

Mark 2:21

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse.

Analysis

Jesus uses a parable contrasting old and new: 'No man seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment.' The 'new cloth' is unshrunk fabric that will contract when washed. Sewing it onto old, already-shrunk garment creates worse tear when the new cloth shrinks. This illustrates the incompatibility of Jesus' new covenant with old covenant forms. The new cloth represents the gospel kingdom Jesus inaugurates; the old garment represents Pharisaic Judaism. Jesus' message can't be patched onto the old system—it requires completely new wineskins. Reformed theology emphasizes the radical newness of new covenant—not mere reform but fulfillment and transformation.

Historical Context

This parable addressed tension between Jesus' ministry and traditional Judaism. Pharisaic leaders expected Messiah to enforce stricter Torah observance, but Jesus proclaimed radical grace. Later, the early church struggled with this—Judaizers insisted Gentile converts must observe Mosaic law. The Jerusalem Council (Acts 15) clarified that faith in Christ, not law-keeping, justifies. The temple's destruction (AD 70) physically demonstrated the old covenant's obsolescence (Hebrews 8:13).

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Matthew 25:31 — Final judgment

Study Questions

1. In what ways do you attempt to patch new covenant freedom onto old covenant legalism?
2. How does understanding the gospel's radical newness free you from trying to supplement Christ's work?
3. What religious traditions might you be clinging to that obscure the gospel's transforming power?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	οὐδεὶς	ἐπίβλημα	ράκους	ἀγνάφου	ἐπιρράπτει	ἐπὶ
also	No man	a piece	cloth	of new	seweth	on
G2532	G3762	G1915	G4470	G46	G1976	G1909
ἱμάτιῳ	παλαιῷ	εἰ	δὲ	μή	αἴρει	τὸ
garment	an old	G1487	G1161	G3361	taketh away	G3588
G2440	G3820				G142	G4138
αὐτῷ	τὸ	καινὸν	τοῦ	παλαιοῦ	καὶ	χεῖρον
from	G3588	the new piece	G3588	an old	also	worse
G846		G2537		G3820	G2532	G5501
γίνεται						the rent
is made						G4978

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 9:16 (Creation): No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the rent is made worse.

1 Corinthians 10:13 (Parallel theme): There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Isaiah 57:16 (Creation): For I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth: for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made.

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