

## Exchanging the Yoke of Sin for the Yoke of Meekness

Galatians 5:23; Matthew 11:28-30

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Jesus Christ did not set us free from the bondage of sin that we may pursue our own dreams, our own desires, or our own pleasures. The life of Christ within the Christian is not comfortable and pleasing to our own natural thoughts and to our own natural ways. For the life of Christ within us is revealed in **taking up our cross** and dying to that which merely pleases us, **denying ourselves** that which is comfortable to our flesh, and **following Christ** in the paths of righteousness and truth which He has blazed before us to walk therein. A soft, cushy, and comfortable Christianity is **NOT** the Christianity of Christ. The Christianity of Christ is the way of the cross (i.e. the way of death to self) and is the way of the empty tomb (i.e. the way of living anew for Jesus Christ in our thoughts, our desires, our dreams, our view of marriage, our view of work, our view of recreation, our view of suffering, and our view of death).

The Christian life to which Jesus calls us is not being without a yoke about our necks or upon our shoulders, rather the Christian life to which Jesus calls us is **EXCHANGING** the yoke of sin for the yoke of Jesus Christ. Dear child of God, are you rejoicing in your deliverance from the intolerable yoke of sin (its guilt, condemnation, and power)? I certainly pray you are throughout the day rejoicing in the removal of that unbearable yoke. But in addition to that, are you also rejoicing in the yoke of Christ that He calls every Christian to wear in following Him—He who wore the same yoke in meekness and submission to His Father’s will? What is it that will give you the grace to bear the yoke of Christ in times of affliction, heartache, and trial, as well as in times of health, joy, and blessing? As we shall see, it is the meekness of Christ, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart.”

The main points from our text this Lord’s Day are the following: (1) The Meekness of Christ in our Justifying Rest (Matthew 11:28); (2) The Meekness of Christ in our Sanctifying Rest (Matthew 11:29-30).

### I. The Meekness of Christ in our Justifying Rest (Matthew 11:28).

A. As Matthew 11 begins, Jesus has sent out His disciples into the villages of Galilee in order to preach and prepare the way for Christ who will soon follow His disciples with His mighty works and His authoritative teaching and preaching.

1. The Apostles of Christ were like forerunners announcing the coming of the King to address His people. That is the attitude and posture ministers of Christ must have—we are mere forerunners—look not to us, but unto Christ the King. He must increase, and we must decrease. Let the personality cults within the pulpit die, and let Jesus Christ reign supreme in the preaching of His Word. Let us not glory in man, but in Jesus and in His cross and empty tomb.

2. In the remainder of Matthew 11, we hear the words of Christ commending the ministry of John the Baptist and condemning the unbelief of cities in Galilee (Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum). This rejection of Christ leads the Lord Jesus to utter the prayer found in Matthew 11:25-27, in which the Lord expresses His thanksgiving for the sovereign wisdom and power of His Father, who hides the gospel of salvation from the so called “wise”, the highly exalted of this world, and reveals it to the so called “babes”, lowly minded of this world. We must be like infants in coming to Christ—absolutely dependent upon the Lord, believing that all comes from our Father and not from our own wisdom, our own righteousness, or our own works.

3. After this prayer, the Lord Jesus then extends this gospel offer of rest to all who labor

and are heavy laden (Matthew 11:28).

B. This first rest in Matthew 11:28 is a **justifying rest**, which is a once-and-for-all, judicial rest and cessation from the guilt and condemnation of the insufferable and intolerable burden of our sin.

1. Dear ones, this is such a heavy burden that it will weigh us and drag us down to the lake of fire itself unless that heavy yoke is removed from us. For our sins (both original sin in Adam and our own personal transgressions of God's Law in thought, word, and deed) demand the just wrath and righteous punishment of the most holy God, as Judge, ("For the wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23). This justifying rest is a rest before the judgment seat of God that forever declares us righteous on account of the imputed righteousness of Christ and on account of the forgiveness of all our sin (past, present, and future). This rest from the yoke of guilt and condemnation of sin is absolutely complete at the very moment of faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. Nothing can be added to its perfection, or taken away from its perfection, because it is a rest that is not based upon us, upon our sin, upon our works of righteousness, or upon our obedience (or lack thereof), but is a rest that is based entirely upon the righteousness, obedience, and sacrifice of Jesus Christ (John 5:24).

2. The removal of this awful yoke of the guilt and penalty of our sin by looking in faith to the cross of Jesus Christ is beautifully illustrated in *The Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, when Christian casts his eye of faith upon the cross of Jesus.

Now I saw in my dream, that the highway up which Christian was to go, was fenced on either side with a wall, and that wall was called Salvation. Isaiah 26:1. Up this way, therefore, did burdened Christian run, but not without great difficulty, because of the load on his back.

He ran thus till he came at a place somewhat ascending; and upon that place stood a cross, and a little below, in the bottom, a sepulchre. So I saw in my dream, that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulchre, where it fell in, and I saw it no more.

Then was Christian glad and lightsome, and said with a merry heart, "He hath given me rest by his sorrow, and life by his death." Then he stood still a while, to look and wonder; for it was very surprising to him that the sight of the cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked, therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks. Zech. 12:10. Now as he stood looking and weeping, behold, three Shining Ones came to him, and saluted him with, "Peace be to thee." So the first said to him, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," Mark 2:5; the second stripped him of his rags, and clothed him with change of raiment, Zech. 3:4; the third also set a mark on his forehead, Eph. 1:13, and gave him a roll with a seal upon it, which he bid him look on as he ran, and that he should give it in at the celestial gate: so they went their way. Then Christian gave three leaps for joy, and went on singing,

"Thus far did I come laden with my sin,  
Nor could aught ease the grief that I was in,  
Till I came hither. What a place is this!  
Must here be the beginning of my bliss?  
Must here the burden fall from off my back?  
Must here the strings that bound it to me crack?"

Blest cross! blest sepulchre! blest rather be  
The Man that there was put to shame for me!"

C. Note, dear ones, that this justifying rest which Christ here promises makes no qualification of the troubled sinner weighed down by his sin except to come ("Come unto me" Matthew 11:28).

1. To come is to come in faith and trust in Christ alone. Jesus does not declare, "Come ye who are obedient, who are wise, who are rich, who are church members, or who are baptized." If you seek to come to Christ looking to any such qualification in yourself, you will not receive this justifying rest. It is in fact your very sin, the guilt of your sin, and the condemnation of your sin that weighs so heavily upon you that qualifies you to come to Christ to have that yoke forever broken from off your shoulders and to receive that justifying rest ("Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" Matthew 11:28). What appears to natural man to disqualify you from coming to Christ to receive His justifying rest is that which actually qualifies you to come in faith to Christ.

2. Jesus looked upon the traditions of the elders which the religious leaders demanded to be obeyed in order to be right before God like a heavy yoke upon the shoulders of the Jews (Matthew 23:4). Dear ones, the religious ceremonies of the Jews, the religious ceremonies of the Papists (or of any church or religion) in which you trust and believe that by keeping them you will be saved, is a yoke of bondage that cannot justify you before God. You can make any biblical duty (or any tradition not commanded in Scripture) a yoke of bondage, **IF** you believe your mere obedience will secure your acceptance before God. Even the duties commanded by the Lord in Scripture are not to be kept in order to receive the free gift of justifying rest, but are kept out of love and thankfulness because you have received the free gift of justifying rest ("I will **give** you rest" Matthew 11:28). Jesus simply calls you to come in faith to Him as unworthy sinners, whose yoke and burden of sin are dragging you down to hell, and He who cannot lie promises that He will break that yoke of sin's guilt and cast away that burden of sin's condemnation and will give you freely His justifying rest.

3. The meekness of Christ is herein evidenced that out of His meekness and underserved gentleness for sinners, He calls you as an unworthy, laboring sinner who is crushed under the burden of your sin to come in faith to Him in order to have that terrible, awful yoke broken forever that you might receive His justifying rest. In meekness at the present time Christ calls to you, "Come". But if you do not come, there will come a time in righteous judgment, He will declare "Go" — "Go into the lake of fire forever and ever."

## II. The Meekness of Christ in our Sanctifying Rest (Matthew 11:29-30).

A. We may be familiar with the concept of rest as a **justifying rest**. We may be familiar with **the weekly Sabbath rest** (in resting from our daily works and recreations in order to enjoy the Lord). We may even be familiar with the eternal rest in heaven, that **eternal Sabbath rest** (in resting from all sin and its temptations, from all pain, heartache, trials, death, and sorrow, in order to enjoy the Lord forever without interruption). But how familiar are we with our sanctifying rest?

B. Jesus distinguishes the justifying rest in Matthew 11:28 from the sanctifying rest in Matthew 11:29-30.

1. Whereas the qualification to enjoy our justifying rest is simply to come in faith, trusting alone in Christ alone, the qualification to enjoy our sanctifying rest is this (according to Christ): "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me ... and ye shall find rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:29). It's not that we stop trusting and believing in Christ at this point and simply work by taking His yoke and learning of Him. It's that we manifest that we are trusting in Christ and continue to trust in Christ by taking His yoke upon us and learning of Him ("Faith without works is dead" James 2:20). Justification without sanctification is a dead justification. A justifying rest that does not lead to a sanctifying rest is no true rest at all. Every Christian that

has had the yoke of sin broken in order to enjoy God's justifying rest, will also take the yoke of Christ upon his/her shoulder and learn of Christ in order to enjoy God's sanctifying rest. Where there is no yoke of Christ in one's life, there is no sanctifying rest.

2. You see, dear ones, it is possible to so emphasize the casting away of the yoke of guilt and condemnation to which we were bound that we forgot or minimize the truth that as justified Christians we have exchanged one yoke for another yoke—the yoke of bondage to sin for the yoke of Christ over the power of sin. As those who trust alone in Christ alone for our justification before God, we are not free to wander about in any direction or path that we choose. We are not free in Christ to love this world or the things of this world—which is worldliness (i.e. to love the wisdom of this world, the philosophy of this world, the fashion and tastes of this world, the riches of this world, the approval of this world, the pleasures and entertainment of this world, and the immoral standards of this world). We are in the world, but we are not of the world.

3. Dear brothers and sisters, we will only find rest for our souls as we grow in the meekness of Christ and take upon ourselves His yoke and learn of His meekness in submitting to His yoke. It is not only to learn of Christ's doctrine, but also to learn of Christ's meekness, heart, affections, and example. To learn only of Christ's doctrine will make our orthodoxy dead and lifeless. And notice that Christ does not say here that we are to passively bear the yoke that He has placed upon us (though that is true), but rather Christ emphasizes our active and voluntary taking the yoke of Christ upon us, just as He voluntarily took upon Himself the yoke of His Father's will ("Not my will, but thine, be done" Luke 22:42).

4. Beloved, our freedom in Christ is not to be unyoked from Christ and His commandments. Our freedom in Christ is not to be unyoked from Christ and our suffering, heartache, persecution, pain, afflictions, or the hatred of others. But rather our freedom in Christ is to be yoked to Christ and His commandments, Christ and His will, Christ and His suffering, Christ and the way of the cross in denying ourselves, taking up our cross, and following Him.

5. Notice the reason (in Matthew 11:29) that Jesus gives for taking up His yoke and learning of Him—"For I am meek and lowly in heart" (humble in heart). Jesus was not a so-called "free spirit" or a wild ox going about to do His own pleasure, to do His own will, to glorify Himself, but rather Christ was as an ox that was yoked to the will of His Father, even to the point of bearing His Father's wrath for the sin of even the chief of sinners. You have likely heard some professing Christians who described their freedom in Christ as a freedom from Christ's commandments. That is not freedom at all, but is rather bondage. That so-called freedom is like a train that has broken loose from its tracks (which is Christ's loving law). The end of such so-called "freedom" is not rest, but is restlessness, bondage, and destruction.

6. You take Christ's yoke upon you and learn of Him by surrendering yourself entirely to Him. "Whatever Jesus wants for me is what I want for me." You take Christ's yoke upon you and learn of Him by surrendering yourself without complaint to whatever He brings into your life in order to train you in love that you in meekness might serve Him and others. When I reflect upon the suffering that many who profess Christ in the past and in the present have and are enduring (imprisonment, cruel beatings, beheadings, rape, dismemberment), I am ashamed of the ways in which I have not surrendered my comforts and pleasures of this life to Christ. When I reflect upon those brothers and sisters that we pray for throughout the week who are suffering intense and chronic pain and have no known remedy, I am ashamed of the ways in which I have not surrendered my loved ones, my health, and strength to the Lord. The meek Christian (like Moses) counts the reproach of Christ to be greater riches than all the treasures of Egypt.

C. Dear ones, it is only as you take Christ's yoke upon you and learn of His meekness in taking the Father's yoke upon Himself and surrendering His life to the cross that you will find a sanctifying rest for your souls. This sanctifying rest will be yours as you take the yoke of Christ, submit in meekness to the yoke of Christ, surrender all that you are and ever hope to be to Jesus; only then will you find that sanctifying rest and

peace from the anxiety, worry, and fear of this world. When you come to the place that you have nothing to lose because everything belongs to Christ, you can finally take a deep breath and enjoy that sanctifying rest that surpasses all understanding. When we are cast into a fit of worry about family, possessions, health, house, or job, it is because we are sinfully not submitting in meekness to the yoke of Christ. We are not at the point learning of the meekness, lowliness, and submission of Christ. We are not at that point surrendering all under the yoke of Christ, and therefore, that sanctifying rest has taken flight from us like a bird. Sanctifying rest and peace is the fruit of submitting in meekness to the yoke of Christ.

D. But notice that Jesus states for our comfort the following words: “For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:30).

Yes, the yoke of Christ is easy, and His burden is light, but O how we make the yoke of Christ very difficult, and His burden so heavy.

1. What makes Christ’s yoke easy, and His burden light? Let me suggest to you three graces.

a. **A meek and lowly heart.** A meek heart does not aim at being honored by others. It bows the shoulder to the yoke, and realizes that is how meekness grows—living to serve rather than to be served. A meek heart makes Christ’s yoke easy and His burden light because it does not consider any service for Christ or for others to be beneath it, or too good for it.

b. **A loving and affectionate heart.** A fervent love for Christ always makes the work easier and the suffering lighter. The growing Christian falls in love with the cross, and counts the burden light, and so finds rest in service, and rest even in suffering.

c. **A thankful and appreciative heart.** When we know (really know) with a heart filled with gratitude the depths of Christ’s love and sacrifice for us, to take Christ’s yoke will be viewed by us as the very least we can do to express our undying gratitude for Christ.

2. What makes Christ’s yoke difficult and His burden heavy? Let me suggest three vices.

a. **A proud and self-centered heart.** It is the proud spirit that gets tired of doing good if it finds its labors not appreciated. It is the proud heart that will shun what is uncomfortable and belittle what it thinks to be beneath it.

b. **A despising and scornful heart.** Just as a loving heart makes the burden work easy and burden light, so a scornful heart will make the work hard (if done at all) and the burden so very heavy.

c. **A complaining and discontented heart.** It is also harder to bear when there is any looking back over the shoulder at the blessings of others or more comfortable times that we have enjoyed. When we look back we not only expose ourselves to grievous risk, but also we make everything so much harder to accomplish. It is a snare of the enemy to think if only our lot in life were more favorable we would find rest and peace. If we cannot find the rest of Christ in our present circumstances, we hope in vain to think we can find it in different circumstances. The issue is that we are not submitting to the yoke of Christ in surrendering all to Christ in meekness and humility.

Finally, the yoke of Christ is easy and His burden is light because you are not yoked alone, you are yoked to Christ, dear brother and sister. To take up Christ’s yoke alone would be to ask the impossible. Without Christ you can do nothing. But you can do all things through Christ who strengthens you. You are yoked to Christ, so that you might learn of Him. You are yoked to Christ, so that when you stumble and fall, He will cause you to stand once again. You are yoked to Christ, so that you can be assured that this sanctifying rest is yours, is powerfully and effectually yours. How can it NOT be when you are yoked to Him who spoke the universe into existence and upholds it by the power of His Word? Will He uphold the universe and not uphold you for whom He suffered the excruciating torment of the cross? Hear the words of Jesus, “Take my yoke upon you, and

learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

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