

Out With the Old, In With the New

Jesus used the ancient figure of the wineskins to warn His hearers against the soul-shrinking thought and life patterns of the traditionalists (see Luke 5: 33-39). Not long ago, I saw how His warning about old wineskins applied to my own life. A cluster of personal failures brought me face to face with frightening signs that my once-new wineskins were becoming old and brittle.

The first incident occurred when I was ridiculed along with several charismatic friends in a published work assailing the most visible leaders in this movement. The broadsides were volleyed by a man I consider a friend, notwithstanding his anti-charismatic posture.

My former will to live humbly with all Christians was cracked in the atmosphere of criticism. In private conversations, I was defensive, retaliatory and moving toward a kind of bitterness I thought my earlier experiences with renewal had pre-empted.

Not long afterward, I was speaking at one of the nation's great churches. While touring their expansive complex, I experienced a piteous recurrence of a character weakness I thought I'd overcome years before.

I used to feel threatened when I heard, read of or visited the scene of a great move of God. Intimidation would take over.

Years ago, I experienced a deliverance from this sorry state of mind, and I became genuinely happy to see God doing great things wherever I found them. That is, until that day in that church.

I wanted to rejoice in such health and blessing. Instead, I reeled under a vicious assault on a point of pride I hadn't recognized until then.

It didn't overcome me, but I was repulsed by the fact that so vile a spirit of jealousy could even momentarily taunt my soul. It's no delight to reveal these things—except that I can do so with an honest heart freshly freed through confession of my sin to God.

Of course, not one of us is ignorant of the subtle skill of the old nature in resurrecting itself. But when old ways shed by earlier repentance are found to have somehow returned, the discovery need not be defeating. It can become a hope, signaling the Holy Spirit's readiness to lead us forward!

We serve a Savior who not only forgives sin such as mine but also delights in renewing—again and again. The new wine is flowing today—and only new wineskins can contain it.