

It Is Too Hard To Be A Christian

"It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

John 5:10 (NIV)

Some people are turned off by the church and Christianity because of so many rules to obey and things to avoid.

Some of us in the church today are doing what Jesus said of the religious leaders of His time (Matthew 23:4-5 NIV), "They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders.... Everything they do is done for men to see."

Jesus had healed a man on the Sabbath as recorded in John 5 and told him to pick up his mat and walk. The man obeyed Jesus but soon found himself in trouble with the teachers of the law who said it violated the law to carry a mat on the Sabbath.

They even taught that if a tailor discovered a needle in his cloak while in the synagogue on the Sabbath he had broken the Sabbath because he had carried his instrument of work on the Sabbath. Or if you swatted a mosquito on the Sabbath it was considered hunting and therefore forbidden. You had broken the Sabbath.

The teachers of Jesus' time also debated over whether or not to eat an egg laid by a hen on the Sabbath—since she "worked" on the Sabbath to produce

the egg—and that broke the command to keep the Sabbath holy. They taught that you could not use a rope to lower a bucket into the well on the Sabbath to fetch water but it was fine if you used a belt. Some kinds of knots you could tie on the Sabbath others you could not.

The rules of these teachers were many but the commandments of the Bible were few—as one person observed. Jesus took the 10 commandments and reduced them to 2; love God with all your heart, love your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:37-40). The teachers in Jesus' day expanded the 10 commandments into hundreds. This is why Jesus talked about the "heavy loads" placed on unsuspecting peoples' shoulders.

I grew up in a time when I was not allowed to change out of my church clothes on Sunday. There was no playing and laughing with my friends on the street on Sunday. At the cottage we could not swim in the lake on Sunday regardless of how hot the day.

We were Christians and had to maintain our witness in front of the other cottagers—we were told. I knew what the message

was we were giving our neighbours and it was not good. On and on it went with the rules. All I could think of as a child was that God wanted to spoil my fun.

So, as an older teenager I rebelled against the stern and unhappy form of Christianity I learned from my earliest days. After several years I came back to the church but with the knowledge that God had made the Sabbath for me to enjoy, relax, and worship Him. I discovered that if I really loved God, I would experience freedom to live life to the full. Being a Christian would not be boring, painful, and odd, but rather I would have an abundant life full of joy and happiness as I lived for the praise of my Creator.

Do you think it is too hard to be a Christian? Well, look at the biblical kind of Christianity and not the Christianity invented by man's laws. It is not so difficult to be a follower of Jesus if you obey His laws—rather than those people make up. It really is not that hard to be the kind of Christian God wants you to be.

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