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**Presentation Transcript**  
**New Wine Old Skins**  
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Today our title is *New Wine Old Skins*. In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke, Jesus gives His disciples a brief parable. Let's read it:

**Luke 5:37-39** – *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. But new wine must be put into fresh wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, 'The old is good.'*"

So, today we're going to look at that parable and the context in which Jesus told it. Not only will we look at what it meant in Jesus' day, but also how the same meaning might apply to us in our lives.

In Jesus' time and much earlier, wine could be stored in jars of stone or clay, but they were heavy. Clay was easily broken, and if wine was stored in them for long, they would become useless for anything else. People also used the skins of sheep and goats to carry smaller amounts of wine. And they fermented wine in them as well. Those were not like the wineskins we see today. Modern wineskins are generally plastic bottles covered with tanned leather to give the appearance of a wineskin.

Originally, wineskins were made by sewing the skin of an animal so that it became water tight. You might look at the picture associated with this presentation on our Website, or else it might be hard to understand how a piece of tanned leather could be water tight. If you think about it, many Inuit and other indigenous people know how to make water tight boots out of skins. So, it's kind of a lost art in Western culture, but among others, not so much.

Wineskins were also lighter, somewhat flexible, less breakable, easier to carry, and they would expand as the wine off-gassed, and then shrink as the wine was consumed. Once a wine was put

in the skin, it would change as the wine fermented and was consumed. The skin would shrink and become less elastic over time. That's why Jesus' comment that a wineskin would break if you tried to use it again to make a new batch of wine. As the wine off-gassed, the brittle shrunken old skin would break open, no longer able to expand.

There's probably a lot more we could learn about wine and wineskins in Jesus' day, but we get the point. If you're going to make a new batch of wine, you had to put it in a new skin, because the old skins were worn out, brittle and shrunken.

Now, let's take a look at the context in which Jesus tells His disciples this parable. It's in Luke 5:33.

**V-33-36** – *And they – they, being the Pharisees – 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.”* So the Pharisees observed John's disciples, and the disciples of the Pharisees fasted often, but His disciples didn't. It doesn't say it, but the idea here is that they felt more righteous than Jesus' disciples, because of their fasting. So, they were looking down on them for that. *And Jesus said to them, “Can you make wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast in those days.”* So, His answer really was, it's a matter of timing, and it wasn't time for that now for His disciples. So, Jesus' disciples were with Him to learn His ways, to do His work with Him, and their time to fast would come later. But there's more – verse 36 says: *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.* So, what is He illustrating here? Both of these have to do with some kind of incompatibility. New and old, sometimes, don't work together. I think that is His point.

The Father sent Jesus to make a sharp change in how He would work with people. Do you know what that change is called in the Bible? Let's look at it – Hebrews 8:8.

**Hebrews 8:8-10, 13** – *Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will establish a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah – yes, it's called a New Covenant, a new agreement, a new way of worshipping God. It's the same God, and since God is love, that stays the same. And since love is expressed by the law of God, the underlying laws are there as well, but expressed in a more organic, flexible and all-encompassing way than ever before. You used to be able to keep the law by avoiding killing someone, and Jesus said, “That won't work anymore. Now, you can't even hate somebody, or you're breaking God's law.”* So, much more all-encompassing and we called it organic. Verse 9, he said: *not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt.* Here's the difference – verse 10: *For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.* Notice that it's the same law, but more intimately connected to us. *In speaking of a new covenant – verse 13 – he*

*makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away.* You can't patch up the Old Covenant with this new one. The whole garment is new.

And then He adds another parable to more deeply expand on His thought. And that's the parable we read already in verse 37: new wine must be put in fresh wineskins. The Old Covenant can't contain the New. The new way of worshipping has to have a whole new skin – a new way of expressing obedience and love and worship of God. The old framework – Judaism, which by that time had a component of human reason added to it by the rabbis. Their reasoning is called the oral law, and the written law is the Old Testament – the Old Covenant. If you're going to entertain and contain this new agreement – the new way of worshipping God – you're going to have to be flexible in your thinking, because you are using the old ways – kind of like new wine has to be put in a new and flexible skin. You're going to have to think differently than you're used to. Do we get that so far? Okay, good.

But then, He completely lays bare the issue of not liking it – that Jesus' disciples didn't fast like they did. That's where this whole discussion started, isn't it? So, listen to this. At the end of this parable, He said:

**Luke 5:39** – *No one, after drinking old wine desires new, for he says, "The old is good."*

So, that was right after explaining about the wine bottles. So, who, in the discussion, likes the old ways better? Well, the Jews do. Gentiles didn't know any different. Right?

Let's read Luke 5:33:

**V-33** – *And they said to him – we're going back to what brought this all up to begin with – "The disciples of John fast often and offer prayers, and so do the disciples of the Pharisees, but yours eat and drink." They were saying, "We like the old way – the way we do." Those are the people that say, "The old is good." The Old Covenant was what they were used to – what comforted them, what they wanted to cling to. Thinking about something new was scary to them. And Jesus was very much upsetting the order of things for them.*

There is a telling scripture in John 11 that is later in the story than where we were just reading.

**John 11:46** – *...but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done – a miracle. So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council – so you've got the council, the chief priests and the Pharisees all together – and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." So, think about what they are saying. They are anxious. They're afraid everyone – to quote them – will follow Jesus, and then, "no one will follow us" – so, selfish thought there – "and then the Romans will come and they'll destroy all of us." It doesn't matter that He's doing good works in God's name. It's only about, "What's*

going to happen to us?” So, “let’s drink that old wine – keep on drinking it – not the new. Let’s just keep the ball rolling, maintain the status quo – with us on top, of course – and everything will just be fine.”

So, the point for us today...let’s think about that. That was then. This is now, right? How do Jesus’ words about wine and old skins instruct us today? What are *we* supposed to learn from that? Some people say, “No, that’s not right. We’ve got to stick to the old say.” Well, is God flexible? Yes, it says, “the same yesterday, today and forever.” So, His character and commitment and His law remain the same. He doesn’t change. And yet, we can pray, and He often changes His plan to meet our needs.

I guess the questions are: Can we be *inflexible* about following and loving God, while flexible when our will and His seem to contradict? Or, to use Jesus’ analogy, can we be flexible enough to contain His will like a wineskin expands and contracts to contain wine?

Let’s think about how that might apply to us today – at least, to those of us in the independent Church of God. I was talking to an independent Church of God minister about the state of his congregation. He was generally happy. The congregation was growing. Members were so warm and loving. People were flocking to them. But he noticed some of the people who were coming in were migrating out of the Church of God older organizations and having a hard time with it. They didn’t like the music, or they didn’t like women up on the stage at church for any reason, or the way some people dressed, or the way some wore their hair. Some of them didn’t like it that there were people attending who didn’t keep the festivals on the same days. And, after coming out of a more structured environment, they were having trouble adapting – similar to the Jews of Jesus’ day who were coming out of a more rigid system. You can read in Acts 15, a huge hullabaloo about what the Gentiles were supposed to do.

Now, we’re not talking about all the problems the rest of the members were having. It’s not my intention to pick on anybody. We’re discussing the issue of adjusting to *new* things, because this is an example of new wine in an old skin or framework. And the assumption is: just because it’s new doesn’t mean it’s good or it’s bad. That all has to be evaluated. But we’re talking about the example Jesus gave was the New Covenant. Well, that’s all good. So, we don’t want to be inflexible about that.

So, here’s another example: A number of the Church of God organizations do evangelism by media. The members contribute to pay for it. I’ve stated before, media evangelism is a good thing. So, this is *not* a discussion about effectiveness. It’s about two different ways of evangelizing. In the independent world, emphasis is also put on being involved with the community and relating to people one on one where they are and sharing our stories of God’s help and intervention. This is one of the ways Jesus did it. But He also used the media of His day – gathering a crowd on shore and moving out over the water in a boat so His voice would carry. If you come from a church that focuses on media evangelism, and you go to a church that grows by member example contact and involvement, you have to flex to contain the new system – just

like wineskins have to flex to hold the new wine. Some people just can stand the thought of having to actually involve themselves with new people and do some evangelistic work on their own.

So, can you flex to contain the new system in your heart – like the wineskin flexes? Can you live and let live when you see someone who isn't wearing a tie? Or, who keeps a holy day on a different day than you do?

So, guess what makes it hard for us to adjust to new things. This is something we might not talk about so much. I came out of two structured church organizations. When I came to the independent church world, I realized it was different. It was a new skin – not doctrinally, but in approach – in the way things are done. People in the independent church, in my experience, seem more interested in the fruits of the Spirit and using them than in structure – you know, all thinking and doing things the same way. There's a lot more freedom of expression or open discussion. You could say, "It's more organic." There's a term for this kind of freedom. We're not free to disobey God. It's freedom *in* Christ, not freedom without Christ. But we are free to worship Him with our unique set of spiritual gifts. Did you hear the word *unique*? Everybody's going to do it differently, and that's okay.

There's been some discussion in my previous presentation on the elements of an independent Church of God. And there's been a lot of discussion about how you know if you have a spiritual gift. Just wanting to do something – you know, like singing or speaking – is not proof that you have a spiritual gift. It's about the feedback you get from what you do. So, it takes flexibility to fit into that skin. We don't sometimes get what we think should happen.

Now, there is a spoiler in fitting in to the different skin of an organization. Do you know what that is? We talked about it before. The priesthood said, "We can't have Jesus going on like this. Pretty soon He'll have everyone following Him, and then, where will we be?" See, they couldn't accept the new structure He was bringing – you know, "the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Right? Because they were operating out of the fruits of the flesh, which is a self-centered approach. It made them anxious. To decrease their anxiety, Jesus was going to have to go.

When we try to flex to fit into the New Covenant, like the early Jewish Christians had to, we have to flex to accept a new role in our independent congregation as an evangelist. Jesus' advice to us – to get our minds off ourselves – to trust Him, keep our eyes on Him, to follow His example, to cast all our cares and concerns on Him, to treat others the way we want to be treated, to include everybody – kids included – to focus on our contract with God instead of other people's contract with God – stop judging another man's servant, as Paul called it – and if we do that, He promises that we can let go of our anxiety, because He has our backs. And once we do that, we can fit into the new skin without a problem.

One of the most astounding things about the Bible to me, at least, is the way Jesus' eternal words

have application across centuries and have value for all the Christian of every age, even in our modern world. Wineskins have generally not been used for hundreds of years to store wine, but they still serve to teach us about our connection to Jesus Christ today.

This is Bill Jacobs for LifeResource Ministries, serving children, families and the Church of God.

We might take a brief moment to thank all those who've been contributing to this effort. We get a lot of positive feedback from people and all you who are contributing to helping that. So, I want to thank all of you for your involvement. God has laid it on your mind to participate with us in this effort.