



2025 Weekly Devotions

Week of: July 21st - 27th

Sermon: July 20th



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus

July 21

Matthew 11:29-30

As I began to consider what God wanted to say to us through the passage for Sunday's message, Galatians 5:25-26, I thought about the need to "keep in step" with the Holy Spirit. The point of verse 25 is that if we are led by the Spirit we need to be walking in step or keeping up with Him. How does one keep in step with the holy, righteous, perfect, and all-powerful God? The answer is by being in a yoke with Him. Matthew recorded in his gospel these words, "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." Today we will ponder what it means to be in yoke with Christ.

First, note that Jesus said to His listeners that they were to take HIS yoke upon them. Throughout the book of Galatians, we have learned that much of Paul's message dealt with throwing off or not putting on the yoke of bondage to legalistic slavery. In other words, we have learned not to carry the burden of believing we must work for our salvation and thereby earn a right standing before God from our own efforts. That is considered a "yoke of slavery" (Gal. 5:1). We are to steer clear from that at all costs.

Now we discover that Jesus Christ Himself is encouraging His followers to put on a yoke. The major difference is that His is a yoke of freedom while the Judaizers were attempting to force a yoke of slavery on the converts. Jesus said in Matthew 11 that His yoke was easy, and His burden light (Matt. 11:30). It is vitally important that we understand that although He describes His yoke as light, it is still a yoke and is a symbol of submission to His Lordship. Never forget that the Law was a good gift from God to His people. It was the Pharisees and Scribes who turned the Law into an unbearable burden (Matt. 12:2; 23:4).

Part of what makes Christ's yoke light is the presence and power of the Holy Spirit at work in us both to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13). He promises to encourage us and to ultimately make submission, sacrifice, and obedience a source of joy, peace, and contentment. His yoke is to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves. Remember that Jesus said if we do these two things all the law will be fulfilled in us. God did not give us the Commandments to steal our joy. He gave us His wisdom, principles, statutes, and Word to lead us into the greatest and most fulfilling life this side of heaven. The bottom line is that His yoke is not burdensome but the means to the good life.

When the Judaizers put forth the law as the yoke to which believers had to submit, they placed a burden on the shoulders of people that could not be carried. We know by now that absolute perfection is the requirement to stand before God and no man can accomplish it. Jesus lived the life we cannot and thereby stands as our substitute. Whenever a person tries to gain acceptance by works, it is never enough, the bar keeps moving, and it becomes a source of frustration, discouragement, and hopelessness. It leads to people who can only "hope" that they make it to heaven. Their hope rests in whether or not they did enough. Who can know? We don't have to worry about that because the yoke that Jesus wants us to willingly put on is light and leads to confidence, assurance, and a hope that will never disappoint (Rom. 5:5).

July 22

Matthew 11:29-30

Today I will continue to focus on the same passage from yesterday. We talked about the difference between the world's yoke and Christ's yoke. Today we will focus on the point or purpose of a yoke. Please don't think of a yoke as a bit and bridle like you would see in a horse's mouth. Our goal is not to do the will of our Master only under compulsion. We don't want to live in such a way that He has to jerk our heads around with the reins in order to get us to move in His desired direction. King David wrote in the 32nd Psalm, "Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle" (v.9). That is not the picture that we should have in our minds when we think of being in a yoke with our Master.

A yoke is meant to help us learn from the Master and to, as Paul wrote to the Galatians, keep in step with the Spirit. You have likely seen a couple of oxen in yoke together. The wooden device is placed across the shoulders of the beasts of burden and tied purposefully to keep the yoke in place. The two animals share the load as together they double the power and effort to pull the plow or wagon.

Notice what Jesus said to His followers when He invited them to voluntarily put on His yoke. He said "...and learn from Me" (Matt. 11:29). You see, the idea is that as He steps, we step; As He makes a turn left or right, we do the same. We are to learn to move when He moves and to do so at His pace. This is a matter of submission as well as discipleship. There is a way that pleases the Lord and a way to live that does not. When we come to Jesus and surrender our will to His as Lord, even though we are born again in that moment there is much to learn and a lifetime of sanctification to experience.

Just as a newborn baby has to learn to rollover, to crawl, to walk, to eat solid foods and so on, we too must learn to walk as children of God. It does not come naturally and must be learned as we put on the yoke of Christ and learn to walk as our Master leads us. Think again how beautiful it is to realize that we are putting on His yoke. He shares it with us and teaches us all the while how to accomplish His will in the most effective and efficient way possible. He teaches us by walking with us. Think for a moment of all the amazing ministries the Holy Spirit works in us once He makes His home inside of us.

When Paul told the Galatians to keep in step with the Spirit, he expected them to know that would come as a result of leaning into the person, work, and words of Christ. The Spirit teaches us the word and ways of God so that we can know what is expected of us, and also empowers us so that we can actually accomplish what He Commands. My hope for today is that you will understand two things: First, that God does actually require obedience to His will. Second, that He offers to assist us in learning how to be obedient to His will. He is a Father who teaches by word and deed. He will tell us what He expects of us and desires for us to do while also modeling for us how to do it. Jesus said, "Put on My yoke and learn from Me."

July 23

Philippians 2:1-11

I believe that Galatians 5:25-26 is a bridge passage into the final chapter of this book. It is in chapter 6 that we are instructed as to how we should gently correct another person who is struggling with particular sin in their lives. We are admonished never to forget that we are prone and capable of sinning just as well as the next person. Paul reminded the Corinthians that whenever they think they are in good shape to be careful lest they fall (1 Cor. 10:12). I am writing in this way because of what Paul said to the Galatians at the end of chapter 5.

In verse 26 he wrote, "Let us not become boastful...." Why in the world would we? Yet, we know it is possible otherwise he would not have warned us to be careful. The truth is that it is very easy to fall into thinking too highly of ourselves because of our spiritual progress or knowledge. Again, he wrote in the book of Romans, "For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think" (Rom. 12:3). I am reminded of a quote I read by Dr. John Stott. He said, "This is a very instructive verse (Gal. 5:26) because it shows that our conduct toward others is determined by our opinion of ourselves." That is a brilliant statement and absolutely true.

What I believe we will all agree on is that when we are feeling a bit too good about ourselves, our abilities, our accomplishments, or even our disciplines we can easily look down on those around us who are "less" than we are in any of these areas. This can even cross over into our spiritual prowess or advancements. We find ourselves wondering why people are struggling with issues and temptations that we have overcome. We judge them for their less than beneficial habits and their displays of weakness demonstrated through incompetencies or lack of self-control. Oh, it may be right that they should be stronger or more disciplined or whatever, but that does not give us the right to forget that it is only by grace they we go forward.

I have often been saddened by how quickly we forget who we used to be, how we used to think, and how we lived. We should be forever thanking God for delivering us from all sorts of "issues" through life's journeys. We should be humble, thankful, and extremely patient with people who are still fighting old battles that we have won. They may win too someday, and you will serve them far better by encouraging them for little steps of progress rather than piling on the next step that they should take or immediately remind them of what they should have done better even in that small step forward.

Paul taught the Philippians that because they were saved, they should think more of the well-being and value of others above themselves. He said it was with humility of mind and the very attitude of Christ that we are to relate to those around us (Phil. 2:1-5). He then went on to point to Jesus as the ultimate example of One who gave Himself for the good of others (Phil 2:6-11). In His position of divinity and glory, He chose to put on flesh and humble Himself to the point of death for us. If anyone had the right to think highly of Himself, it was Jesus. He chose not to and tells us that we should walk as He did.

July 24

Romans 14:13

The next portion of Galatians 5:26 says, "...not provoking one another..." It is important that you read this in its natural order and see how it is connected to the admonition for us not to be conceited. I want you to consider today how our pride or conceit could lead to another person's sin. This is of course a reality that we must avoid with tremendous effort.

Paul wrote to the believers in Rome and to the Corinthians that we should do nothing to cause or contribute to another person's sin. He would often phrase it like this, "Do not become a stumbling block to another person" (Rom. 14:13). His point of course is that what we choose to do and how we conduct ourselves in the eyes of others can have a positive or negative impact on their faith journey. This is especially true where we are considered to be men and women of strong and mature faith. How could our conceit be a cause for another person's sin?

If you think of this exhortation in context, I think it is safe to assume that the danger here lies in our pressure on others to rise up to a standard of expectation that we have set for them. You see, we could be responsible for provoking them into other sins in multiple ways. We may cause them to feel defeated and discouraged as they hear us brag about how great we are doing or how easy it is to follow Jesus. They could be so disappointed with their own lack of spiritual progress that they just altogether quit.

Another possible outcome of our conceit is to cause them to become angry and covetous towards us, which is also sin. They may grow resentful and hate us if we come across as judgmental and self-righteous. If we have a desire to shine, we are often casting a shadow on those around us. Few people are comfortable standing in the shadow of a conceited person which can often lead to various sins in the heart of the one in the shadow.

Yesterday I wrote about being conceited. It is a very common sin—wishing to shine. We call it glory, but it is vain glory; it is marred by vanity if it arises from anything done by us. Glory for you or for me because of anything that we can do is too absurd an idea to be entertained for a moment. Do not let us want to be accounted as somebody; for, if we do, we prove that we are really nobody. Charles Spurgeon once said, "Nobody is anybody till he is willing to be nobody. As long as he wants to be somebody, he is nobody and nothing." Again, the point to ponder today is to realize that our conceit or desire for vainglory often encourages others to fall into various sins and ungodly attitudes. We must work hard at helping people grow in holiness by being certain that we aren't discouraging faith and obedience in them with our own arrogance.

Paul writes in Galatians 6 that we should never boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. Earlier he had stated that if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself (Gal. 6:3). Dear ones, this final chapter of Galatians is filled with warnings against becoming conceited and causing another person to stumble. It is often hard to follow Jesus so we must be about helping each other in every way possible.

July 25

Luke 9:23; Galatians 5:24

Isn't it interesting that we have to be reminded over and over again to keep our flesh in check. This reminder that is prevalent in the Scriptures is there because although we are saved, redeemed, and declared just before a holy God, we must still battle the flesh and practice self-denial on a daily basis (Luke 9:23). We learned in Galatians 5:22-23 that the Holy Spirit will produce godly fruit in us and yet, God immediately follows that up with an admonition to actually walk by the Spirit if we are led by the Spirit (5:25). Then we are encouraged to fight against conceit which may cause others to sin and envy (v.26).

Dear ones, we need to look no further than this passage to recognize the battle that we face and the need to remain vigilant and determined in our fight against sin and pursuit of holiness. Please don't think just because you are saved that the hard part is over. I would suggest that the work of positioning yourself for the Spirit to sanctify you is the hardest part. Why? Because our flesh, the world, and Satan war against the Spirit relentlessly (Gal. 5:17). John Piper once wrote, "God doesn't need to be reminded to be good because He always is. We, on the other hand, are not good and need to be reminded often.

In verse 24 of Galatians 5 Paul wrote, "And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Obviously, this is a true statement as it is part of God's Holy Word. So again, why the need for the next couple of verses? Brothers and sisters, in the heavenlies, in the eyes of God, in the ultimate complete will of God, we will indeed be glorified and set free from the presence and power of sin. The Spirit of God is certainly in us and at work transforming us, but it is a process in this life. We are not yet all that we are becoming and although the victory is ours through Christ, the battles for faithfulness rage on. The warnings and admonitions are meant to keep you and me leaning into Him and choosing to exercise spiritual discipline and obedience so that the means of grace will do their work in us.

This is a wonderful explanation of this from John Piper: As you rise by faith in Christ, He puts a great sword in your hand and says, "Follow Me." He leads you to the mouth of the cave and says, "Go in, slay the dragon." But you look at Him bewildered, "I cannot. Not without You." He smiles. "Well said. You learn quickly. Never forget: My commands for you to do something are never commands to do it alone." Then you enter the cave together. A horrible battle follows, and you feel Christ's hand on yours. At last, the dragon lies limp. You ask, "Is it dead?" His answer is this: "I have come to give you new life. This you received when you yielded to My possession and swore faith and loyalty to Me. And now with My sword and My hand you have felled the dragon of the flesh. It is a mortal wound. It will die. That is certain. But it has not yet bled to death, and it may yet revive with violent convulsions and do much harm. So, you must treat it as dead and seal the cave as a tomb. The Lord of darkness may cause earthquakes in your soul to shake the stones loose, but you build them up again. And have this confidence: with My sword and My hand on yours this dragon's doom is sure, he is finished, and your new life is secure." Isn't that awesome?

July 26

Luke 15:11-32; Galatians 5:26

At the end of Galatians 5:26, we are told that we should not envy one another. Two days ago I wrote about the problem of our behavior causing others to sin. This portion of the Scripture is aimed, I believe, at that place in our heart that envies and resents the progress and goodness in others. They may not be doing anything that should provoke us, but somehow their light exposes our darkness, and we don't like it. No one has to work to be envious. It just blisters up in us.

Envy does not aim to earn anything, but it is the product of a heart that thinks it merits more than it is getting. Jealousy is not calculated to earn any pay, but it is the product of a heart that expected to be paid what went to another. In other words, the kind of heart that produces these vices is a heart that thinks of itself as deserving and everyone else as its owing. The flesh is convinced of its own merit and expects God and man to pay dues by giving the satisfaction it desires. When these payments of satisfaction are not made, the flesh reacts the way it does not to earn anything, but because it feels that it already had earned what it didn't get.

We are admonished in our text from Sunday not to become envious. Above I have written about the one who is jealous because they want what someone else has and believe they deserve it. There is another reason for envy and that is conviction. I think of the person here who grows to despise another simply because the offended person feels "bad" in their presence. In other words, when *you* are living in a way that I know *I* should be living but am not, then I can grow to despise you, envy you, and want ill to befall you. Oh how beautiful it would be to celebrate the grace given to others and the successes of their lives.

The prodigal son eventually came back to his senses and his father's home which was a great cause of celebration. His father rejoiced that his lost son had returned, and he celebrated this new life with a feast and displays of mercy, forgiveness, and love. Note the envy and jealousy that sprang up in the older brother who could extend no grace to his brother because he felt himself to be more worthy of his father's affections.

The flesh knows nothing of grace. It doesn't think of its satisfactions as free gifts from a merciful God. It thinks of them as debts which it deserves to be paid. This is why all its "products" should be called "works." And so everything it produces is flavored by the mentality of merit and is called "works." The older son felt that his father owed him favor and gifts because he had earned them by his obedience. We must not allow ourselves to behave in this manner. Rejoice when another person is blessed even when you are not in a tangible way. Let another person's growth in holiness spur you onto love and good deeds. May we grow to see in them the possibilities that could be true in our own lives. May we learn to rejoice when someone else receives mercy and grace because we know that we have received it from the hand of God ourselves in so many ways. Envy is ugly dear friends. Stay away from it at all costs.

July 27

Genesis 37:1-25

As we wrap up this week of "Points to Ponder," I think the story of Joseph and his brothers provides a wonderful example of what Paul is warning us against in last week's passage (Gal. 5:25-26). Many of us will be familiar with the story, but I will provide a summary of what took place between Joseph and his older brothers, recorded in the 37th chapter of Genesis.

You may recall that Joseph had dreams that are recorded for us in Genesis 37:5 and 9. The mistake that I believe he made, most likely unintentionally, was to tell this dream to his brothers. In the dream, Joseph tells his brothers that they will eventually bow down to him and that he would rule over them. You might imagine that they didn't take kindly to his perceived arrogance. The Bible says that they hated him for his dreams and for his words (Gen. 37:8).

It is likely that none of us struggle with the older brother's reactions toward Joseph in this matter. We may not like it or agree, but at least we can understand their response. The reason I mention this today is because this is part of what the warning of Galatians 5:25-26 is addressing. Joseph's actions provoke his brothers to sin. I am not implying that Joseph was necessarily in the wrong, but I think we can all agree that it probably was not the most prudent decision on his part. Seriously, how would he have expected them to respond to the news that he, the youngest, would rule over them and that they would bow down to him?

Nonetheless, we, as followers of Christ, should not respond this way or allow ourselves to be provoked to anger and to sin. The Bible tells us that love is not easily provoked or as the ESV says, "Not irritable or resentful" (1 Cor. 13:5). For our purposes, I want us to see that our actions do indeed have the power at times to provoke others to sin and we should do our best to prevent that from happening.

The other way that I mentioned yesterday was that sometimes others sin around us at no fault of our own. The older brothers hated Joseph because of his dream, but the truth is they hated him before that moment for no valid reason other than their father loved him deeply because he was the son of Rachel and the last son, at the time, of his old age. They hated Joseph early on because his father loved him in a special way. I certainly believe that Jacob was wrong to show favoritism to Joseph, but that was not Joseph's doing. His older brothers were simply envious of him because he was deeply loved and had favor with their father.

My point for today friends is to simply highlight how easy it is to fall into conceit, to provoke others to sin, and to become envious of others. Paul's admonition to the Galatians as well as to you and me today is that as we bear fruit for the glory of God and our joy, we must never allow ourselves to forget that our blessings are a result of God's grace and mercy not our merit. As we remain humble, broken, and thankful, we will more than likely be able to extend Christlike behavior to others horizontally; you have value as a child of God. Remember what John Stott said, "What we think of ourselves will greatly affect how we relate to others." If you remember that you are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone and that there is no room for boasting in the flesh, you are likely to be humble, patient, and merciful to others in their weaknesses and struggles. It will also be much easier to celebrate their achievements and opportunities rather than to resent them and be envious.