

Yokes

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[0 : 00] I'm talking about a theme of yokes and the Bible talks about a yoke, numbers of yokes. So a bit of a topical look at yokes. What does the Bible say about them? What is a yoke? As pictured here, it's this harness really that joins two animals together.

And we think of a yoke, we think of it's a symbol of servitude and of bondage, of service. So not necessarily always a bad thing. So we'll get to that.

So we know when a farmer has an ox, they place this yoke on its shoulders, even when it's very young. So it gets trained. And the purpose of the yoke is to control the animal, to harness its energy for the owner's use, for the master's use. And we are no different.

The only difference is whose yoke are we wearing? So the Bible talks about a number of yokes. We can unpack that a little. And it's a good little topical study that draws out lots of thoughts that we could take meaning from, I trust today.

And so the first yoke I'd like us to take a look at is what the Bible calls the unequal yoke. The unequal yoke. We see that in 2 Corinthians 6, verse 14.

[1 : 18] 2 Corinthians 6, 14, it reads, Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness, and what communion hath light with darkness?

And it reads on further in the context, but the point is of an unequal yoke, so there's a mismatch. It matters who we yoke up with, doesn't it? A yoke is a wooden beam that joins this pair of oxen, of animals.

It allows them to pull a load. Oxen almost always work in pairs. Oxen almost always work in pairs. So it's not a single thing, it's a joint thing. And when you're on a farm, I'm told, the owners would look for two animals to yoke together, to join them in the harness in the yoke.

And they would look for animals of similar size and ability, so they'd pull evenly. If the yoke animals are not matched, if they're mismatched, it means that the larger animal is pulling much more of the weight, and they have a much greater load.

So they would be overworked. And so that is an unequal yoke. It's not a good match. So the two yoked animals must work in equal cooperation for the yoke, and they're joining together, they're yoking together to be effective.

[2 : 43] When you think about it, if you're a farmer, and you do some unequal yoking, you've got a big animal and a little animal, it's just disastrous. Imagine they're trying to pull a, make a furrow in the land.

They'd just go, yeah, they'd go around in circles, yeah. So that unequal yoke would be a disaster on a farm. And when you think about it, they've been pulling yokes for thousands of years, really.

It's only a recent innovation that you've got tractors and such now. But an unequal yoke is disastrous on a farm. And it's also a disaster in a marriage, or a business partnership, or in ministry. We've got to get the right match. It really matters, doesn't it? So unequal yokes can mean really a relationship that is mismatched is wrong and not wise.

So, for example, marrying an unbeliever is not wise. It's not right.

[3 : 51] Unequally yoking in a relationship is fraught with risk and danger, isn't it?

Now, if you are unequally yoked in a marriage, it's too late to change that. So don't do it. But if you are a believer, married to an unbeliever, then you are in the marriage.

You're bound. You honour that the best way you can. You be the best spouse you can be. And hopefully you win your spouse to the Lord. But if you're yet to marry, if you're contemplating marriage, if you're contemplating marriage to an unbeliever, you have to break it off.

Don't go ahead to marry someone if you're unequally yoked. Don't engage them. Don't betroth them. Don't court them. Don't date them. Don't go ahead to marry someone who's an unbeliever because the Bible is very clear about that.

You don't want to be unequally yoked. It's disastrous. It's a disaster. So it matters who we yoke up with, what we yoke to. Who are we joined up with, connected with?

[4 : 59] So the Bible uses this imagery, this picture of a yoke, this agricultural harness of two animals. The Bible speaks time and time again about it.

So we're going to take a look at some of those references, those different kinds of yokes that we could think about. Maybe reflect on that for yourself. So there's a few yokes to avoid.

Here's one. The yoke of sin. Sin can be like a yoke. We know of some that they're so held fast in this yoke of sin that binds and enslaves them.

In Lamentations, it talks about the yoke of my transgressions. You know, really, sin is the heaviest yoke that we can bear, isn't it? Sin is a heavy yoke.

And when you think about sin, it weighs down our souls with guilt and shame. By the grace of Christ, though, we can be released from that yoke.

[5 : 58] Of course, we know Christ died for our sins. And we can have a setting free from the yoke of our sin. That happens at salvation when we trust him.

He takes our sin and he pays for it at the cross. So we see the yoke of sin. We could say so much more about that, I suppose, but it's plain obvious, really, isn't it?

That sin, it's like the devil's yoke. People get under this constriction, this enslavement. And really, the devil is the ultimate slave master, isn't he?

But Christ has come to set us free. And he says, who the Son sets free is free indeed. So we can be free from that yoke of sin. It happens at salvation.

Of course, through the Christian life, we still have to fight sin. But the yoke of sin, Christ has taken measures such that we can be free from that yoke of sin.

[6 : 58] We're not under that mastery anymore. We're under a new master, aren't we? So the yoke talks about mastery. We're not under the mastery of that yoke of sin.

Not under the yoke of that slave master, the devil. But in Christ, we've been set free. There's many verses that talk about Christ sets us free.

The glorious liberty of the children of God. So the yoke of sin, number one. And then another yoke, we could say, what about the yoke of legalism? Legalism. We know, as I'm going to unpack later today, the yoke of legalism.

And the religious leaders, they burden people down. With all kinds of rules and regulations. Now, it's good to have rules and regulations. But not in this way.

We see of the Pharisees that they burden people down. And whilst they did that, they neglected the weightier things. Of the truth.

[7 : 59] Of justice. Of mercy. Of faith. And so, in Matthew 23, 4, it is our Lord's rebuke here to the Pharisees.

To these religious leaders. And he says, For they bind heavy burdens, and grievous to be born, and lay them on men's shoulders. But they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers.

You know, it's easy to point out this or that, and say, that's wrong, or this is wrong. But we've got to look at ourselves, don't we? I need to look at myself. It's easy for me to be a critic.

To be a fault finder. I think it's, it almost comes naturally, doesn't it? To be a fault finder. I am inclined to do that. And I see a lot of fault in the man in the mirror.

Friends, these religious leaders have this legalism that they constricted people, they constrained people, they tied people up in knots. Apparently that's the root word of the meaning of religion.

[9 : 00] It's got this sense of binding. There's this religious, this binding, this bondage, this legalism. And, of course, we know some people would say, of our church, oh, you're a legalistic church.

Church for you is one of those legalistic churches. I hope not. I hope, I hope that they would see that's not true. I mean, we believe in the law of the Lord. That's the legal side.

The law of the Lord. We believe in the law of the Lord, and that is perfect. Amen. The law of the Lord is perfect. But there's the law of the liberty, isn't there? There's a law that's the perfect liberty.

The law, and then there's grace, that we're not under that legalistic bondage. And this is the problem here. Of course, you look at legalism on the one side, and then do you go, and the pendulum swings, and you just have liberalism on the other side where anything goes.

You've got to find what is pleasing to the Lord. What is pleasing to Him? Of course, we're not under the law. We're under grace. But we see that, really, the true freedom that we enjoy in Christ, it comes from grace.

[10:09] The true freedom that we have is because of grace. And true freedom is from grace, not some ticking off some checklist of laws. Do they conform to this, or conform to that, or are they going to measure up?

Oh, a big cross on that one. That's legalism, isn't it? Honestly, we're not under that. And so instead of the yoke of legalism, we can know the liberating truth of the gospel.

So again, please understand me. I'm not saying anything goes. It's just free for all. And people can just do what they like and believe what they like. But there's the freedom, the grace that overarches our obligations, that overarches our standards, that overarches our obedience, because grace is the overarching principle.

So the yoke of legalism is another yoke. Another yoke we could say is the yoke of bondage. The yoke of bondage. Now in Galatians 5 verse 1, Paul says to the Galatians, Stand fast, therefore, in the liberty, wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

So again, there's this thought of bondage, of this yoke of being bound up, of laws imposed, of requirements. Even though that's all been done away, really, under grace.

[11:40] Paul says, stand fast in what? In the liberty. That's the focus. Stand fast in that. Not the yoke of bondage. So of some of these, of course, in Galatians, it was the Judaizers.

They were trying to get the church to go back to the Judaistic way of living. But that was done away. That was fulfilled.

And we've gone past that. We're not there now. The yoke of bondage. We're not under all of those requirements per se.

We're under grace. And we've got liberty. And so, just as an aside, I thought I'd look up, just as an aside, and it's been speaking to me lately, this expression, stand fast.

It speaks to me. There's lots of ways we should stand fast. Hold your ground. Stand fast. It speaks to me. For example, it says to stand fast in the liberty. So the freedom we have in Christ, it says, stand fast in the faith.

[12:41] Quit you like men. Be strong. It says, be manly. Be brave. Be strong. Stand fast in the faith. It says, stand fast with one spirit, striving together for the faith of the gospel.

And it says, stand fast in the Lord. Having done all, stand in the context of the spiritual warfare. We're told to stand fast. In Christ.

And so, back to the yoke of bondage, we think in Acts 15, one example would be where the disciples were trying to put a yoke on the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear.

So, what it's talking about in the context is talking about some were seeking that these Gentiles who trusted Christ would now have to be circumcised.

Some were talking about this. Oh, you must be. You must do this. You must be circumcised or you don't measure up. You don't. You've got to do this. Or you're wrong.

[13:46] And it's interesting. When it says, put a yoke on the neck of the disciples. You could put it strictly or you could put it on the throat.

It's like this. It's talking about this. It's talking about this. The yoke is on the neck. It's on the throat. Figuratively, the life. And some would try to strangle the life out of you by putting you under some kind of yoke. The yoke of bondage. We're not there. We've actually got perfect liberty in Christ. And we could see that in modern terms how some would impose standards of men that are subjective. And I've been there. It's easy for me to look at others and evaluate them and measure them by my own subjective standards.

And that's wrong of me. And I'm sorry about that. Whenever I have done that. Or if you felt that I've done that. To impose my standards on you. My standards are for me.

[14:51] I want to set a high standard for myself. But I don't want to be setting subjective standards on others that the Lord's not convicted them of as some kind of requirement. Now, of course, the Lordship Salvation crowd would try and measure people by subjective standards as to whether they're saved or they're not.

Because they're God. They sit in judgment as God and they say, Oh, that professing Christian is committing this sin or what I think is sin.

So they're not a Christian. Who are we to say that? Who are we? How dare we? We're not God. I'm not God. God will decide who's his and who's not.

He knows already them that are his. But this crowd, and there's people out there, and they're in our churches, the Lordship Salvation crowd, that would measure people by subjective standards and say, He's saved, he's not.

Whether they, and you name it, I could give you a whole list of things that I say, Oh, if they do this, then they can't be a Christian. That's rubbish. No.

[16:02] It's actually offensive to God. Let alone to the people we try and do that to. So God forbid that we ever act that way. The yoke of bondage. Another yoke is the yoke of oppression.

The yoke of oppression. We think of the children of Israel in Egypt. We know God's people. They were slaves in Egypt. And they gave them hard bondage, didn't they?

They gave them lots of oppressive burdens. And yet God delivered them from that yoke. God delivered them from that yoke with his mighty hand.

The prophet Isaiah proclaims also, it says there about the bands of wickedness, the heavy burdens. And Isaiah writes, let the oppressed go free.

Let the oppressed go free and break every yoke. Now, when I think about the yoke of oppression, friends today, and I know there's some in our number who struggle with this, I think we can see this yoke in the way of all kinds of addictions.

[17:06] All kinds of addictions that control people. That's why we took the trouble and we invested in that training that we had about dealing with post-traumatic stress.

And that captured things like addictions and such things. Because we're all at risk. We can all be suspect to addictions of one thing or another.

And so we think substance abuse gets a hold of people. Pokies. And I've talked about it before. I know just some recent figures on pokies that South Australians lost a whopping 900 million, 900 million to poker machines just in South Australia, just in 12 months.

That's a whole lot of oppression, isn't it? You know, you see some people, they're on their bare bones because their money's just gone down the one-armed bandit's mouth.

And they're oppressed, aren't they? It's addiction. It's oppressing people. And you name it, there's all kinds of things. You think, well, this has got a hold of me. It's a yoke, isn't it? Recognize it for what it is.

[18:30] Ask God to set you free. Let the oppressed go free. Amen. God wants to break every yoke. Let the oppressed go free. And thank God the yoke can be broken. Here's another truth about yokes.

There's numbers of times it talks about yokes can be broken. You don't have to stay under that yoke. You don't have to stay there. The yoke can be broken. It can be taken off your shoulders. The Bible, it talks about a yoke of iron.

There's these yokes that are heavy, that are weighty yokes. And thank God another truth about yokes is that God can break the yoke. God can destroy yokes. We see that in Isaiah 10, verse 27. It talks about, His burden shall be taken off thy shoulder, his yoke from off thy neck, and the yoke shall be destroyed because of the anointing. Of course, we know the anointing.

Some make it all spooky-wooky about, oh, the anointing. Actually, it's just the Holy Spirit. It's God's Spirit. It's not saying, oh, that preacher's anointed, or that church has got the anointing, or go and get the anointing in some place or other.

[19:31] The anointing is the Spirit of God. It's the Spirit of God in you. And you can have the anointing. You have the anointing because you're His. And it's the yoke that's going to be destroyed because of the anointing.

We could think, as we could reflect on our own lives about the yokes, what kind of yokes does the devil put on people? We could think the yoke of jealousy, maybe, of fear, of bitterness, of hurt, of depression, of pride, of envy, of unforgiveness.

These are all kind of yokes that can get on our necks, all right? It's going to get on your neck. Are you under Satan's yoke today? Ask God to show you, Lord, I think I've got a yoke on my neck.

Take it away. Break it. You can be free. Thank God. The Lord Jesus can set people free. It's His mission to set people free from these heavy yokes so we can have a wonderful freedom in Christ. Fundamentally, it's grace, isn't it? It's grace. And so we looked at some unequal yokes. We've seen some yokes that are hard, that hurt people. The yoke of sin, the yoke of legalism, of oppression, of bondage, the fact that the yoke can be broken.

[20 : 42] Now let's turn to a good yoke, all right? I'd like to leave you on a positive note. There is a yoke that you want to have. And I know one of our brethren has spoken on this theme of late too.

The yoke of service. It's the Lord's yoke, all right? And instead of the yoke of sin that enslaves, we've got a yoke of service, actually we're going to serve the Lord and we're going to serve the Lord with gladness.

It's not an irksome thing. There's a yoke that is obedience unto Him. That's a good thing because God sets people free. He liberates us and He empowers us too to fulfil our divine calling.

Of course, you know the one, I'm sure you've heard it so many times, that His burden is light. His yoke is easy. And He says unto you, if you'll hear His voice this morning, take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest unto your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

What a precious promise that is. We could spend hours unpacking that really, couldn't we, to exposit that. Our Lord offers us His yoke to all who will deny themselves and take up His cross to follow Him.

[21 : 51] When you think about it, some have reflected that as a carpenter, the Lord Jesus likely made yokes. He likely made them. He would know what a good yoke looked like and what an ill-fitting yoke was that would make an oxen's neck sore.

So He would custom fit the yoke to each ox. Think of that. He's got a yoke for you. His yoke for you. And it's a yoke that is easy. Amen? I heard about a teacher reading her class the text, my yoke is easy.

And who can tell me what a yoke is? They asked the class, the teacher. And a boy said, a yoke is something that put on the necks of animals. And then the teacher asked, what is the yoke of God? What is the yoke that God puts on us? And a little girl put her hand up and she said that about the yoke of God, it's God putting His arms around our necks. Isn't that good?

Don't we want His arms around our necks? Because He hugs us and holds us to His heart. The love of God is His yoke, isn't it? When you think about another truth about yokes, which is quite interesting, is pairing up animals not only doubles their strength, but triples and quadruples it.

[23 : 06] Apparently there was this horse pulling contest, and there was this horse that could pull 4,500 pounds, and another horse could pull 4,000 pounds. And you think of it, well, maybe they could pull about 8,000 pounds together.

But not so. When they teamed up these horses, one that could carry 4,500 pounds, one that could carry 4,000 pounds, when they teamed them up, the horses could pull 12,000 pounds together. So a third more their total weight. That's an interesting thought, isn't it? When we pull together, we get more done. When we pull together with Christ, He amplifies our weakness and gives us His strength.

Imagine what power you have if you're yoked together with Christ, that you're yoked together with this powerful, almighty God, our Lord. If we yield to Him, we can yoke together with Christ.

And He says to you this morning, He says, take my yoke upon you, my yoke. So the ancients apparently also used this term, yoke as a metaphor of a student under the yoke of His teacher.

[24 : 13] He says, learn of me. He's the model, isn't He? We want Christ to be our model. He says, learn of me. He's the one. We come under His yoke like a student, under a teacher.

And so what's the meaning of all this? My yoke. Really, it's saying every Christian should be serving. And serving Christ is a joy. You know, when the pastor says, I'm looking for volunteers, you don't just suddenly look at your shoes and see how shiny they are.

You don't make eye contact. Don't make eye contact with the pastor. He wants someone to do something. He wants someone to serve. Oh, I'm just going to check my shoes.

No. Yes, Lord. Pick me. The yoke speaks of service, doesn't it? Do we shy away from that?

We should not. And there's a direct appeal to young men here. So young men, look at your shoes now. And it's good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth.

[25 : 16] It's a direct appeal to the young men. Now, I'm still young, I think. But if you're younger than me, you're a young man. Amen? And I know some of you are older than me. You're still a young man at heart.

It's good for a man to bear the yoke in his youth. So young men, this is a call to you. And young women, we could say too, shouldn't we? That there's work to do.

Do it. Take your yoke and wear it. It means serve. Serve in your local church. Roll up your sleeves and say, I'm in. All in. Get your work boots on.

And the word talks about labours more abundant. Time will come later in life when you're less able to serve. Ask some of our older saints here. As you get later in life, you're less able.

Don't miss the boat. And talking about a boat, let's man the oars. If we man the oars, we'll have less time to rock the boat. All right? Get your hands to the oar. Put your hands to the plough.

[26 : 14] Let's get on with it. In one sense, we're yoked with Christ. What's more, in another sense, the yoke is with one another. We're in this together. Amen? We who are committed to Christ and his cause, the yoke talks about joining together.

And that's church, isn't it? What it's meant to be. And so we identify with other churches of like faith. That's a blessed thing. We've got much in common.

We want to foster that. That's why I love things like fellowship meetings. We can get together. We can encourage one another. And when we carry his yoke, it means that we yield ourselves to his will.

We find a purpose of fulfilment there in Christ. And his yoke we can gladly and freely bear. So just one last kind of thought about yokes is another aspect as we wear Christ's yoke is that we also have yoke fellows.

Yoke fellows. I heard Brother Chris Hustler when he came and addressed the pastors in a recent visit. And he talked at length about this. I thought it was a really insightful thought. Yoke fellows.

[27 : 20] Yoke fellows. Paul talked about that in Philippians 4 verse 3. And he says, I entreat thee also, true yoke fellow, help those women who laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellow labourers, whose names are in the book of life.

So Paul's addressing here. He's saying true yoke fellow. He's saying to this one, he's saying help these others. He's saying we labourers together. He's saying fellow labourers.

And the idea is of labourers together in the service of God. And again, to this picture of the yoke, it's a symbol of ministry really as well. We know it can be seen in a negative light, but a yoke can be ministry.

It can be serving God. And friends, it's good to find and be true yoke fellows. I think we are that amongst us, that we are true yoke fellows. So who are we yoked together with?

It's got this idea of co-labouring. Co-labouring, working side by side, working together. We've got a common vision, a common mission. As yoke fellows, we're all in this together.

[28 : 23] It's about that united effort. That's why church is precious. It's everyone playing his part, doing his bit. And once we're joined by a yoke, we can't go in separate directions too.

Think about that. If we're joined in a yoke, we're going in the one direction. Because we have to. It's not, we can't not. We have to go in that one direction together. That's a good yoke.

So the weight doesn't fall on the pastor's shoulders, or this and that person, in a certain ministry. So I'm glad that others are helping. For example, with the youth group, we've got a multiplicity of helpers.

We've got the Gregoricks, we've got the Vellas. We've got others joining when they can, to other times. It's not falling on the shoulders of one or a few, but we're sharing the load.

And that's true of every ministry, that we can all pick up the slack. It's not meant to fall on the shoulders of one or a few, but that we share the load. We'll be yoke fellows, all right? Think of that picture.

[29 : 20] And that we labour us together with God. It's a joint effort that we've pulled together. So think of it, friends, as we think about the church. We've got a common mission. God's yoked us together in this.

You and me. He is the one who's yoked with us too. We labour us together with God. He's the driving force. He sets the direction. He's going to say which way to go because we join to Him in that yoke.

So as two oxen have to go in the one direction, when we join together with Christ, He sets the direction. Amen? He sets the pace. And He carries the heaviness. So we think of these pictures as a whole lot we could say along this theme.

I trust that there's something useful to provoke you to think of this yoke, this wooden frame, fastens the shoulders of horses, of oxen, helps them pull that plough, that wagon, that cart.

And the animals push against the yoke as they move forward and they pull a load. Friends, we've got a load to pull. We can pull together and pull that load. We can yoke together. We can yoke and pull together in the same direction.

[30 : 25] Now if who we are yoked with, our yoke fellows, are struggling against each other, we get less work done. So we want to share equally the yoke. So think of it as you might think for yourself, well I want to do this or that ministry.

Get together with like-minded believers. See how the Lord's leading you to pray together, to yearn together, to suffer together, to serve together. And aspire to be a true yoke fellow.

Say, I'm in, I want to be a yoke fellow. And a yoke fellow is in the trenches with us. A yoke fellow is ready to labour alongside of us. A yoke fellow feels our pain.

And we suffer together. We rejoice together. And a yoke fellow helps carry the load that we're pulling in the same direction. Who's yoke? That's the question, isn't it?

Who's yoke are we going to carry? We talked about those yokes that are not desirable. The yoke of sin, of legalism, of bondage. The yoke of oppression.

[31 : 25] Thank God he breaks the yoke by the anointing. His spirit breaks the yoke. He destroys the yoke. It talks about how he breaks the yoke off the necks in the context of the enslavement to oppressors back in the Hebrews day.

And so let's rather be carrying his yoke. And when you think about it, again, just a thought that comes to mind. And sometimes we can get like this.

That ministry becomes irksome. And it just becomes a drudgery and a duty and unpleasant. His yoke is easy.

Maybe if you're carrying something that you're feeling that way, your spirit's not right or you've got the wrong yoke, you know, ask God to help you find joy in that ministry. Because God doesn't want ministry to be something that's horrible.

He wants it to be delightful. He wants to make that yoke easy for you. And so a yoke fellow is one who can encourage us. So find such people to come alongside.

[32 : 37] I need such people. You need such people. We need one another to be such people.

Say, I'm your yoke fellow. You know, put your arm around them in figurative ways. Come alongside to work together.

Let's work together. They're the ones we want to have around us. And most of all, we want to take his yoke, don't we? You know, you might say, preacher, I'm hearing you.

I'm carrying some yokes that are not good. Let God destroy the yoke, the yoke of bondage, of this or that. The yoke that would oppress or burden you down.

The devil's yoke. Oppression. Whatever it be. Addiction. Let God set you free. And find his yoke. His yoke is easy.

His burden is light. Let's pray. Lord, we praise you that your word tells us that you want us to come unto you. We pray if there's any yet to trust you, that they would do simply that. They would say, Lord Jesus, save me.

[33 : 36] I want you to be my Lord. I want to come unto your mastery. Your yoke. It's a good thing for me to be mastered by you, to come unto your yoke, because it's one you've made to fit me.

And it's going to be well fitting. Lord, we praise you for these things. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thank you.