

## New wine and old wine skins

**Luke 5:36-39:** *He told them this parable: "No one tears a piece out of a new garment to patch an old one. Otherwise, they will have torn the new garment, and the patch from the new will not match the old. And no one pours new wine into old wineskins. Otherwise, the new wine will burst the skins; the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, new wine must be poured into new wineskins. And no one after drinking old wine wants the new, for they say, 'The old is better.'"*

Most of us are familiar with Jesus' saying that you can't sew a new patch onto an old garment, or put new wine into old wine skins. Today's Christian evangelicals like to think that their theology is fundamentally different from the ancient Hebrew religion which was characterized by legalism and a very anthropomorphic view of God. The Christian belief that God tortures unbelievers endlessly in a place called Hell, has resulted from a failure to completely break away from Hebrew tribalism and a view of God as loving and kind only to a very select category of people, and very cruel and harsh towards the enemies of His favored nation. Although today's evangelicals have completely embraced Jesus' view of God as loving, kind, just and forgiving, they still cling to the tribal exclusivism of the Hebrews and have placed severe limits on the extent of God's love and forgiveness. They have been unable to fully embrace the teachings of Christ, because, like the Pharisees of Jesus' day, they have been unwilling to fully let go of the errors of the past. This is in no small part due to the erroneous view of the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures as historically, scientifically, and theologically inerrant in every respect, rather than viewing them as a progressive revelation of sorts, whereby God has progressively led His people on a journey of self-discovery. The Bible records this process from man's, not God's, point of view.

When I first embarked on my journey to discover what the Bible really teaches about God and Christian salvation, I had to put all my cards on the table, and be willing take off those cards which do not fit with the truth. One of those cards was Scriptural inerrancy. Because Christian evangelicals believe that their eternal destiny (heaven or hell for all eternity) is at stake, it would be very scary for them to put the inerrancy card on the table and be willing to take it off, if necessary. It was a step I had to take for the sake of intellectual honesty and an honest search for truth. However, as a Christian evangelical, I decided to leave that card on the table until fully satisfied that it was safe to take it off. I did not take that card off the table until I was fully convinced that the Scriptures fully support the doctrine of universal reconciliation, regardless of whether or not one views them as inerrant. Not only do the scriptures fully support universalism, but that support is absolutely overwhelming. Eventually, I felt safe in taking the inerrancy card off the table. I now view the Scriptures, for many very good reasons, as man-made documents which record God's progressive revelations to mankind, written from man's point of view. Understanding this has made it much easier to discard the "old" for the "new."

The teachings of Christ and His Apostles were a striking departure from the orthodoxy of the Hebrew religion. Since then, I believe God has continued to bless mankind with additional revelations and insights into His true nature and how we may interact with Him. These revelations, which I believe fully harmonize with the spirit and intent of the New Testament record, have come from a variety of sources, such as NDE's, science, hypnotic regression,

psychology, sociology, history, both Christian and non-Christian mysticism, and the writings of many thinkers from all walks of life. When investigating these sources of truth, we must be willing to discard some of the old garments, as we put on the new. Our search for truth is severely hampered if we are unwilling to first admit that there might be at least some flaws in our current belief system. Open-mindedness in our search for truth does not necessarily mean that we have to abandon our currently held convictions and beliefs. But, we must be willing to at least temporarily put those cards on table. In the end, we may end up discarding some of them. At the same time, however, we will be building a firmer foundation underneath the most important beliefs, the ones that are actually true.