

JESUS GIVES US REST FROM RELIGIOUS LEGALISM

Jesus Yoke Fits Easily and His Burden is Light, *Matthew 11:30*

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Scriptures: *Matthew 11:28-30, Matthew 12:1-8, 9-14, Matthew 23:4, Colossians 2:16-23 (11-15), Hebrews 4:1-10*
 Jesus said, **“Come to Me, all you who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am “gentle” NKJV, (“meek”, KJV – Greek: praus), and lowly, (humble – Greek: tapeinos), in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. My yoke is easy and my burden is light.”**

The word “meek” has lost its original meaning in the English language. It has come to mean gentle, but that was not the original meaning in the New Testament. For an explanation of the original meaning of “meek”, see Pastor Notes, Number 32, “Fruit of the Spirit”, and Number 317, on the “Beatitudes.”

The religious leaders of Jesus’ time, the Scribes and the Pharisees, **had laid on the people of God, the people of Israel, a very heavy and burdensome set of religious laws, commandments and duties.** *Matthew 23:1-4.* They controlled and dominated the people by religious rules and regulations of their own making.

You can see this in *Matthew 12:1-8.* Jesus’ disciples were plucking the heads of grain and eating them on the Sabbath day. The Pharisees accused them of breaking the law of the Sabbath. *Exodus 20:8-11.* Jesus refuted the judgment of the Pharisees. *Isaiah 54:17.* They were accusing Jesus’ disciples of reaping on the Sabbath.

You can see this in *Matthew 12:9-14.* Jesus went into a Synagogue. A man was present with a withered hand. The Pharisees challenged Jesus, **“Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?”** They set a trap, to accuse Him of breaking God’s Law. **Jesus tells them why it is right to do good,** such as pull a sheep from a pit, or heal a man **on the Sabbath.** Jesus went ahead and healed the man’s hand. The Pharisees immediately started plotting to kill Jesus.

The law of Moses, found in Exodus to Deuteronomy, contains 613 laws, including the Ten Commandments.

God gave the Law to His people, through Moses, upon Mount Sinai. *Exodus 20:1 – 17.*

The heart of this Law is the **Ten Commandments.** **The first four commandments contain our duty to love God, and the other six our duty to love man.** *Matthew 22:37-40*

The Ten Commandments and their extensions, are called the **“Moral Law.”**

As well as the Moral Law, God gave the Israelites **Ceremonial Laws,** which involved the Sacrifices, the Priesthood, the Tabernacle and the Feasts. *Leviticus Chapters 1 to 7, Exodus 28 and 29, Exodus 25 to 40, Exodus 12, Exodus 23:14 – 16, Leviticus 23, Deuteronomy 16: 1 - 17*

The Ceremonial Laws prefigured Christ, His graces, actions, sufferings and benefits.

All the Ceremonial laws are now set aside. Christ has fulfilled their meaning and purpose. *Colossians 2:14-17, Ephesians 2:15,16.*

Jesus has also set us free from **the curse of the law.** *Deuteronomy 28, Galatians 3:13,14*

The Moral Law is binding upon all people, as well as the justified believers who are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, and who are living in the Kingdom of God. *Romans 13:8,9,10, Ephesians 6:2, John 14:15, John 15:14, 1John 2:3,4,7,8, Matthew 5:17-19, 21,22,27,28,31,32, James 2:8, Romans 3:31, Romans 8:4, Galatians 5:14*

(Please note that they way we keep God’s moral law in the New Testament is through faith in God’s promises, by the power of the Holy Spirit in us, by the laws of God being written on our hearts and not by human effort and determination. *2Corinthians 7:1, 2Peter 1:4, Philippians 2:13, Galatians 2:20, 1Corinthians 1:30, Romans 6:11, Hebrews 8:10)*

Living to fulfil man-made religious rules is of no profit. *Colossians 2:20 – 23.*

Many years after Jesus died on the Cross and rose again, Paul wrote to the Christians at Colosse about the same problem. *Colossians 2:16-23*

In *Colossians 2:13,14*, it is written, “and you being dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, and having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.**” “**He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the Cross.**” *Ephesians 2:15*.

“**The handwriting of requirements that was against us**” refers to the judgment of God upon sin, expressed in the curse of the Law, *Deuteronomy 28:15 – 68*, from which we have been redeemed by Jesus’ death on the Cross. *Galatians 3:13,14*. It also refers to the requirements of the ceremonial laws mentioned above. As explained, they have been set aside by Jesus’ death on the Cross. (Matthew Henry’s Commentary on *Colossians 2* and *Ephesians 2* is very helpful.) It does not refer to the keeping of God’s moral Law, which is described above, and is binding on all believers.

It is written in *Colossians 2:16*, “So let no-one judge you in food or drink or regarding a festival, (feast day) or a new moon or Sabbaths.”

Further in *verses 20-23*, it is written, “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to **regulations.**” “Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” which all concern things which perish with the using – according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an **appearance of wisdom** in self imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.”

In our walk of faith, we can sometimes make up **our own religious rules and laws**, and get a feeling of satisfaction in fulfilling them. Sooner or later there will come a time, when these self made rules will become a bind and a hindrance to us fulfilling the will of God, as shown to us by the Holy Spirit. At this point we have to repent and set them aside, before we can go on in the Spirit of God.

Sometimes we even make **foolish vows**, *Leviticus 5:4 – 13*, where we bind ourselves to some law we have made. If we have done this we need to repent, ask for forgiveness, renounce the vows made in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and be free.

As parents or church leaders we can become legalistic and controlling. This may be because of fear, insecurity, or desire to be in control. We need to check our motives for what we require of those over whom we have authority. **Our motive at all times has to be for the highest good of those we have responsibility for, children, church members, citizens or employees.**

We may need rules or laws at times to protect our children. I remember laying down rules about what we would watch on TV. I would do the same again if I had young children. We also had laws about crossing the roadway.

If our laws are for the good of those we are called to care for, then probably the laws we make and enforce will be a blessing in the long run. If the laws we make are out of fear and insecurity, desire to be in control, or a desire to benefit from those we rule over, they will have a binding and burdensome effect. They will be a heavy burden to bear for those under them.

We can make laws about foods, dress code, what we drink, and what day of the week we worship on.
Romans 14:5 – 13

The rest that Jesus is calling us into, *Matthew 11:28-30*, is a rest from the labour and heavy burdens of the religious systems of men, into the rest of faith through the Gospel. *Hebrews 4:1-10*. It is a rest where we have ceased from our own works, schemes and plans, and walk by faith in the Holy Spirit. It is a place where Christ is living in us and out through us to fulfil His will and purposes. *Galatians 2:20*

As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. *Romans 8:14, Galatians 5:16, Galatians 5:18*