

A few years ago we bought, what I call, “the slum”... Next door to the house we were living in, was one of St George's worst houses. It was on the block where our shed now is, in Barlee Street. Now, the thing is, when we bought it, I didn't know whether I was going to do it up – renovate it, or if I was going to demolish it completely, and start again from scratch.

- *Most of the sheeting on it was asbestos, so I was going to have to pull it down one sheet at a time, anyway...*
- *The roof needed completely replacing,*
- *some of the floor needed replacing...*
- *it needed restumping...*
- *the plumbing and the wiring needed replacing*

Anyway, by the time I got all the sheeting off, and the roof off, I realised that the only part that was any good, was most of the framing timber, but the actual design of the house was atrocious, and I would have to make some major changes to the frame....

So, the decision was made – it would be ridiculous to spend so much time and money, renovating the slum. There was only one thing for it – demolish it, and start again. ... Well, me and the boys built a shed – the house is just going to have to wait a bit...

Sometimes, you've just got to start over.

Jesus said, you don't patch an old shirt with a new piece of material... if you do, next time you wash it, the patch will shrink, but the shirt that's already shrunk, can't shrink any more, and it'll tear, and it'll be ruined completely...

He also said, you don't put new wine in an old wine skin. If you do, the skin will burst, and the skin and the wine will both be ruined. – What's He talking about there?

Well, wine has always been a favoured drink in the Mediterranean world. In Jesus' day, they didn't have readily available glass bottles, plastic bottles, or cardboard boxes with silver bladders to store their wine. And it might sound gross to us, but they used to use goat skins. A piece of goat leather, would be sewed tightly shut, so that it could hold a liquid – Sometimes water, sometimes wine.

And as you probably know, wine ferments – that is – it produces alcohol.

By the way, that's why, in the Bible, there are so many warnings against drinking too much wine. Wine was a common drink, but if you drink too much of it, it starts to affect you, physically, and emotionally, and mentally – it is a drug – it can change your personality – Alcohol is actually a poison (if you drink too much of it)..

And because of the way it affects people, the Bible classes “drunkenness” as “a deed of darkness”, and it warns against drunkenness, or drinking too much wine, over and over and over again.... Now, the message today isn't even about drunkenness – I'm just throwing this in here, because we live in a culture that very much promotes binge-drinking and drunkenness. And it is a curse on our society.

Young people, when your mates are getting drunk, and urging you to join in and give it a go – when they say “Be a man”, well you “be a man” alright – you be man of God, or you be a woman of God, and say “No – I'm not even tempted by that”.

For, God has made you, and saved you and redeemed you – not for you to lose control of yourself – not for you to make yourself sick – not for you to destroy your body by poisoning it – God has made you for better than that – He has made you for His glory. And as Christians, we should be ready for when Jesus returns. We don't know when Jesus is coming.... I don't know about you, but I don't want to be drunk when Jesus arrives... – do you? ...

Anyway, this morning isn't about drunkenness – it's about new wine in old wine skins.

The skins of grapes already have a natural yeast growing on them.¹ As the grapes get crushed, the juice begins to ferment.

The yeast turns the natural sugars in the grape juice into alcohol and carbon dioxide, and the fermentation process often continues after the wine has been “bottled” into the wineskin. The release of the carbon dioxide causes the wineskins to expand, and a new skin, will stretch. But an old skin has already been stretched, and if you try and stretch it any more, it bursts – the stitches pop, and the skin and the wine are both ruined.ⁱⁱ

So, what was Jesus talking about? Was He giving us lessons on sewing? Was He giving us pointers on home-brewing? Was He giving Shannon Lush or Martha Stewart advice on mending household items??? – what was He on about?

I'll tell you what it means. A New Testament lecturer once said to our class, “*The point of the Gospel (Mark), is that God comes and takes religion, and actually shows Himself to be greater than religion.*”ⁱⁱⁱ God came (in Jesus Christ), and the religion that was supposed to worship God, couldn't handle God, and they crucified God.... The new wine came to the old wine skin, and it spat Him out...

We've been working our way through Matthew, and last week, we learned how having Religious Traditions can be worthless. If I don't have a loving relationship with God, and if I don't love others, and demonstrate God's mercy to them,

any religious traditions that I keep, are empty and pointless...
Religious traditions, without a relationship with God, are
worthless.... That was last week.

Now today, it's not the Pharisees any longer, but the Disciples
of John the Baptist, who have a bit of a dig at Jesus – isn't that
interesting? John the Baptist, well his whole message, was to
prepare the way for Jesus, but even John's disciples were
caught up in their religious traditions. They came to Jesus,
and asked Him: **"Why do we and the Pharisees fast, but
your disciples do not fast?"**

What's fasting about??

Fasting, is going without food, for significant times of prayer.

I don't know how it works, but it is a biblical concept, that
sometimes Christians, will stop eating, for a part of a day, or a
whole day, or for several days, or they might give up certain
foods for a time, to devote themselves to prayer, usually for a
specific, special purpose.

*And, from my own experience, when I have been in significant
points of juncture, I have usually had a time of prayer and
fasting, and it's at these times, that the Holy Spirit has really
given me, significant guidance, through the Bible, through
prayer, through dreams and visions...*

But here we have the disciples of John the Baptist, regarding fasting as a religious **duty** (that **has** to be carried out), rather than something that a disciple feels led to do, at particular times.... Alright, now fasting can be very helpful for you in your prayer life – but not if it is just a religious duty, or a religious tradition.

And, Jesus answered them: "**Can the wedding guests mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? The days will come when the bridegroom is taken away from them, and then they will fast.**"

Alright, Jesus wasn't against fasting. He taught us that we should fast – when the time is right. And, if Jesus' disciples were fasting, John's disciples shouldn't even know that they were doing it. Jesus said, "When you fast, keep it between you and God – don't let anyone else know that you're doing it. Don't go making yourself out to be a spiritual hero"...

And while Jesus was with them, the disciples wouldn't need to fast, but once Jesus was crucified, then they would. Jesus was obviously talking about His crucifixion, or maybe even after His ascension... Jesus would be taken away from them... But John's disciples already mourned. John had already been taken away from them. John the Baptist was rotting in prison, waiting to be beheaded^{iv}, at the whim of a spoilt princess....

But Jesus' answer to John's disciples, takes us way beyond a simple matter of timing of when it's appropriate, or inappropriate to fast. Jesus' answer, makes it glaringly obvious – the incompatibility – of the gospel and empty religious tradition...

The Law started out as something good – it started out as something beautiful.

David said of it:

Psalm 19:

- ⁷ The law of YHWH is perfect,
reviving the soul;
the testimony of YHWH is sure,
making wise the simple;
- ⁸ the precepts of YHWH are right,
rejoicing the heart;
the commandment of YHWH is pure,
enlightening the eyes;
- ⁹ the fear of YHWH is clean,
enduring forever;
the rules of YHWH are true,
and righteous altogether.
- ¹⁰ More to be desired are they than gold,
even much fine gold;
sweeter also than honey
and drippings of the honeycomb.

He's talking about God's law – beautiful....

The Apostle Paul said in Romans ^{7:12} **So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good.**

God's law was good – it was perfect,.... but it became perverted – it became a curse – it was perverted when it became an empty religious tradition. It became like an old wineskin – dried and shrivelled up – and when God stepped into the world, in the person of Jesus Christ, the religious legal traditions couldn't handle him.

And so the lesson is, “You can't squeeze the gospel into your old religious traditions.”

And Jesus demonstrated that.

- As soon as he left there, He came into contact with a woman who had been “unclean” because of her menstrual bleeding, for many years. The religious traditional laws said, “You can't do that Jesus”, “If you touch her, you'll be unclean”. But He healed her...
- He went from there, to wake up a dead girl. Their laws said “You can't touch a dead body, or else you'll be unclean.”, but He did, and He raised the girl back to life.
- He then gave sight to two men who were blind
- He then touched a demon-oppressed man (the height of uncleanness), and enabled him to speak once more.

What conclusion could the Pharisees possibly come to from all this? Well, He obviously can't be from God, because He's ceremonially unclean. And yet He keeps healing people, raising the dead, giving sight to the blind, voice to the mute, and driving out demons.... How can He do it? He must be doing it by the devil himself....

How far off the mark could they have possibly been? God stood in their midst, and they said "It's the devil"....

God set His children free from sin and bondage... ³⁴ But the Pharisees said, "He casts out demons by the prince of demons."

They had so perverted God's law, with their human rules and regulations, that by it, they rejected God, in the name of God.... And eventually they crucified God, in the name of God.

Don't ever, let your rules and regulations, shut God out.
Don't ever let the religious traditions that you've been taught by men, shut God out...

That's what it was about.

But I want to share with you, another example of new wine needing new wineskins.

When you become a Christian, many of us, try to Christianize our chosen lifestyle. We try to put this new wine of the good news of Jesus Christ, into our old lives... and ultimately, our new found faith – our trying to fit Jesus in, with our old selves, fails...

You cannot “Christianise”, your old life

Jesus said to a good Pharisee, by the name of Nicodemus, **“I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again.”**

In our baptism, we put to death, the old man, and we raise up the new. We threw away the old wine skin. We turn aside from our old, fleshly desires – we turn our back, on our old way of living... And we begin a new life in Christ.

When you become a Christian – when Jesus Christ becomes your lord and saviour, the old life is gone – the old religious traditions are gone – the old fleshly habits, are gone – the old condemnation of self and others, is gone. You get to start over. A new wine skin, filled with a new wine.

A life of freedom – **not** where you are **obligated** to keep God's law to be saved, but a life where, because you are **already** saved – because you are **already** filled with the new wine of the Holy Spirit, you supernaturally begin to live out the good and perfect law, because Christ has saved you from the old wine skin, along with it's curse...

Questions.

ⁱ Bible Facts. Logos Bible Software

ⁱⁱ *There is no biblical evidence that wine ever consisted of unfermented grape juice. When such juice mentioned (cf. Gen. 40:10–11) it is never called wine. Occasionally the Bible refers to “new wine” (Heb. tîrôš Mic. 6:15; KJV, Isa. 65:8; cf. Acts 2:13; Gk. gleúkos), but this too was fermented and could intoxicate (Hos. 4:11; the LXX always translates tîrôš Gk. oinos “wine”). New wine refers to the first drippings from the vat; it was purer, and because of its higher sugar content fermented into a more substantial drink. Wine could be graded in this manner (cf. the Cana wedding, where the steward is conscious of quality; John 2:10).*

Myers, A.C., 1987. *The Eerdmans Bible dictionary*.

ⁱⁱⁱ James Haire Lectures (Mark), notes taken by Michael Brumpton, 22-26/07/2013

^{iv} Matthew 4:12