

New Wineskins

READING

Matthew 9

Luke 5

Romans 12

1 Corinthians 12

Ephesians. 4

John 14

Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins. And if they do the wineskins will burst, and the wine will pour out, and the wineskins will be ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved.

This article isn't based on the book, "The Problem of Wine Skins" by Howard Snyder, but I do recommend reading that book if you can find a copy. It has a lot of insight into church structures and where we have fallen into the traps I have also mentioned in this article. And I love the opening sentence: "It is hard to escape the conclusion that today one of the greatest roadblocks to the gospel of Jesus Christ is the institutional church."

Ouch.

Do you think that's true?

The Old Testament way of "doing church" was to go along to an incredibly elaborate, amazingly decorated, awe inspiring building, where a separated group of men, priests, who did nothing but serve in that special building, would perform very detailed and highly regulated rituals on your behalf.

The old wine was the Law. A huge list of over 600 rules that you must keep or if you break then you will at least be punished/disciplined/fined, or at worst, be stoned to death for your crime.

The priests themselves had heaps of rules regulating their daily life, and governing who could and couldn't do certain things.

And the Old Testament is full of stories of people breaking those rules and Yahweh's anger being unleashed on them because of that. Time and time again they would repent and beg for another chance. He would relent and give them one, and they would always, always, break the rules again and receive the outpouring of his anger yet again.

And it's not that they were like a new puppy who just doesn't seem to understand the rules yet. They knew what the rules were, and they understood the consequences. They were just never able to keep them the way they had to to receive God's full blessing and approval.

And, in their defence, we're no better. There is no way any of us would have kept all those rules either. We all have the same basic, fundamental problem. As you probably know, breaking any of those rules is called "sinning". And deep down, we love sin.

We say we hate it. But honestly... we don't. We might hate some sin. But those will be the ones we don't do ourselves. And each of us will have one or two sins that we do regularly, and deep down the problem is, we do them because we love them.

This is why Yeshua came. He showed us that it is actually possible to live a life and keep every rule.

And by his sacrificing his own life he made it possible for the times we have broken those rules to be forgiven.

He also made it possible for Yahweh to send his holy spirit to live with us. To guide us. To teach us. To change us. To empower us.

This is the new wine.

The people were asking why Yeshua's disciples didn't do things the old way like the priests. "Because you don't put new wine in old wineskins. You need new wineskins."

We have to do things differently than they did before Yeshua came.

And if you look at the way they did church in the New Testament you'll see that they very much did use new wineskins. The way they did church was nothing like the way they did the temple with the old wine.

The priests were gone. Everyone is now a priest. There is no elite group who run the whole show.

In the new wineskins there is no clergy who do everything.

There are no elaborate buildings which glorify God by their magnificence. Because that's the old way. It's not the new way. Church can be anywhere, even in someone's home. Even outside. Palatial temples are no longer the way to glorify God.

There is still prayer. But anyone can pray. Anyone can talk with God directly. Again we don't need an elite clergy to do that for us, or to perform any rituals on our behalf.

If we want to have bread and wine, we can just pass a loaf and a cup around the table. It doesn't need to be a gold or silver chalice. It can be a dirty old mug if that is all we have.

How about your church?

Is the church you are part of a new wineskin?

Or an old one?

Yeshua said that if it's an old one, then the new wine will break it.

I honestly hope it does. The new wineskins are so much better.

I think this is why so many old wineskin churches stifle and suppress the new wine. They like the old ways. Especially how it makes them feel more important and special. But honestly, I think they're only considered important and special by people of the world. Not people who have the new wine, who are no longer impressed by such things. Who recognise that pomp and ceremony are old wine, from long gone times for Christians. Worldly people think a gold covered church is something amazing. New wine people usually think it's a waste of money, and they recognise it as belonging to the old wineskin way of impressing people.

The old wineskin rulers of churches know that if they let the new wine have freedom, their wineskin will break, their way of doing church will be gone. They won't be elite and special any longer.

It will be replaced with a new wineskin church where everyone is special.

It will become somewhere where people are healed. Where lives are transformed. And where believers are born again.

And where they all rely on the holy spirit of God for everything they do, and they all work together as a body, glorifying Yahweh by everything they do together.

If you can't convince your old wineskin church to change... then leave it. And find one which has.

Your life will never be the same again.

See if you can find a copy of Howard Snyder's book and read it.