

Christ's Yoke Is Easy

by Charles Grandison Finney
President of Oberlin College

from "The Oberlin Evangelist" Publication of Oberlin College
Lecture I
January 2, 1861

Public Domain Text
Reformatted by Katie Stewart

Text.--Matt. 11:29-30: "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."

I propose to remark especially on the first clause of each of these verses -- "Take my yoke upon you -- for my yoke is easy."

I. What is intended by this yoke?

II. What is it to take the yoke of Christ?

III. Christ's yoke is easy.

IV. To whom is this yoke of Christ easy?

I. In enquiring upon this subject the first question is, What is intended by this yoke?

The yoke of Christ is his revealed will, his authority. The word here rendered yoke literally means a band, or something that binds.

II. What is it to take the yoke of Christ?

- 1. To take the yoke of Christ is to accept his will as our universal rule of action.
- 2. To take Christ's yoke is to enter into a voluntary state of entire subjection to him.
- 3. To take Christ's yoke is to commit ourselves to a state of voluntary, loving, confiding servitude.
- 4. To take Christ's yoke is to commit ourselves to universal obedience to Christ from love to

him, sympathy with him, and confidence in him. This is no doubt the true idea of taking Christ's yoke upon us.

III. Christ's yoke is easy.

- 1. This the text affirms. The meaning of the word is agreeable, gentle, gracious, useful, kind.
- 2. Christ's yoke is easy because it is love's yoke. It is good-will universally to us. Every requirement is imposed upon us for our own good, and the highest good of the great family of which we are members. Christ's will is never arbitrary, never capricious, never selfish, requires nothing of us at any time without the strictest reference to our own highest good.
- 3. His yoke is easy because he never prohibits anything, and never imposes upon us any restraint except for our own good, or for the good of the race to which we belong. If at any time he restrains us, or deprives us of anything that we would like, it is love's restraint. He sees that it would be injurious to us, injurious to the world, and consequently dishonorable to him; and therefore enlightened love compels him to restrain us.

We are ignorant, often not able to judge for ourselves; we often suppose ourselves to need that which would greatly injure us. He is infinitely wise, his love is always directed by infinite wisdom; and therefore in everything in which he commands or restrains us, love is his only motive.

- 4. The service which we are required to render him is only a love-service. It consists wholly in love, and its spontaneous fruits and results. He requires nothing but what love will willingly, and joyfully, and spontaneously do. He requires us to love him; and surely this requirement cannot be grievous, inasmuch as he presents to us infinite reasons for loving him.
- 5. Christ's yoke is easy because the state of servitude into which we voluntarily enter, is a state of the highest liberty, the truest, most perfect liberty. It is just that course of life and conduct which, above all others, a loving heart prefers. It is really doing just as we please. A heart that loves Christ supremely, is the only heart that really takes this yoke of Christ. Now this loving state of mind prefers above all other courses of life just that which Christ requires. It is therefore doing according to our own highest pleasure to do his pleasure; and therefore his service is the truest and highest liberty.
- 6. Christ's yoke is easy, because, although a state of subjection, it is the very opposite of a state of bondage. Although his yoke is a band, still it is love's band. It is the opposite of slavery. This service rendered to Christ is not a legal con-straint or re-straint. It is not slavish fear, it is not the thumbscrew of conscience to a must-do, a must-serve-the Lord; but it is a preference of him and his service so deep and radical, and all-pervading, that no other conceivable way or course of life is so agreeable as just that which Christ requires.
- 7. Christ's yoke is easy because it is not only agreeable, but in the highest degree useful to ourselves, to our friends, to the world, to the kingdom of Christ.

As I have already said, the word rendered easy, means sometimes useful, agreeable, kind, gentle, gracious. If Christ's requirements were such as consulted only his interests and not our own, his yoke might not be so easy. But since he loves us, is aiming by his requirements to secure our own highest good, has no selfish end whatever in view in any case, his yoke is truly easy in the sense of being in the highest degree useful to us.

- 8. Christ's yoke is easy because he only requires a love-service; and he gives us a love-reward. He does not stipulate to pay us upon the principle of justice; nor do we stipulate to serve him for pay. He has no servants but love-servants. Those that sympathize with him, that love his person, are devoted to the great interests for which he lives, and have entire confidence in him. In short, all his servants serve him because they love him and love his service. To all such he gives a love-reward. It is not pay on the score of justice, it is not what they deserve, but what his bountiful love is pleased to give them. He gives them more than pay, more than a reward on the principle of justice, infinitely more. His servants all prefer to leave the reward with his love, they want no stipulation as to wages. We serve him because we love him, and he rewards us because he loves us. All this makes his yoke very easy.
- 9. Christ's yoke is just as easy as enlightened, true love can make it. I said enlightened love, I said true love; that is neither enlightened nor true love that indulges children to their own injury, that suffers them to act upon their impulses without restraint or requirement. Christ loves us too well to indulge us to our hurt. His love is too true to let us go ungoverned, and grow up in self will and perverseness. This yoke is a state of servitude for our own highest good and hence for his glory. He subjects us to his will, and requires us to seek his pleasure because his pleasure is always good. He does not make us slaves, and compel us to serve him in order to promote his interests, without reference to our own. The service which he requires of us does indeed glorify him just for the reason that he governs us for our own good. For if he did not govern us for our own good, it would not be glorious for him to govern us. If the service which he requires of us were not for our own highest good, it would be disgraceful to him, and not for his glory. But because his government is entirely unselfish, because his heart is set upon doing us good, because he has been willing to deny himself for the purpose of promoting our good, because he brings us into a state of voluntary subjection that he may restrain us from doing ourselves and those around us any harm, and requires of us just that course of life which shall conduce most to our peace, our comfort, our highest good in time and in eternity, therefore the yoke is easy and the service redounds to his glory.
- 10. The things which he requires of us are most in accordance with our whole nature. This state of servitude is in entire accordance with our own highest reason, with the most enlightened dictates of our conscience, with the truest, most healthy, and most rational gratification of our every susceptibility of our being. He lays no appetite or passion under any restraint but for our own highest good. So it is with every restraint, every cross, every trial -- every thing in his whole treatment of us is demanded by our nature and relations as the condition of our highest well-being.
- 11. In short, Christ's yoke is easy because it is really more of a divine charm or enchantment, than a yoke of bondage. The soul enters into a state of servitude, and takes this yoke, because constrained by a view of his love. It continues in this service, and clings to this state of

servitude, because bound fast by the cords of this love of Christ. In short, this servitude consists in just this, it is the soul's continual offering of itself as a living sacrifice to Christ, a mere yielding of itself to the divine charm of Christ's all-prevailing love. The soul is drawn in this servitude, and not driven. It is called with an effectual calling; it is persuaded by an effectual persuasion; it is overcome and conquered, and subdued, and held by the charm of Christ's love.

IV. I enquire in the next place, To whom is this yoke of Christ easy?

- 1. Not to the hypocrite who only profess to take it, but does not in fact love the Savior. There are many who profess to be religious, and to be the servants of Christ, who are continually complaining of the severity of the servitude. To them his commandments are grievous, his yoke is heavy, unendurable. They will sing,

"Reason I love, her counsels weigh,

And all her words approve;

But still, I find it hard to obey,

And harder still to love."

This class of persons are living in the seventh of Romans. They make their resolutions, and as often break them. They cry out, "O wretched man that I am." The Bible has said, "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." It has also said that Christ's "commandments are not grievous." And in this text we have Christ's own testimony that his yoke is easy. But there are many professors of religion who regard religion as a thorny way.

"True, 'tis a strait and thorny way,"

they say. With them it is not as "the shining light that shineth more and more unto the perfect day." Their experience is not in accordance with the Bible at all. They do not find their religion a peace-giving religion. They do not know the kingdom of God in their experience to be "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." The fact is, they have made a radical mistake; they have not taken Christ's yoke. They have taken the yoke of the law upon stiff necks, and therefore they find their religion a perfect bondage. Let no such one suppose himself to be really in the accepted service of Christ.

- 2. Christ's yoke is not easy to the selfish, who only take it outwardly, from fear or hope of reward. There are many who profess to be Christians, who have no true love to Christ himself, no true sympathy with him, so consequently they have no joy in his service, no pleasure in it for its own sake. They have undertaken to be religious simply to secure something for themselves; and they work hard to make something out of it. But they do not find Christ's yoke easy because it is not a spontaneous love-service. It is not that course of life which above all others they choose because they love the Savior supremely, but it is something which they must comply with as a condition of being saved. It will not do to lose their souls, therefore they must be religious at any rate, though they find it exceedingly hard to be so. But this is not Christ's yoke,

this is not a love-service; this band is not a band of love that binds them to the cross of Christ.

- 3. Christ's yoke is not easy to the self-willed. There are those who profess to be religious whose wills have never been subdued to Christ. They are like unweaned children; and they are continually chafing in their bondage as if Christ's yoke were iron. Of course their state of servitude is not a love-service, is not the true yoke of Christ.
- 4. Christ's yoke is not easy to any who are not constrained by his love.

But it is easy to every one who really understands what his yoke is, and truly takes it upon himself. It is easy to all who truly choose Christ as their sovereign Lord, their Head, their Savior, who enter into sympathy with him and have confidence in him, who make common cause with him and merge their will in his, who in all things trust him. To all this class, who thus really take this yoke upon them, it is easy. And I might add, that the same is true of all the burdens which he really imposes upon us. Christ's yoke is easy and his burden is light to all truly loving, confiding, and submissive souls.

REMARKS.

1. Then let it be understood that Christ's real yoke, or the true service of Christ, is never hard. His real yoke is never heavy. It is self-will and selfishness that at any time fault the yoke or the service of Christ.

2. If what we call religion is burdensome, it is not Christ's yoke, it is not Christ's religion. If we make an uphill business of it, and if we find it "hard to obey, and harder still to love," Christ says to us, Who has required this at your hand? What I require of you is a love-service, not this slavish service.

If you love me not, if you do not serve me from love, I abhor your doings. Let no one think himself truly religious whose religion is a bondage, and not the highest liberty.

3. Whatever is hard in religion is made so by our want of heart, our want of love, our want of confidence; and is therefore not Christ's yoke at all. It is not true religion, it is not Christian liberty, but legal bondage.

4. All truly religious duties are easy. If we make them hard, they are not a love-service, and not what Christ requires. If we make them hard we spoil them. If we go complainingly about his service, grumbling about the difficulties and the hardness of his service, he loathes our bondage, he cannot accept it.

5. Let it be understood, then, that they who make religion a hard, up hill matter, have no Gospel religion. They are wearing, not Christ's yoke, but the yoke of the law; and that, too, laid upon their stiff-neckedness and unbrokenness of heart.

6. This subject will throw light upon the true nature of the Christian warfare. This is not hard, a something to which we are to be screwed up, and whipped up, by our conscience. It is only love to Christ spontaneously resisting temptation to displease him. It is not hard work for the most

affectionate husband or wife to resist infidelity to him or her whom each loves most. This resistance is not that to which we are whipped up by a mere sense of obligation, or fear of consequences. It is the spontaneous resistance of love to that which is entirely inconsistent with it. Such is the Christian warfare.

7. Nothing that love cannot well afford to do is ever required of us in our Christian life. Of course if everything is for our highest good, as well as for the highest glory of Christ, love can well afford to do it, or abstain from it.

8. Love cannot afford to have one of Christ's commandments abated, nor one of his prohibitions relaxed. His will is perfect; his true service is the perfection of liberty; his true yoke is as easy as possible.

9. Let no one judge of Christ's religion by the common representations of it. Should we judge of Christ's religion, from the complaints of many of its professors, we should infer that Christ kept his children on short allowance, that he required "brick without straw," that he is a hard master and even a cruel slaveholder. Their mouths are full of complaints. They do not hesitate to say in their prayers and in their conversation that which implies that Christ's commandments are most grievous, that his yoke is too heavy to be borne, that he supplies their spiritual wants so sparingly that he keeps them little short of absolute famine and starvation. Nay, they represent the commandments as beyond the possibility of obedience, and the service which he requires as so entirely above their reach, that by no grace received in this life are they ever able to obey him. Now this is surely as opposite to the teachings of Christ and this text, as possible. Just compare this text and many similar ones, to the old confession of faith, that "no man, since the fall, is able, either in his own strength or by any grace received in this life, to obey the commandments of God."

Where did they get this? Is this in accordance with Christ's teaching in this text? Is this according to the text in which it is said, that "his commandments are not grievous," and that all "his ways are ways of pleasantness and all his paths are peace"? The fact is, that Christ's religion has been grossly misrepresented by its professors.

Such a statement as this in the confession of faith is a stumbling block, and as contrary to the teachings of Christ as possible.

10. You that are not Christians may see your mistake in this regard. You have been misled. You have been deceived by the complaining spirit that you have heard among professed Christians. You have thought religion was hard, something unendurable, impracticable, something not suited to your present nature, relations, and condition. But those that have stumbled you are not Christians. If you would read your Bible you would see that these complaints are not the Christian spirit; and that all this talking and praying which really implies that religion is an up-hill matter, something so far above our reach as to keep the mind in a constant strain that is unendurable by human nature -- that this is all a mistake.

The fact is, the kingdom of God, when it is really established in the soul, is "righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost." It is the charm of Christ's love revealed to the soul, sweetly drawing it

away into a perpetual offering of itself to a delightful love-service to Christ. Everything that is hard about it is made so by unbelief, by a want of love, by self-will. All that, therefore, is without the pale of Christ's true service. Whatever is not done for love, is no acceptable service rendered to Christ.

11. Those of you whose religion is a bondage, can in the light of this subject discover your mistake. Who has required this bond-service at your hands? Christ is no slave-holder. He employs no slave-drivers to whip you to duty. If the law as a schoolmaster had brought you to Christ, you would have escaped from this bondage.

But, beloved, do not mistake your bond-service for true religion. Do not mistake the yoke of the law for the yoke of Christ. Do not mistake, do not mistake this drudgery in which you engage, and which you call religion, for that spontaneous love-service which Christ requires. The difficulty is, you have not taken Christ's yoke.

12. In the light of this subject, all professors of religion can see whether and how far you really serve Christ. Do you ever find passages in your experience, in which all is a spontaneous love-service, natural, peaceful, joyous? If you have never had this experience, you have never yet come to Christ at all. If you have had this experience and have fallen from it, you have fallen from the real acceptable service of Christ.

Your present state, and your present religion, is not a Christian state of mind, nor the accepted service of Christ. You have fallen into the bondage of your own unbelief. And who has required this bond-service at your hand? This is not Christ's yoke.

13. How much ruinous misapprehension exists in regard to what constitutes the Christian religion. The great mass of professors of religion are in such bondage -- and the same is true, I fear, of many ministers, -- that they grossly misrepresent the religion of Jesus. By their teaching, by their prayers, by all that you see and hear from them, you would get the impression that the religion of Christ is the most difficult, up-hill, unendurable task, that ever any one undertook. It amounts to a gross libel upon the religion of Jesus. They profess to be Christ's disciples, profess to wear Christ's yoke; and yet "it is that which neither we nor our fathers have ever been able to bear."

Alas! that Christ is so dishonored, so contradicted, so misrepresented, his religion presented in such a repulsive light as to frighten the young, and make them think it is unendurable, except as the less of two evils. It may be a less evil, they think, to wear this yoke of iron than to go to hell; but it is at best so hard, so void of comfort, so almost unendurable, that for this life, to say the least, a course of sin is far preferable to Christ's religion. So far as this world is concerned, they cannot afford to be religious. It is only to escape from hell that the thought, or the effort, can be endured. But how gross is this misrepresentation; and how fatal is the delusion that this fastens upon the minds of those that are not religious.

14. It is not merely a ruinous misapprehension to those who are without, but to those who belong to the church and yet are living a life of bondage. Their misapprehension of the religion of Jesus is destructive. It is not only a stumbling block to others, but the ruin of their own souls. When will these bondmen learn that this is not what Christ requires at their hands? He pities your agonizing struggles

to wear the yoke of the law which neither you nor your fathers have been able to bear. He beseeches you to really give him your hearts, to enter into his love-service, to take his sweet yoke of love upon you that you may breathe easily and walk at liberty as the sons of God.

15. What folly to make only a pretense of being Christ's servants, to pretend only to wear his yoke. This is of no use. To render him any other than a love-service is not truly to serve him at all; you gain nothing by it to yourselves; you do no good to others by this bond-service; you do not meet the wishes of Christ at all. What motive then can you have for this folly? Do you not know that Christ is greatly dishonored by those that leave their hearts in the world, and consequently make their religion a bondage? I beseech you misrepresent him not; deceive not yourselves. Mislead no others. Serve him lovingly, or attempt not to serve him at all. Take his easy yoke and render him a love-service, or no service at all. "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver," and a cheerful giver only. He will not accept a service that is not a heart-service, that is not a free-service.

16. Remember that all duty acceptably performed, must be free, it must be cheerful, it must be loving. Let no one deceive himself by supposing that he does his duty, when he does it in the spirit of bondage, and not from love.

17. From what has been said, it must be seen that there is real enjoyment in wearing Christ's true yoke, in all true religion, in all that Christ really requires.

We always enjoy pleasing those whom we most love. In this we necessarily find our truest and highest enjoyment, in the promotion of the honor and in doing the pleasure of those whom we supremely love.

Whatever is not enjoyed, is not true religion. We often hear people say they do not enjoy religion. They are religious, they say, but they are not at present enjoying religion. But this is a mistake. If they have true religion, that is, the religion of love, it must in its very workings, produce enjoyment.

18. If you look steadily at this subject, you will see how much Christ's account of his real service differs from the common experience. Now, is Christ's account of his own religion to be taken as true? or are we to suppose these experiences, that are really inconsistent with it, are true religion? Christ's own account of his religion must stand! He has told us what service is acceptable to him, and he is to be the judge in such matters. Let no one pretend that his experience is Christian, unless he finds that Christ's yoke is easy.

19. This false, but common experience, is the world's great stumbling block, and legal ministers are helping forward the calamity. Really, many of the representations from the pulpit are such a gross misrepresentation of the true religion of Jesus, that whole churches are in bondage and the ungodly without the church are perfectly afraid of religion.

20. Christ is not responsible for these slavish experiences. They are only the result of selfishness and unbelief. He cannot away with them, he abhors them. They are his dishonor, the church's stumbling block, and the world's ruin.

21. Christ's true service is the soul's true rest. In immediate connection with the text, you remember he said "ye shall find rest unto your souls." True religion is truly the soul's recreation, the soul's amusement, the soul's highest liberty; it is the rest of faith, the deep repose of loving confidence. It is love, and only love, with its spontaneous fruits. This is the whole of it; and this is the best and truest sense the soul's rest.

22. The real service which Christ requires of us could not be easier and still be real. Did he require less than love with all its spontaneous fruits, it would not be real. But if it is love and its spontaneous fruits, it could not be easier.

23. We cannot afford to have less to do than Christ calls upon us to do. We need not fear to have more to do than is for our own highest good.

24. We cannot afford to have less to bear, fewer crosses, fewer duties, fewer burdens. We cannot afford to have anything lighter, anything easier, or anything more agreeable. The whole of his service is the most useful, the most truly agreeable, the most in accordance with our whole nature and all our relations, of any course of life possible or conceivable.

And now what do you say? Will you that never have taken Christ's yoke, now take it? Will you now offer yourself a willing sacrifice to be Christ's living servant forever? Will you who have worn the bondage of the law, lay it aside, give up your selfishness, your self seeking, your unbelief, and truly embrace Christ, and take his easy yoke, and find rest for your souls?

GLOSSARY

of easily misunderstood terms as defined by Mr. Finney himself.

Compiled by Katie Stewart

1. **Complacency, or Esteem:** "Complacency, as a state of will or heart, is only benevolence modified by the consideration or relation of right character in the object of it. God, prophets, apostles, martyrs, and saints, in all ages, are as virtuous in their self-denying and untiring labours to save the wicked, as they are in their complacent love to the saints." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE VII)*. Also, "approbation of the character of its object. Complacency is due only to the good and holy." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE XII)*.
2. **Disinterested Benevolence:** "By disinterested benevolence I do not mean, that a person who is disinterested feels no interest in his object of pursuit, but that he seeks the happiness of others for its own sake, and not for the sake of its reaction on himself, in promoting his own happiness. He chooses to do good because he rejoices in the happiness of others, and desires their happiness for its own sake. God is purely and disinterestedly benevolent. He does not make His creatures happy for the sake of thereby promoting His own happiness, but because He loves their happiness and chooses it for its own sake. Not that He does not feel happy in promoting the happiness of His creatures, but that He does not do it for the sake of His own gratification." *Lectures to Professing Christians (LECTURE I)*.
3. **Divine Sovereignty:** "The sovereignty of God consists in the independence of his will, in consulting his own intelligence and discretion, in the selection of his end, and the means of

accomplishing it. In other words, the sovereignty of God is nothing else than infinite benevolence directed by infinite knowledge." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXVI)*.

4. **Election:** "That all of Adam's race, who are or ever will be saved, were from eternity chosen by God to eternal salvation, through the sanctification of their hearts by faith in Christ. In other words, they are chosen to salvation by means of sanctification. Their salvation is the end- their sanctification is a means. Both the end and the means are elected, appointed, chosen; the means as really as the end, and for the sake of the end." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LXXIV)*.
5. **Entire Sanctification:** "Sanctification may be entire in two senses: (1.) In the sense of present, full obedience, or entire consecration to God; and, (2.) In the sense of continued, abiding consecration or obedience to God. Entire sanctification, when the terms are used in this sense, consists in being established, confirmed, preserved, continued in a state of sanctification or of entire consecration to God." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LVIII)*.
6. **Moral Agency:** "Moral agency is universally a condition of moral obligation. The attributes of moral agency are intellect, sensibility, and free will." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
7. **Moral Depravity:** "Moral depravity is the depravity of free-will, not of the faculty itself, but of its free action. It consists in a violation of moral law. Depravity of the will, as a faculty, is, or would be, physical, and not moral depravity. It would be depravity of substance, and not of free, responsible choice. Moral depravity is depravity of choice. It is a choice at variance with moral law, moral right. It is synonymous with sin or sinfulness. It is moral depravity, because it consists in a violation of moral law, and because it has moral character." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
8. **Human Reason:** "the intuitive faculty or function of the intellect... it is the faculty that intuits moral relations and affirms moral obligation to act in conformity with perceived moral relations." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE III)*.
9. **Retributive Justice:** "Retributive justice consists in treating every subject of government according to his character. It respects the intrinsic merit or demerit of each individual, and deals with him accordingly." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXIV)*.
10. **Total Depravity:** "Moral depravity of the unregenerate is without any mixture of moral goodness or virtue, that while they remain unregenerate, they never in any instance, nor in any degree, exercise true love to God and to man." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE XXXVIII)*.
11. **Unbelief:** "the soul's withholding confidence from truth and the God of truth. The heart's rejection of evidence, and refusal to be influenced by it. The will in the attitude of opposition to truth perceived, or evidence presented." *Systematic Theology (LECTURE LV)*.