New Wine in Old Wine skins

In the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, lies a short parable Jesus tells about the “old” and the “new.” It is written: “And no one puts new wine into old wineskins. The old skins would burst from the pressure, spilling the wine and ruining the skins. New wine must be stored in new wineskins. That way both the wine and the wineskins are preserved” (Holy Bible, Matthew 9:17).

Setting:

Jesus is driven to tell this parable by some questions raised regarding Jewish customs. Matthew records that it was the disciples of John the Baptist who asked Jesus why His disciples were not fasting, when both they and the disciples of the Pharisees were. In response to this question Jesus gives three examples. The first portrays a wedding, in which there is no need to mourn while the bridegroom is present. Christ asks, “Should the wedding guests mourn while celebrating with the groom? Someday he will be taken from them, and then they will fast” (Holy Bible, Matthew 9:14). His second example explains why one does not use unshrunk cloth as a patch for old clothes. He further explains that “the patch shrinks and pulls away from the old cloth, leaving an even bigger hole than before” (Holy Bible, Matthew 9:16). His third example warns against using old wine skins for new wine, which would result in spilled wine and ruined wineskins. This final example clearly demonstrates the dangers in mixing “old” with “new.”

Exegetical Analysis:

In order to understand the meaning of this parable, it is important to understand how wine is processed and stored. In the 1st century, wine was commonly stored in leather skins. The parable explains that old wine will burst the new wineskins. This is due to the fact that “old skins
were less flexible, and fermenting wine kept inside of them would expand and sometimes burst the skins” (Marcus, 234). Therefore, if one pours new wine, which has not yet fermented, into old wineskins, the skins would rip and both the wine and the skins would be destroyed.

Why does Jesus use this parable as a response to a question regarding fasting? Fasting was a part of Jewish custom, practiced for “the expiation of sins, for penitence, and for mourning” (Fitzmyer 596). Jesus’ parable about the presence of the bridegroom illustrates what is about to happen concerning salvation. A modern day reader of this passage should know that Christ’s death on the cross modified the process of forgiveness. After His death, Christians no longer had to compensate for their sins. Instead, they could simply receive forgiveness if they sincerely invited it into them.

When John’s disciples asked about fasting, they were basing their practices of faith purley on old Jewish customs. Christ, however, offered something new. Jesus’ response with the three examples demonstrates, “the incompatibility between the eschatological [doctrinal] newness of Jesus’ ministry and a way of doing things that, in Mark’s view, takes its cue from the old age” (Marcus, 235). As mentioned previously, Jesus illustrates how the “old” and the “new” cannot mix.

What is the old and the new? It is the old and new ways of salvation. The old refers the old Jewish customs, especially regarding the atonement of sins. The new refers to the gift of salvation brought by Christ’s death on the cross. As stated in the Bible Knowledge Commentary, “Salvation, available through Jesus, was not to be mixed with the old Judaistic system” (Walvoord). Christ was not trying to destroy the old ways of Jewish tradition and he does not say that the disciples will never fast again. Instead, he explains that “even though there would come a
time for it [fasting] in Christian life, it has an aspect of the “old” that has to yield to a “new” understanding of God’s economy of salvation” (Fitzmyer, 597).

Message:

Just as new wine poured into old wineskins will destroy both the wine and the skins, similarly the new salvation offered by Christ practiced through old Jewish customs will destroy both as well. “The old observances and practices are not simply to be taken over,” but the original Jewish doctrines of piety must yield to the new mission of Christ (Fitzmyer, 597).

Application:

Jesus’ parable boldly preaches that there are no compromises in Christianity. There is no middle road between the old and the new. In the parable, Jesus is specifically warning against compromises between world religions. However, it is just as true today, that one cannot compromise their faith with anything else. Christianity today, is constantly fighting to keep compromises out of the Christian faith. Many feel that it is okay to commit what they might call, “smaller sins,” and still say firmly that they are Christians. These are the very compromising dangers which Christ addresses. To be a Christian and say that, “it’s not that bad to… have sex outside of marriage, cheat on a math test, tell a harmless lie,” will destroy the individual’s Christian walk. Compromising is not an option. It will destroy both the individual and the Christian faith.
Works Cited:

