
His Yoke is Easy

Sermon • Rev'd John Shoaf • 5 July 2026

Romans 7:15-25 • Matthew 11:16-19,25-30



May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of our hearts give glory to you, O Lord. Amen.

Today's Gospel and the Romans passage contain both reassurance and warnings. This is usually the case with the Bible. God is love, and so God's word is loving; but God's true love protects and sometimes admonishes us if we go wrong. We are sometimes caressed and sometimes chastised. All good parents understand this. Paul tells us in the Letter to the Hebrews:

‘My child, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
or lose heart when you are punished by him;
for the Lord disciplines those whom he loves,
and chastises every child whom he accepts.’ (Hebrews 12:5,6)

And why do we need to be disciplined or chastised? Because sin controls us. You may call it the devil, or sin, or our own evil nature; it is the same. Even when we want to do right, we may do wrong, because of sin's influence. We seek to do good in the world — that is commendable. Anyone may do that. But we have no hope of succeeding in doing good without the help of Jesus Christ. Paul described it in a physical way:

For I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind, making me captive to the law of sin that dwells in my members. (Romans 7:22-23)

The sin is in us, and we are helpless to fight it — unless we also have Christ in us. We cannot avoid sin simply through our own intelligence. We need faith and to surrender to the influence of Christ in our lives. The message from the Gospel is the same. What did Jesus mean when he said, “Thank you, Father ... because you have hidden these things from the wise and intelligent” (Matthew 11:25)? Surely God wants us to use the brains he gave us? This is the way those who don’t follow Christ reason it out. They think that God should be perceived through intelligence, through reason alone. It doesn’t work. You need to have faith to follow Christ and avoid the pitfalls of your sinful nature.

Through faith, we understand our place in the world, relative to God and Christ. Our intelligence may lead us to arrogance and boastfulness, but our faith leads us to humility and gentleness. I remember, with embarrassment, an episode from my youth. When I was little, they showed cartoons on TV all Saturday morning. I was a fan of Bugs Bunny. He always outwitted his antagonists, particularly Daffy Duck and Yosemite Sam. He was quite arrogant to them. There was a line he often used when his opponents thought they were outwitting him: “He don’t know me very well, do he?”

So, once upon a time my family was on holiday with my grandparents, staying in a rented house by the beach. I was probably nine or ten years old. The house was furnished, of course, and they had a radio and record player in the lounge. I went to turn on some music, and my grandfather said, “John, don’t touch that; you don’t know what you’re doing and you might break it.” Well, at home, I always used the record player with my father’s permission, as he had taught me to use it properly. So I said to my father, who was standing nearby, “He don’t know me very well, do he?”

My father quite properly chastised me on the spot, as well he should. I was arrogant and rude, and I was bragging about my ability. My intelligence had let me down; I was using my brain, but not my heart. My sin was arrogance and presumptuousness. Normally, I was quite polite to my grandparents; I loved them and they loved me. As Paul would put it, the evil that I did not want is what I did.

I wasn’t a Christian then, but God was planning my calling, as God has planned everything since the beginning. This was one of those episodes in my life which has really shaped me, so I know God was behind it. God calls us to a life of care and community, and will correct us along the way, if we need it — and most of us do. Paul uses an image of our minds following God’s law and our bodies following the law of sin, and it is true, for our minds do not always

control our bodies as they should. But we are not fated to live always in that state. When Jesus died on the cross “he condemned sin in the flesh” (Romans 8:3), and made it possible for our minds and our bodies to be in harmony with each other, both following God’s law.

In the well-known Gospel passage, Jesus tells us to take his yoke upon our shoulders, for his yoke is easy and his burden is light (Matthew 11:29,30). Often we take this passage to mean that the way will be made easy for us, and it is made easier, if we live in the faith of Christ; but there is still a burden. That burden is the cross which we must bear, and it is different for each one of us. Our cross is to resist the sin which is in us, that sin which makes us do wrong things. When I say this, I do not mean that we have no personal responsibility for our actions. We are still responsible for what we do, and God will judge us according to our faith. For we make the choice to have faith. We are not judged by our actions, but by the faith which enables us to avoid sinful actions. The more faith we have, the less we will be tempted to sin, and the more we will live in accordance with God’s laws. Our burden, then, is tied to our personal choice to follow Christ.

I should say a word about the chastisement of God. It is easy to assume that if something goes wrong for us, that God is punishing us. I won’t say this doesn’t happen, because who am I to put limits on what God can or will do? But my belief is that when things goes wrong, it is usually because of our own mistakes, or the actions of some other person, or just bad luck — accidents and mistakes so happen. I think when God corrects us, it is more often through our conscience. God has written his law on our hearts, and we know right from wrong; so we feel it when we do wrong. I know I felt horribly embarrassed when I truly realised just how rude I had been to my grandfather, whom I loved and respected, as I loved and respected my father.

So we are left with the burden of Christ’s yoke. We can choose to follow Christ or not. If we do not, we risk God’s wrath, and that is not an easy burden. Choose faith, and Christ’s yoke will be easy. Choose faith, and sin becomes easy to resist. Choose faith and come to Jesus Christ. Amen.