

The Yoke and the Cross

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There is a well-known painting showing an ox standing between an altar and a plow, with the caption underneath, "Ready for Either." The picture is taken to be symbolic of what the attitude of the Christian must be. He must be consecrated to God for death, if such be His will, or for a lifetime of faithful service.

Actually, however, the caption might better read, "Ready for Both," for a follower of Christ must both pull the plow and be sacrificed on the altar. This might also be true of the ox. It is possible that the animal might spend some time before the plow in service to his Jewish master, and at last be offered as a burnt sacrifice. That is service first, then sacrifice. With the Christian, however, the process must be reversed, in order for his life and work to be truly useful and acceptable. First sacrifice, then service.

Christ calls all those who would follow Him to both sacrifice and service. "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). "And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The yoke is a symbol of service; the cross is emblematic of sacrifice.

Let us think first of the demands of sacrifice. The one who steps upon the narrow road to heaven must lay aside many things he previously cherished. The world must be cast off. Companions, entertainments, habits, adornments, language, many things that mark one as a lover of this present world, have to be placed by life's wayside and left there.

Sometimes one's closest earthly friend has to be sacrificed on the altar, for if our dearest friends do not see eye to eye with us as we begin the new way, we must turn from them, sadly and reluctantly. But turn we must if we are to accompany that best possible Friend along the rocky road of sacrifice. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" If we desire to fellowship with Christ, we must give up all fellowship with the world.

But sometimes we are called to give up more than even our

best friend. "He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37). What can make the heart bleed more than to be forced to turn from the breast at which one was nourished, and the hearth at which one is warmed? Yet many, many times the sacrifice has to be made. But to all who turn away for Christ's sake from the home portals, He offers love more abundant and comfort more abiding.

But there are those who would rather break with their friends, and even sever the strong ties of home more willingly than part with their possessions. Many examples there are of men who would rather sacrifice life itself than relinquish their gold. The wealthy young man who came to Christ inquiring the road to eternal salvation turned his back upon it, because his burden of wealth was too cumbersome to be taken along, and he would not go without it.

Yet it is conceivable that a person might, like some ascetic of ancient days, give up the world, his friends, his family, and his total possessions, and still fail to inherit the kingdom of heaven. For though a man give up all these things, nail every one on the cross of sacrifice, yet fails to sacrifice himself, it is all in vain.

When one truly sacrifices himself, he takes all else with him to the cross.

Taking now our eyes from the cross, the symbol of sacrifice, we turn them upon the yoke, the symbol and badge of service. People usually think of a yoke as being a hard thing, something to escape, something unpleasant. Actually, it is the opposite.

Regardless of whether we bear a yoke or not, we are bound to have burdens carry. The shoulders of the world are piled high with them, and we all have our share. And because we have burdens, Christ offers us a yoke.

When I was a boy I lived in a village where instead of turning a tap for water we had to go to a well for it. So I would take two buckets not quite full of water—I couldn't carry full buckets at the time—and start toward the house. But for a small boy two buckets of water, even when not quite full, are heavy, and they swing against the legs splashing water all over the shoes, and the arms feel as though they were coming loose at their sockets. But take a piece of wood, place it horizontally across the shoulders, tie rope at both ends and to the bucket handles—how it changes the weight of the burden! The buckets do not swing around so much, the water does not splash, and the arms no longer feel as if they are being pulled out of their sockets—all because of the yoke.

Reader, to live in the world we must bear burdens, the burdens of the world, or Christ's burdens. If we carry only the world's we do so with no help, no relief; we bend beneath them as the cart beneath sheaves.

But lay aside the world's load and take up the cross—Christ, and lo, He lays another burden upon you—His yoke. But His yoke is to help you carry your cross. You learn that it is much easier to carry two burdens than one.

Friend, the world's load is truly heavy and trying; we sink beneath it often. But turn away from it to Christ, take up the cross, place upon your shoulders His yoke. The burden grows so much lighter, the sky so much brighter, the road so much smoother and shorter, because then there is a Companion by your side to shorten the journey with His presence.

You Will Never Be Sorry

**For telling the truth.
For living a pure life.
For your faith in Christ.
For confessing your sins.
For doing your very best.
For thinking before acting.
For hearing before judging.
For forgiving your enemies.
For helping a fallen brother.
For being honest in business.
For thinking before speaking.
For being loyal to your church.
For stopping your ears to gossip.
For bridling a slanderous tongue.
For harboring only pure thoughts.
For money given to the Lord's cause.
For faithfulness in keeping your promises.
For asking pardon when you have done wrong.**

—The Presbyterian Banner.
