

supply this natural corruption with a thousand inducements to go wrong. Are you naturally idle? You will encounter throughout this year a profusion of incentives to idleness. Are you prone to indulge your sinful lusts? You will not walk far into the world without meeting that which is provocative to lust. Perhaps you are naturally proud. The world will offer you a thousand sources from which conceit can feed itself. Perhaps you are inclined to gluttony? For you will the table be spread, and the wine shall sparkle in the cup. The great enemy of our souls is never idle. He is the master of the well-filled armoury of sin. He is the director of the myriads of evil agents who are continually abroad, seeking above all things else to do injury to the soul.

Now here is our burden, and here the yoke which Christ imposes—that, despite these hindrances, we must seek with our whole heart to do God's will.

Satan would tempt us to believe that we may serve God and himself at the same moment—and that, if we fail to serve God, our difficulties are so great, our temptations so strong, our circumstances so peculiar, that we shall be judged by a different standard from others. There is no such statement in the Bible. The cry this day from the very cross of the Saviour himself is *not*, “indulge your besetting sins, and live as your corrupt heart would prompt you,” but, “take my yoke upon you, bow your heart to submit to the burdens which my laws impose.”

2. Secondly, the question arises, *How can it be said that this yoke is easy and this burden light?*

And here every page of the Bible comes pressing on our view, and I hardly know which out of the many answers to suggest, if any one should ask, “In what do the lightness and easiness consist?”

What say you, for example, to this—that the yoke is imposed on us by One who loves us as a father, and who, in fact, “so loved us that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” An earthly father, if he really desires his child's welfare, imposes a yoke on him. He knows that “it is good for a child that he bear the yoke in his youth.” To leave him without it, is to provide a scourge for the child's back as well as for his own. And our heavenly Father lays this yoke on us, not in anger, but in love; not for our hurt and hindrance, but for our good. Here, then, is one delightful thought for us at this beginning of the year, that if we are required to bow our necks to receive a certain yoke, the hand from which we shall receive it will be the hand of a wise and tender Father, who consults not only his own glory, but our temporal and eternal welfare, by the laws which he imposes.

But again, the lightness of the yoke consists in this, that we are not constrained to bear it in our own unaided strength. The same wisdom and love which impose it, have provided most efficient help for us. We cannot, except by our own fault, be overburdened by the weight. Our Lord himself has told us, that if he left his disciples, it was that he might send the Holy Spirit, that he might abide with them for ever. This Holy Spirit is promised to all who

seek him. They who obtain this precious gift are inwardly “strengthened by his might,” and the happy result is, that the yoke which would otherwise be too hard, becomes light and easy. Under the Holy Spirit's teaching the word “duty” vanishes from the vocabulary of the Christian, and “privilege” stands in the place of it.

3. And only once more, the lightness of the burden consists in this, that they who cheerfully bear it, are being prepared by it for an eternal dwelling-place in heaven. So far from leaving any effects behind, from which it is reasonable that the human heart should shrink, the honest bearing of this burden makes the man who submits to it daily more fit for his Master's service here on earth, and daily more prepared for that service which is without alloy in heaven. It is a delightful thought. Satan would, if possible, hold us back from submitting to this yoke. But here should be our reply: “The yoke which my Saviour imposes, shall I not bear it? He has borne it before me, and I cheerfully bow my neck to it. It is imposed on me in love. I shall find help in carrying it. I have the happiness of knowing that every day throughout this year, if I do not flinch, I shall grow daily happier, and daily fitter to join myself hereafter to those happy spirits who cease not day nor night, but serve him continually in his own eternal kingdom.”

I conclude with three short cautions, founded on these three circumstances which constitute the lightness of the burden.

1. I said that the lightness of the burden consists in this—that it is God's imposing. Let us, however, take care that it is his imposing and not our own. Many trials come through our own fault. Take Jacob as an example. He availed himself of his brother's hunger to procure his birthright, and jealousy was excited. He practiced deceit on his father, and exile followed. He showed too much preference for Rachel, and domestic quarrels were the result. Thus many trials are of our own making. If we run wilfully in the way of temptation, we shall find immediately a heavy burden laid upon our shoulders, but not of God's imposing.

2. I said the lightness of the burden consists in this—that God has promised his Holy Spirit to strengthen us to bear it. Let us take care that we do not attempt to bear it in our own strength. If he has provided for us most efficient help, let us seek it daily in our prayers.

3. I said that the lightness of the burden consists in this—that bearing it cheerfully tends to prepare us for a better service in the world to come. And the last word of caution and exhortation is this—Let us take care that our daily life, with its daily burden, is making us more fit for the Master's service. Let us see to it, that by God's grace, we *are* travelling onward in faith and love, in humility and prayer, towards that better world, for which this mortal life is intended, through the Holy Spirit's teaching and the Saviour's merits, to prepare us.

God grant that having cheerfully carried the yoke which God's law imposes, and having found it to be light and easy, we may at length cast it down for ever in eternal happiness and joy.