

# GLAD TIDINGS

“And we bring you good tidings of the promise made unto the fathers...” (Acts 13:32)

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## Fresh Wine Skins

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**T**he disciples of John and the Pharisees were fasting often and wondered why the disciples of the Lord were not fasting, but eating and drinking. Jesus responded with three related short parabolic illustrations: sons of the bridegroom not mourning and fasting, sewing a piece of undressed cloth on an old garment, and putting new wine in old wine skins.

Jesus instructed his questioners, using the illustration of the friends of the bridegroom, showing that it was not the appropriate time for his disciples to fast. The bridegroom, Jesus Christ, was still with them. However, the time would come when sadness over the Lord being “*taken away from them*” via death would provide the appropriate reason to fast (*Matthew 9:15-17*).

The same theme of appropriate action is seen in the next two illustrations. It is not fitting to sew a piece of undressed cloth on an old garment. The piece of new cloth that had not already shrunk would then pull from the old garment and “*a worst rent is made*” (*Matthew 9:16*). The les-

son? It was not appropriate. The same lesson is driven home with the illustration of fresh wine skins. No one puts new wine into old wine skins because the fermentation process would burst the old wine skins which had lost its elasticity, causing the wine to spill and the skins to burst. The appropriate action was to put new wine into new or fresh wine skins which had not been exposed to fermentation and both the “*new wine*” and the “*fresh wine skins*” would “*be preserved*: (*Matthew 9:17*).

As there is always an appropriate action to take, fitting for the occasion, the disciples of John and the Pharisees need to understand that fasting among his disciples would come when it was appropriate - when they were mourning over the Lord’s departure. Until then they would enjoy the presence of the bridegroom and eat and drink with him.

In the spring of 1992, a new publication began among some members of the church of Christ named “Wineskins”. Mike Cope, Rubel Shelly, and Phillip Morrison set forth their “purpose statement.” “Wineskins “is taken from Jesus’ parable about the

*ever-fresh gospel and its always-frail containers*” (*May 1992*). The “frail containers” are the “*culturally– conditioned and time-bounded*” people who make up the “*covenant community of God*”. In their mind, the time had come for the people to change. “*When those receptacle-carriers of the heavenly message become fixed and inflexible, they no longer serve God’s purpose effectively*.”

Of course, the “inflexible” old wine skins are those who still do not allow mechanical instrumental music in worship and forbid women leading the local flock as elders. It seems that a change in the once revealed “heavenly message” is what is “new” demanding a “new” more flexible people.

But where in Jesus’ parabolic illustration is this application of the *Wineskins* purpose? It is ironic that *Wineskins* published an article entitled “*Preach the Text, Brother*” (*Jan. 1994*). The article was correctly critical of what many call “Bible preaching” as being merely allegorical and foreign to the revealed text. We say to “Wineskins” you might follow your own advise: preach the text, brother!