



Yokes

Jesus already discussed the problem of weighing people down with heavy burdens with the Pharisees in Matthew 23:4 and Luke 11:46. Of course, people can also weigh themselves down with all sorts of burdens which can often be the result of their upbringing, their education, church history, denomination, leadership and, of course, ignorance. This often involves rituals and all sorts of (moral) obligations and requirements.

Rabbis, who were the teachers in those days, had authority to give their own interpretation to certain parts of the law. Not to change God's commandments, but to explain something that might not be very clear. If the law said that the Sabbath was holy, the rabbi could determine how that should be interpreted. He could say that keeping the Sabbath holy implied not being allowed to walk more than two kilometers or to perform certain actions.

Whenever the rabbi specifically allowed something in this interpretation, it was called "unbinding". Whenever he declared something to be forbidden, it was called "binding". Hence, the rabbi developed his own interpretation and bound and unbound various things to illustrate how people should abide by the law. This was called a yoke. He then tested his students and asked them questions. If the student's answer and actions conformed to the rabbi's "yoke", it could be said that the student had fulfilled the law. If the student's response was wrong, based on the rabbi's interpretation, the student was said to have "unbound" the law.

In Matthew 5:17, Rabbi Jesus says that He didn't come to abolish the law or the Prophets, but to fulfill them. He said, in other words, that everything He said and did was a pure interpretation of the law. Jesus came to show people how to abide by the law. He came to be the law by being a perfect interpretation of God's will.

At a given point in time, a lawyer approached Jesus and tested Him by asking what the greatest commandment is. It isn't impossible, or perhaps even quite likely that he expected an interpretation of the law (Matthew 22:35-36). Jesus' yoke couldn't have been made easier. He summarized the law in two points:

'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

In other words, all of the Hebrew Bible is based on these simple principles. This is the theme. This is the goal. What could be easier to understand?

Rabbi Jesus' yoke which is His personal teaching, the way He lived life, the way

He viewed life and the proclamation of the Kingdom of God is a complete expression of the Father's will. That's why Jesus could say:

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. (Matthew 11:28-30)

Earlier, we discussed keys and Peter's revelation in Matthew 16:13-20. Rabbi Jesus asked His disciples a question: "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" Peter replied: "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." His rabbi hadn't taught him that. No man had revealed that to him. He had received that revelation from the Father Himself. Jesus used this point to clearly illustrate that His Father had also given His disciples the ability to interpret God's will and to not only depend on others to do so.

Yokes in the church

The church has interpreted the Bible throughout the past two millennia. In doing so, several yokes have been imposed. That's quite a responsibility. The church has developed rules and sanctions, thereby binding/unbinding various issues, including the use of alcohol, the role of women in the church, clothing, make-up, jewelry, finances, leadership, television, movies, theatre, cinema. One would think it were behavioral therapy! Throughout history, many yokes have been created, and none of them have brought us any closer to God's heart. The things that believers have bound and unbound in the church! That is why I believe we should be careful about what we bind and unbind. The promises, agreements and rules we make. Even today, we often see increasingly more of these yokes in the Body of Christ. It sneaks in so easily and often goes hand in hand with the best intentions to help people get ahead.

For example, consider how we think about "guest speakers". A guest comes to your church and he preaches about the importance of speaking in new tongues. It's important and his words are very convincing. If you really want to have a victorious life, you should speak in tongues at least thirty minutes a day. You're convinced by his words and decide to do so from now on. As of the next day, you start speaking in tongues for thirty minutes a day. It feels good.

Two weeks later, another guest speaker arrives. He discusses the importance of reading the Bible. Of course, this is also an important topic. If you really want a victorious life, then it's important to read your Bible at least half an hour every day. You're convinced and start reading the Bible as of the next day. Half an hour of praying in tongues, and half an hour of reading the Word. You feel good and you feel blessed.

Here comes the next guest speaker. She preaches about the importance of spiritual warfare. Obviously, this is a matter of great importance. However, we will only really have victory if we spend half an hour of our day doing spiritual warfare. You make your decision

and start the very same day.

Then someone else comes by and teaches about the importance of praying the Bible. This definitely is very powerful. I have witnessed close to a thousand people doing so during a conference. It was a very impressive experience. But what about that victorious life of ours? We're already reading the Bible for half an hour every day. Let's change that into daily praying the Bible for thirty minutes. Clearly, we now need at least one and a half hours a day in order to have a victorious life. As a result, we often see that what has begun as a blessing eventually becomes a "curse".

Many people go to bed, switch off the light, stare at the ceiling and suddenly... realize they'd forgotten to read! The light is switched on again, the Bible's on the night table and they'll fulfill their religious duty by reading a bit. The light goes out again and only then will they be able to sleep peacefully. I know from experience that this is a very familiar experience and that many people laugh when they recognize themselves in this example. Sometimes, I go to bed and just say: "Good night, Lord, I'll see You again in the morning."

Some time ago, a lady told me that she was facing a rather difficult problem and had spoken to a pastor about it. His advice had been for her to do two to three hours of Bible study every day. So, he actually gave her yet another problem to cope with. Please hear me carefully. It is absolutely important to spend time with God, to contemplate His Word and to move towards His heart. However, one shouldn't allow a yoke to be imposed upon oneself. You can read, meditate, listen to music, dance, read the Bible, pray, pray in tongues, be quiet, etc. What matters is that we get closer to God's heart and that we please Him.

We're moving on

We're all moving on and it's important to learn to be free and mature. Our granddaughter, Romy Beau, kept on wanting to make my wife pretty when she was four years old. My wife had to sit at the table and Romy always managed to get her hands on everything that was necessary to paint my wife's face. After about ten minutes, she'd stand at a distance and admire her latest piece of art. My wife then looked at herself in the mirror and saw the ugliest face she'd ever seen. Yet, she would admiringly look in the mirror and say: "Wow! Pretty!"

Obviously you'd want to encourage your granddaughter, who'd then glow with pleasure and pride. Eventually, my wife saw a revelation of God's heart in this activity. Because we do the same with God. We want to make God pretty, we want to make Him happy and exalt Him. We then ask Him to stand in front of the mirror and what He sees doesn't always have to be very pretty. Yet God looks at our heart and when He sees that it's sincere, He'll encourage us and say: "Wow! Pretty!" Still, God knows in His heart, just as my wife knows when talking with our granddaughter: "A few years down the road, she'll do much better." I sometimes put it this way – and it's not because I don't have any respect for the church, for the Body of Christ, that I dearly love – but sometimes the church is just like Noah's ark: from time to time it can be really smelly, but we can't abandon ship.

A friend of mine says: "Trees are smarter than people." Trees are rooted by the waterside,

branches and leaves in the sky. They enjoy the sun and rain, and don't even try to produce fruit. It just happens, they can't help it.

The Bible says that rivers of living water flow from within us. You're a waterfall. It's impossible for someone to stand in front of you without getting wet. This in itself already testifies of fruit. We are often so focused on producing and doing all sorts of things. Not that that's always a bad thing, but people sometimes forget to just live and enjoy.

Naturally, an important condition is for us to stay close to the water. As long as we're near it, there needn't be any worries about not bearing any fruit. "Not bearing any fruit" is a tormenting thought that plagues many believers, because it's from Satan. Jesus taught us:

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (John 15:5)

If we stay close to Jesus, we grow and the fruit is visible. This is confirmed in Galatians:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; (Galatians 5:22-23)

This always influences our environment and the people around us.

Relaxation and freedom

Let me mention some issues to bring more freedom and to go a bit deeper into the prophetic lifestyle in the Kingdom of God and the relaxation it brings.

I've attended many meetings and have often heard a song being sung. The first part of the lyrics is: "I went to the enemy's camp and I took back what he stole from me." Everything is put into action while the song is being sung: dancing, flags, banners and a lot of energy. The song and everything it involves take about fifteen minutes, after which everyone sits down. Please understand that I love powerful songs, dancing, flags and banners, and I certainly don't mind a lot of volume.

But when it was my "turn", I asked the congregation if anyone could tell me what they had taken back from the enemy's camp. I asked this because to me, it's clear that most things I need are not located in the enemy's camp. If the devil steals our health, healing can be found with God. If the enemy has the opportunity to steal our joy, then new joy can be found with God. God has white garments for us, including eye salve and gold (Revelation 3:18). There's no reason to be looking around in the enemy's camp for these things. It's spiritual warfare, based on an energy drain and it's ineffective.

It's a great song and its origin is Pensacola. God's Spirit moved there powerfully and very many souls got saved. That's when this song was born by the Spirit, and what was it about? It was about souls that were being grabbed from the darkness, the enemy's camp, and who were being brought into the Kingdom of God. Nowadays it's being sung almost everywhere

without many people giving it a second thought. I sometimes call this a parrot spirit or a copycat spirit in the church.

The idea that the devil has stolen praise and worship from the church has also been wrongly emphasized. This way of thinking has caused us to go to great trouble to try and get it back. We can even hide behind the fact that it has been stolen and that we first need to go through a lengthy process to develop strategic insight in order to get it back. The emphasis should however not be on the idea that the devil has stolen praise and worship from the church, but on the fact that the church has stopped to practice it in all its fullness.

The devil grabs whatever he can get his hands on and perverts it. The church didn't do much, if anything, about it. Clearly, our own responsibility is something worth considering. It's as if someone gets a car and leaves it in his garden for thirty years. Someone then asks him why he doesn't use his car. Obviously, he can't respond that his car has been stolen, so it can't be the reason why he's not driving it. No, it's been standing in the garden for thirty years and that is why he hasn't driven it. What matters is that he must start using the car (again). That'll probably not go completely smoothly after thirty years. The car will need some fixing and fine-tuning. But: it wasn't stolen.

Around the world, millions of Christians "try" to get into God's presence every Sunday morning. This really is just a waste of energy. Clearly, a song alone can't get us there. A worship leader can't get us there, either. We don't need some sort of Levite to get us there. Hebrews 10:19 says that we can have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus. We are in God's presence by the blood of Jesus. If anything else could accomplish this, we'd be giving power to something that doesn't have any. That's just religion.

Isn't it much more relaxing to know that you're already in God's presence before the meeting starts? Then the worship leader only has to help us get closer to God's heart, so that we can see what's in God's heart at that moment. And then the worship team won't be blamed afterwards if someone couldn't "come into God's presence".

Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

(Romans 12:1)

This means that you offer your body to God as a living sacrifice yourself. You are the one bringing the sacrifice and you are the offering as well. That's why God has come to live inside us, when we decided to follow Jesus and when we gave Him our heart. The Bible says:

Yet You are holy, O You who are enthroned upon the praises of Israel. (Psalm 22:3)

This verse really says that God inhabits our praises. We ourselves are the praise, and that's why He lives inside us. Can He get any closer?

Not too complicated

People often ask me what God's will is for their lives. I then try to explain to them that it's simpler to believe that you already are in God's will. If you're constantly seeking God's will and always wondering what it is, you could end up having the idea that you're never really in it. Why not just believe that He leads us by His Spirit? Aren't you a son of God if you're led by the Spirit of God? We can believe that we're sons and daughters of God, can't we? Of course, if you're sincere in your desire to follow Jesus.

But what about sin? Then you can't be in God's will, can you? Whenever you sin, you yourself know that you're not entirely on the right track. You don't need me to tell you that. Repentance is all it takes to get back into God's will. Of course there are certain issues that require us to seek God's heart very intensively, to be very specific, and this may also vary per individual.

However in the end, a decision must still be taken. Sometimes you're at a crossroads and you can go either left or right. At times like these, it's wonderful to hear a voice saying: "Take the right turn, My child!" But in daily life, it usually doesn't happen this way. Still, a decision must be made in order to get ahead. So suppose, for example, that you decide to go right. But then people around you, or you yourself start wondering: "What if you were supposed to have gone left?" The answer is straightforward. If you were supposed to have gone left, then you wouldn't have gone right.

We often are too complicated. By the way, many people assume that God leaves them whenever they make a wrong decision. I wholeheartedly disagree. If we make a wrong decision with a sincere heart, then God will just go with us. Someone recently gave me a car navigation system. Without knowing it, I once took a wrong turn. Suddenly "that voice" instructed me to get off the road, turn around and head towards a different direction. I then realized that I had made a mistake and that the navigation system had corrected my error. This incident from daily life gave me a wonderful example about Holy Spirit. He just goes along with us and, if necessary, brings us back onto the right road.

People often ask me what I think God wants them to do. I usually respond with an easy question. I ask them what they would like to do. Is that possible? The Bible says:

*For it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.
(Philippians 2:13)*

Many people think that God won't like what they like. However, God has inspired and instilled desires within you, which happen to be the things you'd like to do. Obviously, the main issue is that you're sincerely following Jesus and doing anything that is contrary to the Word of God is out of the question.

Divine encounters and other experiences can be very specific and detailed. Fortunately, there is so much room within which we can live and move with God. The door through which

we can move to step onto the road God wants us to take isn't merely a side hung door. I think it's more like a revolving door where you can enter and exit in various places. I sometimes compare it to playing darts. Many people look for the bull's-eye. It is my understanding that the most points aren't obtained by only hitting the bull's-eye, but by distributing the darts over the entire board. Why wouldn't the entire board be God's bull's-eye?

Our idea of discipleship has also become a yoke to many. When you tell people that discipleship is important, they immediately think that they have to win a soul for Jesus so they can start discipling them. Jesus says:

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; (Matthew 28:19-20)

Discipleship doesn't start when someone has given his or her life to Jesus. Discipleship starts when you meet someone. "Make disciples of all the nations." It means that you have to make a disciple out of someone who doesn't believe in Jesus (yet). That's when it begins, and not just through your words, but also through your attitude, lifestyle, the impression you give, etc. As soon as someone gives his or her life to Jesus, the process of discipleship simply continues, to teach people to keep God's commandments.

The relationship with God is the most important element of such a prophetic lifestyle. I believe that it's God's heart to want to live as close to us as possible, and He does, too. He is in us. He wants to relate to us and He wants to communicate with us. He wants to meet us, just like He met Adam in the garden of Eden. I don't think they talked about theology. God just says: "Hello Adam, how are you?" Doesn't God know that? Of course He does, but He reveals Himself to us as a Father who relates to His children. Then Adam responds: "I'm fine, God, and how are You?" Would God not be alright? Of course He would be, because God is God, but He doesn't always have to feel alright. God can be sad or angry. God also wants our attention. He wants our heart, He wants to be encouraged and He would like us to tell Him that we love Him. He enjoys it when we crawl onto His lap, embrace Him, comfort Him and encourage Him. In my view, this doesn't make God smaller, but actually exalts Him just so much more.

God can take care of things by Himself much more easily than with us. All He has to do is snap His fingers and everything's taken care of. Yet God has decided to partner with us. He says that His church is the instrument through which He wants to reveal His glory in this world. This means that God sticks to His word and that He can't do it by Himself anymore. Of course, God is sovereign. He can intervene whenever He wants to, but He has decided not to always do so and to include us in His plan. He won't do it without us, His church. This is how great our God is! He can do this and He is not afraid that His plan will not be fulfilled.

This is also what impresses me about Abraham's encounter with God in Genesis 18. That's when God meets Abraham in his tent to tell him that he'll be getting a son. They eat

and drink together. Then the men depart towards Sodom and Gomorrah, and Abraham walks with them to send them off. Then God thinks: “Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?” God wanted to destroy these two cities because of their sin. Yet He involves Abraham in His plan, and the process of intercession for the cities begins. This reminds me of the following passage:

Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets. A lion has roared! Who will not fear? The Lord God has spoken! Who can but prophesy? (Amos 3:7-8)

Cooperation

I believe that God wants to reveal His heart to a prophetic nation, His church. Yes, He could also decide that there are still some things that don't concern us (yet), and He can do so because He's God. And clearly, we don't understand everything yet, either. Still, He mostly just wants to talk with us and God is definitely interested to know how we think about various issues. He would like to hear our opinion; He enjoys when we take initiative and is willing to change His mind in certain matters. So, He really is our Father. We are very important in God's eyes.

We read about the prophet Elisha arriving at the city of Jericho in 2 Kings 2:19-22. The men of the city tell him that the situation of the city is good, but that there's a problem with the water: it is bad and the land is unfruitful. The prophet asks for a new jar. This jar prophetically represents us, who believe in Jesus and therefore are a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17).

The men of the city then have to put salt in the jar. The salt also prophetically refers to us. In Matthew 5:13, Jesus says that we are the salt of the earth, and in Mark 9:50 He tells us to have salt in ourselves. In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul says that we have a treasure in earthen vessels.

The prophet then takes the jar and salt, goes to the spring of the water and throws salt into it. Water symbolically represents Holy Spirit and nations in the Bible. Jesus speaks of Holy Spirit who will flow like rivers of living water from our innermost being (John 7:38-39). Revelation 17:15 says that the waters are peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues.

In a way, the prophet makes a combination of water, salt and people, which means a combination of nations, Holy Spirit and us. The water brought forth fruitfulness after Elisha had thrown salt into the spring. So, here we see that the water by itself didn't have that ability. That's why it's such an honor serving God. God keeps to His Word and works with us and not without us. A combination of Holy Spirit and us is necessary, and that combination results in fruitfulness in this world.

It is good to see and believe that we don't have to go into praise and worship, because we are already an offering of praise. We don't have to come into God's presence, because we're already there through the blood of Jesus. We don't have to become prophetic, because we are

prophetic by reflecting God's heart in everyday life. We don't have to win a soul in order to make a disciple, because we are already making disciples. In Jesus, we've already received everything and we don't have to waste any energy in order to obtain what we already have. We don't always have to worry about seeking His will, because we can believe that we're already in His will. We don't always have to worry whether He's leading us, since we can believe that He leads us because Holy Spirit lives inside us and we are His sons and daughters.

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