

## **Reflection #6: PAUL AND CHRISTIAN FREEDOM**



Paul went to Ephesus in 52 AD to the home of Prisca and Aquila, and remained there for two years and three months (Acts 19:8-10). During these 27 months he travelled to ten churches within a 192 km. radius of Ephesus. (Paul was now in his mid forties).

A delegation from Antioch sought to “correct” Paul’s teaching. Although they were Christians, in their Jewish worldview which regarded idolatry as the source of all evil, Gentiles were clearly sinners. Only observance of the covenant made people “right” with God! These Judaizers made the claims that Paul sought popularity, not truth (by not teaching circumcision and dietary laws); that Paul’s teachings were not approved by Peter; that Paul was too focused on the crucified Christ; and that Jesus (although the Messiah) merely inaugurated a new age in which the salvation promised to the descendants of Abraham would be extended to the Gentiles. However, Gentile converts had to accept the 613 commandments of the Law since Paul had offered only a few general directives and insisted on personal moral decisions. The Galatians sent a messenger to Ephesus to consult Paul.

Paul’s reaction: shock, dismay, bewilderment, anger! He wrote a letter to the Galatians, but in reality to the Judaizers who were still in Galatia. While Paul had been willing to tolerate certain Jewish ethnic customs and feasts, he now saw that such tolerance could open the way for the Law to become a dangerous rival to Christ. **GOD’S COVENANT FAITHFULNESS IS REVEALED THROUGH THE FAITHFULNESS OF THE MESSIAH! THROUGH HIS CRUCIFIXION AND RESURRECTION, THE SPIRIT IS Poured OUT ON BELIEVERS, JEWS AND GENTILES ALIKE, LEADING THEM TO BECOME THE NEW PEOPLE OF GOD!** Paul had to *condemn* the Law as a means of salvation. He would regard it only as offering guidelines for authentic living.

“For freedom Christ has set us free” (Gal.5:1). But authentic freedom means living by the Spirit, and living by the Spirit means not gratifying the desires of the flesh (flesh = the unredeemed person ruled by passions and desires), but bearing one another’s burdens and through love, becoming slaves to one another (Gal. 5:13) in a community of the new covenant centered on Christ.

Life in the Spirit: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control... And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.”

**CHRISTIAN FREEDOM** means “justification” - being put right with God - by living from Christ’s faithfulness and Christ’s self-sacrificial love.

Read: Gal 2:19-20; Gal. 3:1-5; Gal. 4:1-7; 5:1, 5:13-15; 5:22-26.