

New Wine in New Wineskin

by Zac Poonen

The sermon emphasizes the need to break free from religious traditions and denominationalism in order to experience the new wine of the Holy Spirit

Scripture: Matthew 11:12, Mark 7:1, Luke 5:38, 1 Corinthians 14:26, Ephesians 4:11, 1 Peter 2:5, Revelation 1:12, Revelation 2:14

Topics: "New Covenant", "Spiritual Freedom"

Description

Zac Poonen preaches about the importance of embracing new wineskins to contain the new wine of God's Word, highlighting the battle against religious traditions that can hinder our obedience. Jesus was crucified not for preaching against sin, but for exposing the hypocrisy of religious leaders and their traditions that replaced God's Word. Poonen challenges believers to break free from old-covenant characteristics and embrace the new covenant realities, such as every believer being a priest and the importance of body-ministry in gatherings.

Transcript

Jesus said, "New wine must be put into new wineskins" (Lk. 5:38). And here is where our obedience is tested. In acquiring the new wine, our battle is against sin. But in acquiring the new wineskin, our battle is against religious traditions that have annulled the Word of God. And it is far more difficult for many to break free from the traditions of men than it is for them to break free from sin! But, men of violence alone will possess the kingdom of God (Matt. 11:12). Religious traditions cannot be removed apart from violent treatment.

Jesus was crucified not because He preached against sin, but because He preached against religious traditions that had replaced God's Word among the Jews (Mk. 7:1-13). He exposed the hypocrisy of religious leaders, the emptiness of their religious traditions and turned out of the temple those who made money in the name of religion. His zeal to purify God's house was what infuriated the religious leaders to ask for His crucifixion. It is unlikely that people will demand our crucifixion for preaching a message of 'brokenness' and the new wine. But if you are determined to go on and proclaim the whole counsel of God that the new wine must now be put into new wineskins, you can expect the wrath of the religious hierarchy in every single denomination that there is in Christendom.

Why did Jesus say that the new wine could not be put into the old wineskin? Because the old wineskin could not stretch any more and so would burst. The old wineskin was once useful - to put the old wine in -

but it is of no use for the new wine. The Jewish religious system - the old wineskin - was once ordained by God through Moses to contain the old wine. But once Jesus had come and established a new covenant, a new wineskin was needed. The old had to go. Jesus said that the old could not even be modified with the new patched on to it! That would tear the garment (Lk. 5:36).

We may think that, being Christians, we have got rid of the old Jewish wineskin and that we have a new wineskin in the Christian church. But if you look carefully at what you call your Christian assembly, you may be surprised to find a number of old-covenant characteristics in it.

Consider just three examples, although there are many others.

First of all, the Jews had a special tribe (the Levites) who were priests who did all the religious work. Not all Jews could be priests. Under the new covenant, however, all believers are priests (1 Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6). Although this is a truth held theoretically by most believers, it is actually practised by very few. Almost every group of Christians has their 'priest' or 'pastor' or 'God's servant' or 'full-time worker' who are exactly like the Levites of old, leading the worship of God's people. Only these 'Levites' can baptise new converts and break bread. And these 'Levites' are supported by the tithes of God's people. In the meetings, these 'Levites' dominate the show, giving no opportunity for a 'body'-ministry. A one-speaker show is part of the old wineskin. Under the new covenant, every believer can drink of the new wine, be anointed with the Holy Spirit and have the gifts of the Spirit. Two or three prophets are to begin the meeting, one or two may speak in tongues (with an interpretation for each) and every believer is free to prophesy in the meeting and build up the church. This is the new wineskin (1 Cor. 14:26-31). The new wine is described in 1 Cor. 13 - the life of love. The new wineskin is described in 1 Cor. 12 and 14. But how many believers want things done God's way? Alas, very few. Most are content with their old wineskin and their paid 'Levites'.

Secondly, the Jews had their prophets who found God's will for them in various matters - since the prophets alone had the Spirit. But under the new covenant, the prophets have quite a different function - to build up the body of Christ (Eph. 4:11,12). Since all believers can now receive the Holy Spirit, they do not have to go to some prophet to find out God's will for them (Heb. 8:11; 1 Jn. 2:27). Yet many believers are still living in the old wineskin of going to some man of God to find out what they should do, whom they should marry, etc.

Thirdly, the Jews were a large community of people scattered over a wide area but having a central headquarters in Jerusalem and having an earthly High Priest as their leader. Under the new covenant, Jesus alone is our High Priest and the only headquarters we have is the throne of God. The Jews had a lampstand with seven branches branching out of the central stem (Ex. 25:31,32). This was the old wineskin.

Under the new covenant, each local church is a separate lampstand - with no branches. You see this clearly in Rev. 1:12,20, where the seven local churches in Asia Minor are represented by seven separate lampstands - unlike the Jewish lampstand. Jesus, as the Head of the churches, walks amidst those lampstands. There was no earthly pope or general superintendent or president of any denomination in those days. There was no chief elder brother anywhere on earth either, who was the final voice in any matter. Each local church was governed by local elders. These elders were directly responsible to the Lord as their Head. But we see multitudes of Christians around us today who are in a denominational system (the old wineskin), whether with or without a name - for there are some groups who claim not to be a denomination but who nevertheless have all the characteristics of a denomination. All this is the old

wineskin.

God has ordained the new wineskin of the local church to prevent the spread of corruption. If the seven churches of Asia Minor had all been branches of one another, then the corrupt doctrines of Balaam and the Nicolaitans and the false prophecies of Jezebel (Rev. 2:14; 15,20) would have spread to all the seven churches. But since they were all separate lampstands, two churches in Smyrna and Philadelphia could keep themselves pure. Get rid, then, of the old wineskin of denominationalism, if you want to keep your assembly pure. May the Lord raise up many in our land who are willing to do violence to the traditions of men (Matt. 11:12) that have held so many in bondage; and who will build the body of Christ in each locality.

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