

Sermon Series: **The Acts of the Apostles**

The Deadly Yoke

Acts 15:1-35

The yoke of human opinion...

A yoke is a wooden beam normally used between a pair of oxen or other animals to enable them to pull together on a load.



When a heavy “oxen yoke” is placed on the necks of human beings, that yoke is, to say the least, burdensome. For example, the “yoke” of **human opinion** in the place of **the Word of God** is burdensome in all its forms. And as it relates to the gospel, the yoke of human opinion effectively hinders the spread of the gospel and may even thwart it altogether. Another form of human opinion that has been a great hinderance to the spread of the gospel, is the yoke of legalism. Legalism is the ism that makes human opinion the _____ of God. Max Lucado put it this way: “Legalism makes *my opinions* your burden, makes my opinions your boundary, makes my opinions your obligation.”

But when humans add legalistic human opinions to the gospel, that’s more than burdensome, that’s _____! It not only hinders the gospel, it destroys it. Paul and Barnabas, after their missionary journey that took up to two years to fulfill, were challenged at Antioch Syria by some Jewish believers from Judea that their gospel work was worthless. In *their hardline human opinion*, the Jewish believers in Jesus were saved, but all the Gentile “converts” weren’t converted. The apostles’ good news gospel wasn’t good news after all.

The deadly yoke that puts God to the test:

1. What is the human _____? (1-5).

As it turns out, it's not just circumcision that the legalistic Jews are demanding. They want the Gentiles to become _____ in order to be Christians. Circumcision was the physical sign for one's Jewishness. So, Gentiles, be circumcised and obey the whole law of Moses.

2. What does the church _____? (6-11).

According to Jesus' lead apostle Peter, how is any person, Jew or Gentile, saved? **Verse 9:** "By faith." **Verse 11:** "Through grace." We can't somehow earn it by keeping a set of laws. Jesus graciously accomplished the saving work for us on the cross. We only have to believe in Him.

Later on, guided by the Holy Spirit, Paul wrote more than once on this subject. **Ephesians 2:8-9:** "For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast." We can only boast in the _____ of Christ! **Galatians 2:15-16:** "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified [not counted or declared righteous] by works of the law but *through faith* in Jesus Christ, so we [Jews] also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified *by faith* in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."

Salvation is through the work of Jesus, not through our work. So, let me ask you something: If you didn't do anything to gain your salvation, can you do anything to lose it? Instead, aren't we free in Him to love Him with an unrivaled desire to please Him? What drives you? Working your way to heaven, or loving Him most because He loved you first?

3. How should the church _____? (12-21).

Verse 12: "And all the assembly fell silent..." Peter's inspired word was convincing. Not even the opinionated legalists could speak. And now all were ready to hear from the two missionaries who were used by God to see Gentile sinners flock to the Lord Jesus (**12-18**).

Verse 17: In other words, during the Millennium, the saved Gentiles won't become Jews. They will remain Gentiles who are called by the

Lord's name, saved by grace through faith, the same as everyone else who belongs to Jesus.

Verses 19-21: There are Jewish synagogues in every major city in the empire. If the saved Gentiles don't want to offend them, then abstain from these four things. But especially abstain from these things for purity's sake. This word from James is meant to help pagan Gentiles who are saved by God's grace to completely _____ away from their idolatrous past. For all four practices are related to idol worship.

So how should the church in that day and in our day respond? Come down squarely on the side of Peter, Paul, Barnabas, James, and the prophets: Fall silent and listen to them, for listening to them is the same as listening to the Holy Spirit. *Don't push back on God. Don't test Him with deadly human opinion. Respond to solid biblical teaching.*

4. What is the church's _____? (22-35).

What is the outcome? Throw off **the deadly yoke of human opinion!** It's not only too heavy to bear, it will make you slaves to the law, and that's deadly! The worst fears of the Gentile believers were alleviated. And by not requiring believing Gentiles to become Jews, the church protected the doctrine of salvation: **Saved in _____ alone, by grace alone, through faith alone!** We don't have to be circumcised. We don't have to be baptized to be saved—to be obedient, yes. We don't have to have faith + works. We believe that God purified our hearts by faith in Jesus. We are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus. We don't have to live with **the deadly yoke** but with **the Living Jesus!**

Jeff the _____...

Some of us have lived in a legalistic approach to Christianity. We lived under a **deadly yoke of human opinion** that put God to the test. But now we have committed ourselves to a **Living Lover, Jesus Christ**, who has set us free. It's not that we are *law-less*. It's not that we no longer have rules and laws to live by. But rather, it's this: We love to live in faithful trust and obedience to our Living Lover, who promised, "My yoke is easy, and My load is light!" Do you believe that?