineskins so that God could give them a fresh wineskin.

For Consideration:

Why was new wine never placed in old wineskins?

How is human religion like old wineskins?

What is the new wine Jesus spoke about in this passage?

How is the old wineskin of the flesh not compatible with the new wine of the Gospel? What needs to happen for the Spirit of God to work?

Is it possible for the believer's heart to become hardened to the work of God's Spirit? Explain.

Apart from your salvation, have you ever had a time when the Lord has had to give you a new heart and mind? Explain.

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For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to forgive you for trying to do the work of the Gospel in your strength and wisdom. Ask Him to show you your need of His leading and empowering.

Ask the Lord to help you to understand that unless you have a new wineskin that is sensitive to the work of the new wine of His Spirit, you cannot do the work of the Gospel as He requires. Ask Him to forgive you for times when you have ignored or resisted the work of His Spirit to do things your way.

Ask God to transform your heart and remove any dependence on yourself and your wisdom to do the work of the kingdom.

Thank the Lord for the trials He has brought you through. Thank Him that these trials have broken your pride and revealed your need of Him in a deeper way.

Ask God to give you the grace to resist the flesh and to put no confidence in your flesh or its reasoning. Ask Him to give you a heart that is wholly surrendered to Him, His leading and His empowering.



## Chapter 4 - The Old Is Good

*39 And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'” (Luke 5)*

We come now to the final proverb of Jesus in response to the objections of the Pharisees and scribes. In verse 39, the Lord Jesus speaks again about old and new wine. The focus of this verse, however, is different from His illustration in the preceding verses. Jesus speaks here not so much about the wine as He does about the people who drink the wine.

There is a difference between old wine and new wine. In an article entitled: “What’s Up With That: Why Some Wines Taste Better With Age,” Nick Stockton explains the difference in this way:

*Tannins are a group of molecules that come from grape stems, seeds, and skins. "Tannins are present in all grapes and are generally produced by the plant as defensive compounds," said Jim Kennedy, an enologist at California State University, Fresno. Tannins have anti-fungal properties, but also make the unripe grape taste really nasty until the seed is mature. Not only do they taste bitter, tannins bind to the proteins that make your saliva slimy, stripping away the sliminess, leaving your mouth feeling dry, chalky, and ashen. "This is like how a green banana leaves your mouth feeling," Kennedy said. This feeling is called astringency.*

*But tannins aren't just salivary spoil sports. They're also indirectly responsible for a wine's smell. Tannins don't have any aromas themselves, but react with the wine's alcohols*

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*and esters (acidic alcohols) to gradually subdue the flowery, fruity aromas of youth. They also combine with other molecules to help create the more complex and subtle smells characteristic of mature wines.*

*<https://www.wired.com/2014/10/whats-wines-tastes-better-age/>*

To bring out the best flavour and aroma, wine needs to be aged. Jesus understood this when He said: *“And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, ‘The old is good’”* (Luke 5:39). The taste of old wine is preferable to new wine. If given a choice, the most natural thing would be to choose the older and more mature wine.

The question we need to consider here is what Jesus meant by this parable. In the first two parables, the Lord Jesus compared the religion of the scribes and Pharisees to the Gospel He taught. The old garment and the old wine referred to the doctrine of the Pharisees and scribes. There is no reason to see any change in this interpretation in verse 39.

What was the response of the religious leaders of Jesus’ day to the Gospel He preached? In Matthew 15, the disciples told Jesus that when He taught was an offence to the Pharisees:

*[12] Then the disciples came and said to him, “Do you know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?” (Matthew 15)*

Listen to the response of those who heard Jesus preach in the synagogue in Luke 4:

*[28] When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. [29] And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on*

The Old is Good  
*which their town was built, so that they could throw him  
down the cliff. (Luke 4)*

The reaction of the people of Jesus' day to the gospel message He preached was so strong that they wanted to kill Him.

Writing to the Romans about the Jews of His day, the apostle Paul quoted from Isaiah:

*[33] as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of  
stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in  
him will not be put to shame." (Romans 9)*

The Jews of Paul's day rejected the Gospel of Jesus Christ and saw it as a blasphemous offence. They preferred their old religion to the new wine of the Gospel.

The new wine of the Gospel is hard for many to accept. Jesus taught that we are sinners and that there is nothing we can do to change this fact.

*[23] Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his  
spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to  
do evil. (Jeremiah 13)*

Jesus believed what Jeremiah preached about the human heart.

*[9] The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately  
sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17)*

Jesus knew that the thoughts and intentions of the human heart were only evil all the time:

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*[5] The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. (Genesis 6)*

One day a Pharisee came to Jesus at night to speak with him about the condition of his soul. As a Pharisee, he lived a religious life. Nicodemus believed that Jesus was from God and that what He taught was true. Listen to what Jesus told this religious man who believed in Him and His message in John 3:

*[1] Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. [2] This man came to Jesus by night and said to him, "Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him." [3] Jesus answered him, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God."*

Essentially what Jesus told Nicodemus that day was that nothing he did or believed counted. He needed to become a new person—he needed to be born again. Matthew records Jesus as saying:

*[20] For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5)*

There was no one more religious in Jerusalem than the scribes and Pharisees. To think that a person needed to be even more righteous than them was difficult to imagine.

You can see why the Gospel of Jesus was a bitter cup for many to drink. Jesus taught that human effort was insufficient to merit favour with God. This was an offence to the Pharisees

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and religious people of the day who believed that somehow their sacrifices should count for something. They could not imagine that they were in the same position before God as the tax-collectors and sinners.

Human religion is comfortable and predictable. It tells us that if we do certain things, we merit the favour of God. The more we do for God, the more religious we are. Religion shows us how we are to live and what we need to do to go to heaven. If we are doing those things, we feel good about ourselves, and we maintain our status in the community of faith.

When the Lord Jesus chose His disciples, they left everything they had. They left their homes and families. As they followed Him, they risked their lives and endured the mockery of those who hated the message they preached. The apostles endured great insults. Many of them died for the message they preached. Hebrews 11 gives us an account of the men and women who faced great persecution because they chose to follow the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord was crucified. The anger over the message He preached was so intense that the people of His day chose to kill Him to rid the world of His teaching. They hated the Gospel He preached.

Throughout the ages, men and women who preached the Gospel have been martyred and tortured for the truth they believed. Tyrants have sought to destroy the Word of God. Whole countries have banned the Bible and imprisoned those who own it. Even in our day, men and women who teach the truth of Scripture risk their lives for doing so. Jesus taught that the days are coming when people of our own family will hate us because of Jesus:



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*[21] Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, [22] and you will be hated by all for my name's sake. But the one who endures to the end will be saved. (Matthew 10)*

Jesus makes it clear in Matthew 16 that if we are going to follow Him, we must be willing to deny ourselves and take up our cross:

*[24] Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. (Matthew 16)*

To follow Jesus, the disciples left everything. He would be their Master and Lord. Jesus expects nothing less today. We must surrender to His Lordship and die to ourselves. He must be first in all things. His must be our greatest desire and ambition in life.

Jesus taught that there was no other way to God, but through Him:

*[6] Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14)*

This exclusivism has offended many. They cannot accept a message that teaches that there is only one way to God. They have a hard time believing that all other ways apart from Christ lead to hell and eternal separation from God.

Jesus makes no apology for His teaching. Listen to His words in Matthew 7:

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[13] *"Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. [14] For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.*  
(Matthew 7)

The way to the Father is through a narrow gate. Few people find this narrow gate. Most people will continue on the wide road that leads to destruction. These individuals reject this gate as being the only solution to the problem of sin and the only way to God.

In Luke 5:39, the Lord Jesus told the Scribes that if given a choice, humanity would choose the old wine of law and human effort over the new wine of the Gospel. John Gill, in his commentary on this passage, expressed it this way:

*Scribes and Pharisees, who have drank of the old wine of the law, and the traditions of the elders, do not desire the new wine of the Gospel, but prefer the former to it. (John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible (JGEEB) John Gill. "John Gill's Exposition of the Entire Bible." Cedar Rapids, IA: Laridian, 2013. Electronic edition copyright © 2013 by Laridian, Inc., Cedar Rapids, Iowa. All rights reserved.)*

The NIV Study Bible Notes interprets this parable of Jesus to mean:

*Jesus was indicating the reluctance of some people to change from their traditional religious ways and try the Gospel. (NIV Study Bible Notes (NIVSBN)) "NIV Study Bible Notes." Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004. Zondervan NIV Study Bible (Fully Revised). Copyright © 1985, 1995, 2002 by The Zondervan Company. All rights reserved.)*

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There is something very comforting about continuing in our old ways. Change comes at a high price. We risk losing friends and the support of loved ones. Change opens unfamiliar territory to us with all the uncertainty that this brings. For this reason, it seems much more comfortable to follow the broad and familiar road that leads to destruction rather than take the detour through the narrow gate.

Because the gate is narrow, we are forced to strip off all our baggage to pass through. There are so many things we want to hold onto, but they will not fit through that narrow gate. God expects us to lay everything down at the entrance and surrender it up to Him. Many chose to walk away because of this. A powerful example of this is found in Matthew 19 when a rich ruler came to Jesus and asked what he needed to do to have eternal life. Jesus told him to sell all he had, give it to the poor and follow Him. Matthew 19:21-22 tells us the response of that ruler:

*[21] Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." [22] When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. (Matthew 19)*

That rich ruler went away full of sorrow in his heart. He was unwilling to part with His wealth to enter a relationship with God. He would not surrender His vast resources, even to obtain eternal life. He left the entrance to the narrow gate and continued on the broad way that led to destruction. He would not be the last person to make this decision.

The new wine of the Gospel is offensive to many. They cannot accept its call because it is too costly for them to bear. They

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cannot receive its truth because it is an insult to their human pride. The Pharisees, like many people, preferred their old traditions and religious practices to the truth. I have even met individuals who knew that the message of Jesus was true but refused to accept it because of what it would cost them. They were unwilling to give up their status in the community. They were reluctant to surrender their passions. Like the rich young ruler, they walked away from Jesus, sorrowful in heart, but committed to their possessions and status.

The disciples of Jesus left everything to follow Him. They turned their back on the religion of the Pharisees to pursue the truth of the Gospel of Christ. They ate with tax collectors and sinners because they needed to hear the message of the Gospel. They were unconcerned about whether they would make themselves unclean by associating with sinners because they knew the forgiveness of Christ. It was not what the religious community thought about them that mattered, but what Christ thought of them.

The old wine of traditions and human religion is not the same as the new wine of the Gospel. How easy it would be for us to be content to maintain the traditions and religion we have grown up with. How comfortable it is to stick with the old ways. The old wine of religion and legalism, however, will never satisfy our soul. Only Jesus can do that.

The disciples of Jesus rejoiced in the presence of sinners. They did so because they had discovered the truth that had set them free from the bondage of sin and human effort. They had tasted the new wine of the Gospel and that new wine had transformed their lives. They ate with sinners because the love of God now constrained them to share the good news

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they had discovered. The new wine overflowed within them, pouring out in everlasting joy to all who would listen.

The religious Pharisees and scribes of Jesus day rejected the new wine of the Gospel. "The old is good," they said. They were comfortable with the traditions and laws of Moses. Their eyes were closed to anything else. The old wine of the law, however, would not save their soul, for that they needed the new wine of Jesus Christ and His work.

For Consideration:

How is the gospel offensive?

How did the people of Jesus day respond to the message of the Gospel? How do people react to this message today?

Why do people feel it is easier to stick with their human religion rather than accept the message of the Gospel?

What is the cost of following Christ?

What is the difference between traditions and religion and the message of the Gospel of Christ?

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Have you been set free from human religion to experience the freedom of the Gospel?

For Prayer:

Ask the Lord to set you free from the futility of human religion and traditions that can never bring us to God.

Thank the Lord that He has opened your eyes to the narrow gate that leads to God.

Thank the Lord that you have tasted the new wine of the Gospel of Christ and have been freed from your human effort to trust in Christ and His work alone.

Take a moment to pray for those around you, who, like the Pharisees and scribes of Jesus' day, still trust in their religion and traditions.

Ask God to give you the grace to be willing to suffer for His cause. Surrender yourself anew to Him and the new wine of the Gospel He preached.



## Chapter 5 - Summary of Jesus' Teaching

In this final chapter, let me take a moment to summarize the teaching of Jesus in Luke 5:36-39. The passage tells the story of a confrontation between a group of religious leaders and Jesus. The Pharisees were known for strict adherence to the Law of Moses and rigorous observance of Jewish traditions. They gave a tithe of everything they owned and kept themselves from anything or anyone that would defile them. They saw themselves as the supreme example of what it meant to be a follower of the Lord God of Israel. The Pharisees judged true religion by outward actions and practices. They looked down on those who did not measure up to the standard they held dear.

On this occasion, the Pharisees watched as Jesus and His disciples sat at a table with tax collectors and sinners. Their religion would not allow them to eat with a tax collector. They refused to associate with anyone they perceived to be a sinner. Standing at a distance, the Pharisees rebuked Jesus and His disciples for their free association with the ungodly.

The response of Jesus revealed what He felt about the religious beliefs of these spiritual leaders of Israel. He compared their faith to worn-out garments and dried up wineskins. The religion of human effort, practiced by the Pharisees, was incompatible with the Gospel Jesus preached. Jesus came to offer a new way.

How often have we tried to attach the Gospel of Jesus to our religion? We speak about the work of Christ for our salvation but live as if everything depended on us. I have talked to



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individuals who claim to trust Jesus but do not have an assurance of their salvation because they are not sure they have lived a good enough life. Like an old filthy garment, our human religion and effort must be cast off. It cannot be repaired or patched anymore. We need to realize that if we are going to be right with God, it will not be through our personal righteousness. Like Isaiah, the prophet says: "All our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment" (Isaiah 64:6).

We do not need to patch up or repair our lives. The great need is a new life. When the old garment is worn out, it needs a replacement. This is what the Lord Jesus came to do. He came to offer us a new life, a new heart, and a new mind. Those who come to Him will never be the same. As much as the Pharisees tried, they could never measure up to the standard of God's righteousness. Their religion and human effort were offensive to God.

What we need today is not more effort but a realization that all our endeavours fall short. Instead of trying more to accomplish our personal religious goals, we need to surrender to what God wants to do in us. There is no hope unless He gives us new birth. We need to be clothed in the garment of His righteousness. Unless He changes us and gives us a new robe, we will never be able to please Him. Stop trying to repair and improve your human efforts and let Him transform you from within.

For us to be transformed from within, we need the new wine of God's Holy Spirit. Our old hardened wineskins must be broken and replaced with fresh wineskins that are tender and flexible in His hands. These new wineskins, received as a gift from God, expand as He sees fit. As the new wine of God's Spirit fills us, we grow more and more into the image of Christ.

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The work of God's Spirit transforms us from within. This transformation is not our attempt to be religious but the work of God in changing our attitudes, passions, and desires. As this new wine matures within us, it changes us. This is a work of God from start to finish. The wineskin does nothing but be flexible and expand as the wine matures within.

How easy it is for us to say: "The old wine is good." We become happy with where we are. We feel like we have grown enough. We are unwilling to pay the cost for greater maturity and intimacy with God. We are content with our ministry and become used to our routine. We do not like the uncertainty of what the Spirit may do or lead us to do. We love being in control and choosing our destiny. We struggle to surrender, and so we rest in what is old, familiar, and comfortable.

What blessings we miss, however, when we fail to allow God's Spirit to be Lord of our life. As long as we wear the garment of religion and human effort, we will never understand or experience the fullness of the work of God's Spirit in us.

There is a religion that is focused on human effort, rules, and traditions. This is different from the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel calls us to die to ourselves and let Jesus make us new. It calls us to allow Him to fill us with the new wine of His Spirit, exchanging our hardened wineskins for new and flexible skins that are sensitive to what He wants to do in us.

Will you surrender your old garments to Him? Will you allow Him to give you a new heart and mind that He can fill with His Spirit. Will you trust in this new wine to transform, lead and direct you in the path He has for you to take? The Pharisees

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and scribes of Jesus' day chose to remain in their old garments and resisted any effort of God to change their old wineskins. They would perish as religious people who knew nothing of the power of God to transform and renew. May God give us the grace to learn what they failed to learn.

## Light To My Path Book Distribution

Light To My Path Book Distribution (LTMP) is a book writing and distribution ministry reaching out to needy Christian workers in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Many Christian workers in developing countries do not have the resources necessary to obtain Bible training or purchase Bible study materials for their ministries and personal encouragement.

F. Wayne MacLeod is a member of Action International Ministries and has been writing these books with a goal to distribute them freely to needy pastors and Christian workers around the world.

These books are being used in preaching, teaching, evangelism and encouragement of local believers in over sixty countries. Books have now been translated into several languages. The goal is to make them available to as many believers as possible.

The ministry of LTMP is a faith-based ministry, and we trust the Lord for the resources necessary to distribute the books for the encouragement and strengthening of believers around the world. Would you pray that the Lord would open doors for the translation and further distribution of these books? For more information about Light To My Path Book Distribution visit our website at [www.lighttomypath.ca](http://www.lighttomypath.ca)