The Heavy Yoke of Religious Error…

Jesus said in **Matthew 11:28-30**: "**Come to Me all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light**."

Here, the Master gives the invitation to all to come to Him for rest from the world… from the corruption of the world because of man's sin. We can have this rest because of the hope we have in Him and the promises surrounding Him… resurrection in Him on the last day, eternal life, final rest from sin and spiritual warfare, disease, death… a transforming of ourselves to His likeness and life with Him and the Father forever. Those are wonderful things for us to think about… indeed to long for with all of our hearts, and knowing these things… these truths about life in Christ does make the burden or yoke that He places on us light and easy… it does provide rest… even here, because we know that this world is just temporary… We are pilgrims here… Ambassadors in an alien land… And we are waiting to go home to our God and our Lord when He calls us.

Look at the vast contrast between the burden of Christ and the burden that the world would place on us… a burden of sin, pain and death…a burden of delusion… of relative truth… no direction and no purpose and ultimately eternal death. A "yoke" is a symbol of slavery and the Scriptures make it clear that we are wearing one of two possible yokes, the yoke of Christ or the yoke of sin... there are no other selections out there.

This morning I want to talk with you about the yoke of the world… and specifically the heavy yoke of religious error. So many in this world are caught up today in the wrong yoke… many are wandering about this life with the veil of the world over their eyes… but truly the most frightening veil of all… is the one of religious error, because it lulls one into a false sense of eternal security.

Let's look for a few minutes at the yoke the world has created for itself… with Satan's help of course and man's ambition and pride…

There are three very heavy hands at work in the labors and trials of those who wear the yoke of religious error… I call these the three great "**ISM**'s" of error:

Denominationalism- We are all very familiar with what denominationalism is and its various forms… I heard one preacher say recently that new denominations are now springing up "like tadpoles"… and this is so true. Denominationalism by it's very name means division; the idea behind it is that… the body of Christ is divided up into a multiplicity of religious groups… all claiming affiliation with the Lord Jesus… all claiming to be "Christian", but acknowledging themselves as only a subset of such by their very "denominators". People caught up in this lie, when asked what faith they adhere to, will tell you "I am a Baptist, or Methodist, or Presbyterian, or Anglican, or Catholic, or…" on and on ad nausea. It is interesting how they would designate themselves as something other than Christians most of the time... and we have to ask

ourselves is what Jesus wanted when He prayed for His followers to be one with Him and the Father in **John 17:20-23**? Did He want division… did He want those who would follow him to be so hopelessly divided by creedal differences that the world would only see disagreement… division?

No, as a matter of fact He did not and does not… divide and conquer is Satan's strategy, not Christ's… for with division there can be no conquering… just as a house divided against it self cannot stand, so the body of Christ if it is divided up cannot be effective… it can only be confusing to all who see it. We know from the **Colossians 1:24** that the body of Christ is the church and we know from **Ephesians 4:4-5** that there is one body and one faith… not multiples of such. **Ephesians 1:22-23** further confirms this by telling us that Christ is the head of the body which is the church… can you see Jesus as the head and having multiple bodies? That would be a ridiculous image and it is not one that Scripture supports.

There is only one church and it is the one that Jesus Christ foretold in **Matthew 16:18**, when He said, "…**I will build My church**"… and it is the "**ekklesia**" meaning the assembly or church that was established in **Acts 2**… and we know from **Acts 11:26** that the people who were in the assembly of the saints called themselves Christians and nothing else.

There is no other "**church**" that God the Father or Jesus Christ will recognize as belonging to them… the others out there… they belong to men… to those who "**walk by the flesh**". Summed up, denominationalism is a grave religious error that is the tool of the Devil and an anathema to the prayer of Christ in **John 17**.

Calvinism- Some of us are familiar with what this is and some may not be, so a brief description is in order. Calvinism is that body of doctrine espoused and taught by Swiss theologian John Calvin during the rise of Protestantism during the 1500's. His teachings have grown in acceptance by the religious world to the point that 95% of the denominational world now subscribes to some form of Calvinism… Here are the five main points of Calvinism that are the pillars of the doctrine; they are referred to by the acronym "**TULIP"**:

1. **T**- Total hereditary depravity: The doctrine of original sin, the idea that we are so depraved that we are incapable of responding to God's offer of salvation without His help.
2. **U**- Unconditional particular election: The idea that only certain people were selected to be saved by God before the world began and that the salvation they receive has nothing to do with them; it was arbitrarily decided upon by God.
3. **L**- Limited atonement: The idea that Christ's atoning sacrifice was not for every one… Jesus died on the cross only for the elect souls, whom God arbitrarily decided to save no matter what they do
4. **I**- Irresistible grace: The idea that the Holy Spirit gives faith as a gift to a depraved sinner… one of the elect, and saves him. This "religious experience" as some call it cannot be resisted; you have no choice but to accept it.
5. **P**- Perseverance of the saints: The idea that once someone is saved they cannot lose that salvation no matter what they do… or "once saved always saved."

These teachings and the errors that they represent are legion! I mean the error here is so vast where do I begin? Let's start with the first principle of total hereditary depravity… this frankly is the one religious error that has contributed the most to the idea that homosexuality is a genetic trait that someone is born with, and not the sin that it is. Let's get this straight… no one is born being sinful… sin is a learned condition, and we learn it from the sin we see all around us… every day. Look at **Ezekiel 18:4** & **20**. God says that He gives us our souls and the soul that sins shall die… we are responsible for our own sins and not the sins of our fathers or our sons… there is no heredity to sin.

Just as a little child cannot intellectually have faith in Christ, because of a lack of understanding that comes with the maturing process, neither can they have an intellectual grasp of sin in their lives. God tells us in **Deuteronomy 1:39** that "**little ones… have no knowledge of good <u>or evil</u>**". He views little children as sinless until they come to an age where they have the ability to intellectually assess right and wrong according to the divine standard He has given us. Look at **Ezekiel 28:15** and the description of the king of Tyre… clearly depravity is not inherited, it is learned. And again on this point Christ shows us how God views little children when He gives us His statements about the matter in **Matthew 18:3-5**.

Jesus used the sinless, humble nature of a little child to demonstrate to us all the nature that is needed to be a child of God… does anyone think He would have used this example if God viewed children as sinful and condemned? No. Furthermore, **Hebrews 12:9** tells us that God is the Father of our spirits, and **Ecclesiastes 12:7** tells us that our spirits come from Him… and when they do so they are most certainly as pure as the Holy Source they came from.

Total hereditary depravity is a twisting of the scriptures and places an unjust and heavy yoke on mankind. Thank God we do not bear the sins of our fathers all the way back to Adam!

Next is unconditional particular election… the bible does teach election for salvation but the election that is taught is not Calvinistic election… it is the election of those who have elected to follow Christ! It is the election of those who are "obedient to the faith" as shown in **Acts 6:7**… election is not an arbitrary thing that God just decided to pass out to a few no matter what. What a travesty and a mockery of God's sense of divine justice! Abraham told us the truth regarding God's sense of justice in **Genesis 18:25**. Will God do what is fair and what is right… of course He will. He made us creatures of free will and He will freely allow us to follow the dictates of that will no matter what. Besides God wants us to choose Him… to return to Him and He wants us to make that choice, otherwise why did Christ die? **Romans 8:1** tells us, "**There is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus…**" if you are "in Christ" you have made a decision to follow Him and you become elected for salvation. Unconditional particular election is false and again places an unjust yoke of anguish upon mankind; Christ promised us peace when we come to Him… not the anxiety of not knowing whether or not we are going to be saved by a capricious Deity.

The next pillar of Calvinistic doctrine is limited atonement… and the Bible teaches that Christ's atonement was for all mankind… and that is what made it so beautiful. To say that it is arbitrary makes it an ugly thing. There are several verses in scripture that make it clear that this idea is so false that I don't know how it even got off the ground in the first place. Those verses are **John 3:16**, **1 John 2:2**, **2 Peter 3:9**, and **Ezekiel 18:31-32**. Suffice it to say this doctrine of limited atonement does not make sense and it mocks the death of Christ, and because of that it is blasphemous.
Following limited atonement is the doctrine of irresistible grace. This is the doctrine that teaches that one must have "religious experience" in order to have faith that ultimately saves you, and that it comes upon you irresistibly through the working of the Holy Spirit… meaning you have no choice. Frankly, this doctrine is kind of frightening… it sounds like being invaded and turned into a robot. This is doctrine is clearly refuted in **Romans 10:17** where it says that "**faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God**"… the Calvinist would say that faith is "gifted to you"… a complete contradiction of this passage, and that you have no choice in the matter… which is ridiculous due to the fact that you can make a choice not to hear! **Mark 16:15-16** states that "**He who believes and is baptized shall be saved, but he who does not believe shall be condemned**"… clearly there is a choice here… and it one that WE make.

Faith is the responsibility of man, not God… God gives us grace because of our obedience to "**the faith**… (**Jude 3**)"… which is the gospel of Christ… which in turn is "**God's power to salvation for everyone who believes**... (**Romans 1:16**)." Irresistible grace is a false doctrine that keeps men in bondage to unnecessary fear, waiting for a religious experience that never occurs; and furthermore, it is a perversion of the teachings about the work of the Holy Spirit in this age… certainly the Holy Spirit works on men to convict them of sin… but as **Ephesians 6:17** tells us, He does it through the use of the sword of the Spirit **<u>which is the word of God</u>**… not by invasion.

Lastly, we come to the doctrine of perseverance of the saints, or the idea of "once saved, always saved." Just think upon the logic of that point in light of what we have just studied… if the other points of Calvinism were true then this idea would have merit… if salvation is not something we have a choice in, then obviously losing it is not something we can affect either. But this is not the case… and the scriptures show that too. Look at Paul's letter to the **Galatians**… some of them had fallen from the Christian faith and had gone back to Judaism and the tenets of the Law of Moses… and he told in **chapter 5 verse 4** that they had "**become estranged from Christ**" and that they had "**fallen from grace.**" Now how could they have done this if we cannot lose salvation once we have it? Some Calvinists would say "well they were never really saved." Not true… how can you become estranged for someone you have never known?

This piece of the doctrine of Calvinism is a tool of the Devil that gives weak willed people an excuse to go on sinning willfully instead of truly repenting and growing in strength in Christ. **Hebrews 10** makes that clear… as Christians we are to "**hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering (verse 23)**"… **verse 26** says that "**if we sin willfully**… **there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins**"… and **verse 29** says "**Of how much worse do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he <u>WAS</u> sanctified a**

common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" The chapter ends by saying in verse **31** "**It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.**" Does any more really need to be said about perseverance of the saints and the fallaciousness of this idea?

To sum up the doctrines of John Calvin we say this… they represent great error, and it is error that keeps men in bondage to and under the yoke of lies and contradictions of God's word to us.

Postmodernism- This last of the three great "**ISM**'s" of error is one that many may or may not be familiar with, but it this philosophy works hand in hand with our first two erroneous positions because it helps to facilitate any error… any lie… and as such it is the most frightening of the three because it take God's word out of the way by making it a rubber band that can assume any shape we wish it to. Simply put this philosophy says that no one can know anything for sure, except of course, that we cannot know anything for sure. Funny how this philosophy really contradicts itself in it's very basic premise, huh?

This mindset or philosophy takes away the ability of God to direct us morally, ethically and righteously through His word… it lends itself to helping those who would dispute what the truth is by saying, "Well that is just your interpretation of God's word, not mine." This is truly scary because it really means that anyone can decide upon their own code of morality and ethics and no one can tell them for sure that they are wrong. It means that our justice system, as imperfect as it is, has no foundation for deciding guilt or innocence. It relegates truth to a relative position… in which it can change to fit any situation you are in. It makes truth a subjective thing that is fuzzy and indefinable, instead of an objective thing we can know for sure. It allows those who would countenance sin as good, to do so with clean hands. This is such an ungodly position it defies description!

I want to look at two scriptures that refute this and we will deal with this topic more directly in another part of the lesson. First look at **Isaiah 45:19**. In this verse the Lord says "**I have not spoken on secret**" and the latter part says "**I, the Lord, speak righteousness, I declare the things that are right.**" God makes it abundantly clear that He tells us what is right and wrong and that this is His prerogative alone… and He says He has done it in such a way that we can know it… He did not do it secretly. Now let's look at **Isaiah 5:20**… this verse tells us "**Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!**" Here God casts a withering curse upon all who profane His truth as He has defined it for us… postmodernism facilitates the doing of just that… and in doing so brings down great condemnation on itself as a philosophy for living life by. Postmodernism leads to the enabling of all sorts of evil in this world including the great religious errors that we have mentioned this morning, and as such is a wrong and sinful mindset… it sets oneself up as God… declaring right and wrong according to one's own whims… and that is dreadful indeed.

When the three "ism's" speak… and we look at their overall message we get this when viewing them through the lens of God's word: Denominationalism makes a mockery of

the one church that Jesus bought with His blood; Calvinism makes a mockery out of the scriptural teachings around how to be saved and stay that way, and Postmodernism says don't worry it's not really relevant to you any way… you can make up your own way to go. Together they represent a heavy yoke indeed… and one that leads to eternal destruction.

False doctrines abound around salvation, what the church is, what scriptural worship is… and all of these are of the Devil… designed to keep us separated from the Lord… designed to steal His rightful glory and praise from us.

So what are we to do? As God's children we have been given a commission assist to Christ our Lord with ridding the world of sinfulness and error concerning God's word… And we do so by teaching the truth.

Jesus came to walk on the earth with us to free us from the yoke of sin… In **John 8:32**, He said "**You shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free**"… In **John 17:17** as He was praying to His Father in heaven He asked God to sanctify us by the truth… to set us apart from the world through the truth… and then He tells where the truth is found that set us free… when He says "**Your word is truth**"… we are freed by the truth, and God's word is the key… it is where the truth is found… it where God has declared what is right (**Isaiah 45:19**). We must know it and we must teach it to others in order to assist our Lord as He has commanded.

The Great Commission of **Matthew 28:19-20** is the Lord's prescription of a cure for what ails the world. We are to go make disciples every where, we are to baptize them, and then TEACH them… we are to assist in ridding them of error. We are to teach them what the Lord has said… as Jesus said in the passage earlier from **Matthew 11:29**… we are to help them learn of Him.

Jesus is the Great Physician of **Matthew 9:12**… prescribing the cure for sin and freedom from eternal death… the Great Commission is our call to help Him to rid the world of the cancer of sin and spiritual death… we have to do it, no one else will. We are the hospital staff physicians if you will… we are the administrators of the cure that Christ prescribed… Jesus said in **John 14** follow me and you will do greater things than I have done… Christ raised people from physical death through His miracles… we bring people His words… the words of eternal life as Peter called them in **John 6:68**.

As a side note, these thoughts should generate this question in all of our minds and we should take a moment out here to ponder it: are we fulfilling our commitment to the Lord as His people? Statistically there are approximately 1,200,000 New Testament Christians in the US today, and that is out of a population of 270,000,000… so I think not. We need to hear what the Lord has told us to do. Let's look for a moment at "**The Parable of the Talents**" in **Matthew 25:15-30**… Christ teaches us that those who take the riches they have been given… referring to the "treasure" we have in God's word… and produce gain with it, will be richly rewarded. Unprofitable Christians… Christians who don't grow what they have been given… like the one talent servant, who did not grow what He had been given by the Master… will be cast away into darkness. Just as medical doctors who

shun their Hippocratic Oath lose their license to practice medicine, so Christians who shun their commitment to Christ lose their souls.

Now let's get back to our main thought this morning… Just as the Israelites were in the "**hard bondage**" of slavery under the Egyptians (as seen in **Exodus 1:12-14**), and Moses was their deliverer (**Exodus 3:10**); man is in "**hard bondage**" to sin, and Jesus is our Deliverer, and He delivers us through the truth. Christ came and broke the yoke of sin for all mankind as we see in **Isaiah 9:4**; He brought the light of life to those in the shadow of death (**verse 2**). In **Romans 6:7** we are told that "**He who died has been freed from sin.**" This is an immediate reference to the baptism commanded by Christ and it is the point where the bonds… or the yoke… of sin is broken for us by Christ… this line of reasoning in **verse 7**comes from the preceding thought in **Romans 6:3-4**. So baptism is the point at which one is delivered…from sin and death. Baptism is the point at which we become "free". Baptism is the point at which we administer God's prescribed cure for the disease of sin… the precious blood of Christ.

To sum up our lesson this morning we come to this inescapable point: we need to… and have to… teach the world about these errors and about sin in general as Christians; no one else will do it if we do not. We have talked so much this morning about the religious error in the world, and the lack of wisdom that is from above. Only we… can combat that through the use of the tools that God has given us, and they are found in His holy word to us… the Bible. Remember **Romans 10:17** which says that "**faith comes by hearing**"? In **Romans 10:14** Paul asks, "**And how shall they hear with out a preacher?**" Brethren we have the truth and we are all preachers… we are all priests… let us remember that.

In closing, all of us at one time are under the yoke of sin until we are obedient to the faith and are freed from sin by the blood of Christ upon immersion into Him… as we saw earlier from **Romans 6:3-4**. That is our purchasing point… the "point of sale" if you will from slavery to the world… from Satan our adversary… over to Christ… at that point title is transferred. When you do this God adds you to His called out body… the church of Jesus Christ (**Acts 2:47**).

We also see this idea expressed in **1 Corinthians 12**. Here, Paul has written a fascinating discourse about the body of Christ, and the fact that there is one body… we know that body is the church from **Colossians 1:18**. But Paul reveals more to us than that in **1 Corinthians 12**… we also learn that God has set the members in the body in **verse 18**, and that the one body is composed by God from **verse 24**. We might ask what made God do this setting and composing? Well, **verse 13** provides the answer where it says "**For by one Spirit**"… meaning through the teachings of the Holy Spirit…"**we were all baptized into one body**". No denomination teaches that or can teach that, and no point of Calvinism or postmodernism will ever convey that point to anyone.

If you have not obeyed the gospel in your life yet and been freed from the yoke of sin then please… this morning… answer the undenominational call of Jesus Christ