

For My Yoke Is Easy And My Burden Is Light

Parts taken from Abba Abraham
John Cassian's Twenty-fourth Conference
Edited, paraphrased, and added to by DSB

Matthew 11:28-30 . . . 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.

It seems contrary to reality to say that Christ's yoke is easy and His burden is light. For example, when speaking in defense of his call to be an apostle, Paul said: "Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern" (II Corinthians 11:23-29)?

In that same letter Paul says: "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body" (II Corinthians 4:8-10). And again he says: "Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (II Timothy 3:12). How can persecutions and sufferings such as Paul endured be spoken of as easy and light?

However, not all Christians face the kind of trials and tribulations Paul faced. What about them? Is not Christ's yoke easy and His burden light for them?

Peter speaks to this issue when he says: "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ" (I Peter 1:6-7). James adds these words: "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing" (James 1:2-4). And returning to Paul, we read: "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint,

because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us” (Romans 5:1-5).

We also have the words of Jesus, who says: “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, because of this the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, 'A slave is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also” (John 15:18-20). And once more he says: “If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me” (Luke 9:23).

So we return to our first statement: “It seems contrary to reality to say that Christ’s yoke is easy and His burden is light.”

And yet, what can be heavy or hard to the Christian who has taken up Christ’s yoke with his whole heart and mind, is firmly rooted in true humility, contemplates and meditates often on the Lord’s suffering, and rejoices when trials and tribulations come because he treasures the spiritual growth they produce in him? What can be heavy or hard to the Christian who is convinced that God’s grace is sufficient for him in all situations, and that spiritual power is made perfect in weakness? Such a believer will gladly join Paul in saying: “I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong” (II Corinthians 12:9-10).

Will a Christian be annoyed or distressed or angry over the loss of some earthly possession if he no longer loves the world or the things in the world? Can it be hard for us to lose what we cannot take with us if this world is not our home, but heaven is?

The apostle Paul counted “all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus his Lord, for whom he suffered the loss of all things, and counted them but rubbish so that he might gain Christ” (Philippians 3:8). Jesus says: “What does it profit a man to gain the whole world, and forfeit his soul? For what will a man give [from his earthly possessions or wealth] in exchange for his soul? Therefore, whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel’s will save it” (Mark 8:35-37). Therefore, what loss is too hard or lack of earthly possessions too burdensome for the one who wants to gain Christ and know Christ as much as it is humanly possible to know him?

Won’t a Christian who is content in whatever circumstances he is in find Christ’s yoke easy and His burden light (Philippians 4:11)? Such a Christian has taken to heart the words of Paul when he says: “I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need” (Philippians 4:12).

And so I ask, will a Christian who is convinced that he can do all things and endure all things – by the inward strengthening of Christ – feel it is an unfair burden or a burden too heavy to bear if he is deprived of what others have or if he has to endure sickness others don’t endure

or if his trials and tribulations are excessive in comparison to most (Philippians 4:13)? Surely the answer is no.

What toil or command of an employer or church elder, however difficult it may be, will disturb a Christian's inward peace and confidence in the goodness of God if he has repented of self-rule and eagerly joins Christ in saying to his Heavenly Father: "Not my will, but Your will be done" (Matthew 26:39)? What hardship, harm, suffering, persecution, and even torture can be too burdensome to bear for the Christian who, with the disciples, rejoices in the prospect of being counted worthy to suffer shame and physical abuse for the Lord's sake (Acts 5:40-42)?

And so we see that Christ's words are true – His yoke is easy and His burden is light to those who do not love the world or the things in the world, who freely deny self and daily pick up their cross, who cheerfully make themselves poor so others can be rich, who humble themselves in the sight of God and wait for Him to exalt them, who are among us as those who serve regardless of their position in this life, who value the profit gained from trials and tribulation, who count all things as rubbish for the sake of knowing Christ Jesus their Lord, and who trust in God for provision, protection, empowerment, and grace in all things.