

no man putteth new wine into old bottles

by William MacDonald

Transcript

“...no man putteth new wine into old bottles; else the new wine will burst the bottles, and be spilled, and the bottles shall perish. But new wine must be put into new bottles, and both are preserved.” (Lu. 5:37, 38)

The bottles referred to here were actually containers made from the hides of animals. When these wineskins were new, they were pliable and somewhat elastic. But when they became old, they were stiff and inflexible. If new wine was placed in old skins, the fermenting action of the wine would build up too much pressure for the old wineskins to accommodate, and they would burst.

Here in Luke 5, Jesus uses this to illustrate the clash between Judaism and Christianity. He is saying that “the outmoded forms, ordinances, traditions and rituals of Judaism were too rigid to hold the joy, the exuberance and the energy of the new dispensation.”

This chapter contains dramatic illustrations. In verses 18-21, we see four men tearing up the roof of a house in order to bring a paralyzed man to Jesus for healing. Their innovative, unconventional method is an illustration of the new wine. In verse 21, the scribes and Pharisees begin to find fault with Jesus; they are the old wineskins. Again, in verses 27-29 we have Levi's enthusiastic response to Christ's call, and the banquet he held to introduce his friends to Jesus. That is the new wine. In verse 30, the scribes and Pharisees grumble again. They are the old wineskins.

We see this in all of life. People get set in traditional ways of doing things and find it hard to adjust to change. The housewife has her own way of doing the dishes and finds it irritating to see someone else fumbling around in her sink. The husband has his own ideas as to how a car should be driven, and nearly loses his senses when wife or children drive.

But the great lesson for all of us is in the spiritual realm. We should be flexible enough to allow for the joy, the effervescence, the enthusiasm of the Christian faith, even if it comes in unconventional ways. We neither want nor need the stodginess and cold formalism of the Pharisees, who sat on the sidelines criticizing when God was working.

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