

Liberty in Christ

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 5:1-17

PAUL’S WORDS FOUND IN our Key Verse illustrate the inherent need for restraint in the exercise of Christian liberty. Many mistakenly believe that liberty means the right to exercise unrestrained license—to do whatever their impulses dictate. This is not the case with Christian liberty. It is characterized by the use of discretion in our dealings with others. In particular, our liberty in Christ is not for the purpose of promoting carnality. Properly used, however, liberty is a means of elevating, enlightening, and ennobling our spiritual minds. It is the most profitable when used for the service and blessing of others.

We learn that it is our liberty to give up personal preferences and comforts. We are not obligated to defend these, although our fleshly minds may take great exception to that fact. Our Key Verse declares, “by love serve one another.” Love is the guiding principle behind our use of liberty, and finds its primary focus in devotion to God. After God, it flows out to others. Expressing liberty with these priorities leads to spiritual growth, as well as freedom from selfishness.

Romans 14 speaks of a conflict that arose in the church at Rome over the petty matter of the right to eat meat that had been offered to idols. The conscience of some

brethren could not tolerate partaking of such meat. However, the Apostle Paul observed that those whose faith was strong enough to eat this meat were at liberty to do so. Those brethren realized that an idol was nothing more than a lifeless piece of rock. It could neither add or detract from the value of the meat. However, the strong were cautioned not to act with arrogance toward those of weak conscience, who were troubled by this practice. Those strong in faith may have felt they were at liberty to eat meat offered to idols, but there existed a deeper truth in this situation, even as it does for us today. This greater meaning is the realization that we want to assist others more than self. It is our privilege to give up our rights, our liberties, for the sake of others. As Paul admonished, “If because of food your brother is hurt, you are no longer walking according to love. Do not destroy with your food him for whom Christ died.”—Rom. 14:15, *New American Standard Bible*

The Scriptures teach that God’s purpose in giving us liberty is not realized in allowing us to eat or drink whatsoever we wish. The exercise of liberty in our daily Christian life is not about trivialities. It is about things that touch eternity. It is about righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit. The exercise of godly love for others is a beautiful expression of true Christian liberty. “The whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’”—Gal. 5:14, *NASB*

The Apostle Peter taught the beauty of tempering liberty with restraint. “For the Lord’s sake submit yourselves to every human authority: whether to the king as supreme, or to governors who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. . . . Live like free people, and do not use your freedom [liberty] as an excuse for doing evil. Instead, be God’s servants. Honor everyone.” (I Pet. 2:13-17, *International Standard Version*) May we learn, as servants of God, the true meaning of liberty in Christ and practice it in our lives each day. ■