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Grounders:

What rules, regulations, and stipulations do you add to Jesus' message of heart transformation? They probably fall into two categories: *do's* and *don'ts*. Do go to church, do fast, do vote Republican or Democrat, do have it all together, do serve in church programs, do dress for success, do go to public Christian gatherings, do listen only to Christian radio, and the list continues. Then, we add the don'ts. Don't drink, don't smoke, don't chew, don't go with girls who do, don't cuss, don't go to rock concerts, don't watch TV, don't go to movies, don't listen to country music, don't dance, don't talk with gays, and on it goes. The result is containing the kingdom of God.

Two thousand years ago, God's plan for heart transformation had been hijacked by the Pharisees who had added 1,500 rules, regulations, and stipulations to the 613 Old Testament Laws. When they encountered Jesus, they couldn't handle the fact that His disciples included tax collectors like Matthew and that they didn't fast twice a week (a Pharisee add-on to the Old Testament provision for fasting one day each year on the Day of Atonement).

Jesus responded with a *parable* which means "to throw along side." A parable throws an earthly truth along side a spiritual truth. Parables can be allegorical, but they are not to be allegorized—neatly fitting each earthly character or object into a convenient spiritual box. About 40 of them are recorded in the Gospels. They come in at least 3 categories: 1-point, 2-point, and 3-point (simple and complex).

When challenged about rules, regulations, and stipulations, Jesus answered with a 1-pointer, "*No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. Neither do men pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst, the wine will run out and the wineskins will be ruined. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved*" (Matt. 9:16-17).

The new patch of unshrunk cloth sewn to an old garment would make the tear worse because the new cloth would shrink when the garment was washed. The new patch alluded to Jesus' message of heart transformation which he referenced as the *kingdom of heaven*—God's divine reign, rule, and order in the hearts and lives of people on earth now and in the future. The old garment is the Pharisees' religious traditions. Jesus was saying that He didn't come to patch up the Pharisees' religious system. He came for a revolution.

New wine was still fermenting. When poured into an old wineskin (goat skin was used to hold wine), the new wine would expand and break the brittle, old wineskin. Both the skin and the wine would be lost. Wine was often used as imagery for the kingdom of God. Consequently, Jesus' message of heart transformation was not going to fit in the Pharisee's religious framework.

Jesus' point is that His kingdom of heaven would not be contained by the Pharisees' rules, regulations, and stipulations, nor will it be contained by religion today. Baptists, Catholics, Presbyterians, Methodists, Orthodox, Lutherans, or Missionaries do not have a lock on the kingdom of heaven. Jesus has unlocked its door to anyone who humbles his heart to Him (Rev. 3:7).



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Have you contained the advancement of the kingdom of heaven to a place (a church building), a time (one hour a week on Sunday morning), or a style (of worship or rules)? Jesus' message of heart transformation cannot be contained. Wherever there is a humble heart surrendered to Christ, there the kingdom of heaven breaks through (Matt. 23:1-12). The proof test is love. Jesus said it (Matt. 7:12; 22:36-40). Paul said it (Rom. 13:9-10; Gal. 5:14). James said it (James 2:8). It was God's original idea (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18).

Love can break through in a hospital, in a bar, in the bed of a prostitute, in a concert hall, in a business deal, or in a dance club. It can break through in your work, your play, and your family. Wherever there is a humble heart surrendered to Christ, there the kingdom of heaven breaks through. Christ's message of heart transformation cannot be contained.

Uncontained,  
Mitch