



## The parable:

The parable of the wineskins is to be found in three Gospels: Matthew, Mark and Luke. The Gospel of Luke gives the most complete text.

Jesus said:

- *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.*
- *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.*
- *No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins.*
- *And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'* (Luke 5:36-39 - see also: Matthew 9:16-17 / Mark 2:21-22)

## The context:

The reason for this parable is the question posed by John's disciples to Jesus as to why His disciples do not fast

Jesus replies:

- *Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while he is with them? But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; in those days they will fast."* (Luke 5:34-35)

And Jesus then tells the parable to indicate that He is shedding new light on the teaching of the Old Testament.

## Remark:

It is usual to speak of the **laws** from the Old Testament, which are imposed and must be obeyed, with punishment for every transgression.

However, '**law**' is the translation of the Hebrew '**torah**', which means:

- **teaching**
- **instruction**

When '**the law**' is referred to in the text of the Bible, or when it is referred to as such in the studies on this website, its deeper meaning '**instruction**', or '**teaching**', should be taken to heart, if one wishes to experience the full life, which Jesus talks about when He says:

- *Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.*
- *Take my yoke upon you **and learn from me**, for I am gentle and humble in heart,*
- *and you will find rest for your souls.*
- *For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:28-30)

## The old garment:

The law (the teaching) given by God via Moses after the exodus from Egypt was intended to be written in the heart and to transform man inwardly.



This is why God said:

- *Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. (Leviticus 19:17)*

For, as Jesus said later:

- *For **out of the heart** come evil thoughts - murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander. (Matthew 15:19)*

The law (the teaching) of God was intended to influence the meditations of the heart, as Moses expressed when he transmitted God's words to the Israelites:

- *These commandments that I give you today are **to be on your hearts**. (Deuteronomy 6:6)*

No-one is capable of putting the Bible's teaching completely into practice, however.

Paul writes:

- *So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. (Galatians 3:24)*

The law was to supervise life and morals.

However, a law can only prevent someone from acting in accordance with the wrong desires of his heart, so that whoever hates his brother is prevented from murdering him.

In this sense the laws can be seen as a garment, which must hide man's nakedness - the image of the sinful heart.

Nevertheless, what lives in a person's heart will be unable to be kept hidden and will be noticed by other people.

This is why Jesus came to the world, so that man would be justified **through faith in Him** and not through strict observance of the law, which no-one is capable of.

**Because of man's weakness the 'garment' is incapable of preventing man from acting against God's will.**

**Man's imperfection will be visible. The 'garment' will show 'tears'.**

### Repairing the old garment.

A piece of cloth from a new garment is not used to repair a tear because:

- the new cloth will shrink in the wash, as a result of which the tear will only become worse.
- the fact that the new patch does not match the old garment will be conspicuous

### Meaning:

Repairing an old garment with a piece of cloth from a new garment is no solution.

There is no teaching that is capable of preventing someone from acting from a wrong state of mind.

A person's heart has to change.

This is why Jesus leaves the image of a garment in the parable and uses a different image, to make what He is teaching clear.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Study: Matthew 5:17 - Jesus has fulfilled the law.



## New wine:

Jesus taught how to become a citizen of the Heavenly Kingdom.

This is why He compares the teaching He gives to 'new wine'.

This is not something one puts on, to hide what lives in the heart, but something that one must 'drink', which must renew man's heart, inwardly.

Jesus' teaching is the fulfilment of prophecy, in which God says:

- *I will sprinkle **clean water** on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols.*
- *I will give you **a new heart** and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.*
- *And I will put **my Spirit** in you **and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.** (Ezekiel 36:25-27)*

**Pure water** is the image of the teaching that purifies the heart, which makes the heart sensitive, so that it becomes receptive for the Spirit of God.

The purpose of Jesus' teaching is for man to live in accordance with 'the law', God's teaching as expressed in the Old Testament - not from an imposed commandment, however, with fear of punishment for transgression<sup>2</sup>, but from a willing heart that is guided by the Holy Spirit.

## Wineskins:

Wine was kept in leather wineskins in the time of Jesus.

In the same way the teaching of Jesus, which He compares to new wine, must be kept in a 'wineskin'.

By the **wineskin** Jesus means someone who is prepared to receive His teaching like new wine.

Jesus makes a distinction between a wineskin that has already been used - the old wineskin - and a completely new wineskin, which has not yet been used.

## The old wineskin:

Jesus warns against keeping wine in an old wineskin that has already been used.

He says that new wine will cause the old wineskin to tear, so that the wine will run out and the old wineskin will be lost.

A wine merchant was asked whether he knew why new wine causes an old wineskin to tear.

He said that wineskins are no longer used at the present time, but he indicated that he knew that they are referred to in the Bible.

He supposed that sediment was left in a used wineskin, and that when this came into contact with the new wine, it caused it to ferment, as a result of which the old wineskin would eventually burst. He also said that it was possible to turn a used wineskin inside out and burn the sediment off. If the leather was scraped clean the wineskin could be used again as new.

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<sup>2</sup> Study: The law and the curse.



## Meaning:

In His teaching Jesus shows the heart of God - God as the Father, who is love, and who sent Jesus to the world to make forgiveness of sins possible, through faith in Him.

This was completely new for the people of Jesus's time, who lived under the legalistic teaching of Moses.

The old wineskin is therefore also a symbol of hanging on to that legalistic teaching and one's own rules of life and habits, which have been added to it over time.

From the Gospels and the Book of Acts it is clear that those old ways of thinking caused opposition, as a result of which it was not possible for Jesus' new teaching to be understood.

Those people were unable to comprehend Jesus' teaching, so that they were unable to receive the new life for which Jesus came to the world.

## The new wineskin:

The new wineskin symbolises the fact that the old must be done away with in order to be receptive to the new teaching of Jesus, as new wine.

When the Israelites left the slavery of Egypt they were only allowed to take unleavened bread with them. No sour dough, originating from the time of slavery, was allowed to be used.

After they were set free they were not allowed **to use old sour dough** for the **newly baked bread**.

**Old sour dough** represents the way of thought as a result of previous teaching.

In Jesus' day that was the teaching of His time, as He said to the disciples:

- *"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." (Matthew 16:6)*

They did not understand that at first, but:

- *Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against **the teaching** of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16:12)*

If anyone wants to receive Jesus' teaching in his heart, he must first be completely renewed in his way of thinking, as Paul said:

- *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but **be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will.** (Romans 12:2)*

Only when one turns from the world's ways of thinking and is renewed in one's thinking, through Jesus' teaching, will one be able to understand the will of God.<sup>3</sup>

That is precisely what Paul experienced in his life.

He was brought up as a Pharisee and persecuted the Christians.

However when, after meeting Jesus on the road to Damascus, he had removed the 'sour dough' from his knowledge, he demonstrated that Jesus was the promised Messiah from his new view of the Old Testament.

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<sup>3</sup> Study: Conversion.



Paul wrote from experience:

- *But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, **for whose sake I have lost all things**. I consider them garbage, **that I may gain Christ** and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - **the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith**. (Philippians 3:7-9)*

In the present era also, anyone wishing to be a disciple of Jesus must let go of the sour dough, one's own ways of thinking and that of the world, in order to be able to comprehend the ways of thinking of the Heavenly Kingdom.<sup>4</sup>

For:

- *We were therefore buried with him (Jesus) through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live **a new life**. (Romans 6:4)*
- *Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ, the new creation has come**: The old has gone, the new is here! (2 Corinthians 5:17)*

This is what Jesus means when He speaks of an old garment that must not be repaired with a piece of new cloth.

**The alternative is something completely new: new wine must be received in a new wineskin.**

And this no longer refers to outward appearance, but to the fulfilment of the prophecy from Ezekiel 36, the inward transformation of the heart, for:

- *And hope does not put us to shame, **because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us**. (Romans 5:5)*

When a person lives in a relationship with God and with Jesus, in the power of the Holy Spirit, on the basis of the love of God in the heart, the soul, he/she will live in a different manner.

This is life in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, on the basis of love in the heart, which is the fulfilment of 'the law and the prophets'.<sup>5</sup>

**This is life on the basis of new wine, as a new wineskin.**

## **The old wine is excellent:**

Only Luke mentions that Jesus said - probably with pain in His heart:

- *And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'* (Luke 5:39)

Matured wine is usually considered to be better.

The new wine that Jesus gives surpasses everything however, as the master of ceremonies had to admit, at the wedding at which Jesus turned water into wine.

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4 Study: Discipleship (1).

5 Study: Discipleship (2).



He said to the bridegroom:

- *“Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now.” (John 2:10)*

### **Conclusion:**

Jesus promised:

- *I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. (John 10:10)*

Whoever receives Jesus’ teaching and lives under His authority will achieve his full potential in life:

- freed from the curse on the law
- in a life in accordance with God’s commandments,
- on the basis of divine love in his heart.