

Free to Serve

Key Verse:
***“Brethren, ye have
been called unto
liberty; only use
not liberty for an
occasion to the
flesh, but by love
serve one
another.”***
—Galatians 5:13

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 5:1-15

PREVIOUS TO HIS CONVER-

sion to Christ, the Apostle Paul had been a Pharisee, a sect of the Jews claiming to be followers of the Law given by Moses. The apostle had earlier written to the Philippian brethren, “as touching the law, a Pharisee; Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.” (Phil. 3:5,6)

After his conversion, the apostle found himself having to take a stand against one of the main points of the Law—circumcision. Many of his newly converted Jewish brethren were insisting that the Gentile Christians needed to be circumcised.

Our lesson for today opens with the words of the Apostle Paul, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth any

thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love.”—Gal. 3:1-6

What is this ‘liberty’ that the apostle speaks of in our lesson? The word liberty is the Greek word *eleutheros*, and has the meaning of freedom from being a slave. Paul had said that all those holding the letter of the Law were slaves—in bondage—because they could never keep the laws that would lead to life. He went on to say that if one comes into Christ and away from the Law, he is free—at liberty. The Law was like a yoke upon the necks of those still considering themselves to be followers of the Law.

Circumcision was first given to Abraham; it was called a covenant of circumcision. (Gen. 17:9-14) This physical ritual set the people of Israel apart from all the other nations around them, binding them to God. By the time of Christ, circumcision had taken on a different meaning. Going to the New Testament we find the real meaning of circumcision.

“A man is not a Jew if he is only one outwardly, nor is circumcision merely outward and physical. No, a man is a Jew if he is one inwardly; and circumcision is circumcision of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the written code. Such a man’s praise is not from men, but from God.”—Rom. 2:28,29, *New International Version*

Again, from Galatians 5:9, the apostle writes regarding the holding of the law of circumcision, “A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.” By giving us the picture of placing a little leaven in dough, the apostle says if one holds to keeping just one feature of the old Law, it would affect all of the Law.

Forcing the Gentiles to conform to even one feature of the old Law would not be loving. It is through love that we are to serve one another. This then is the liberty which sets Christians free, but as the Key Verse states, it is not to be used to entertain, or justify, the weaknesses of the fallen flesh. ■