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BY LOVE SERVE ONE ANOTHER

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"For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13). Christians have been called unto liberty (freedom, ASV) by hearing and obeying the gospel of Christ (John 8:32; 2 The. 2:14), and, by so doing, are free from the bondage of sin. This freedom begins when we make the deliberate determination to be free from the practice of sin by repentance, free from the guilt of sin by obedience in order to have our sins washed away (Acts 22:16), and free from the eternal consequences which would have resulted had we continued in sin (Rom. 6:23). Paul cautions Christians not to use their "freedom for an occasion to the flesh." Salvation in Christ does not give us the right to live as we choose, but does give us the right (and responsibility) to live as Christians (Rom. 6:16-18).

Christians are free to serve. "By love serve one another." A number of characteristics should manifest themselves in our lives because of our changed hearts. The first, love, signifies our benevolent and sacrificial love for one another. The second, willingness to serve, flows from the first. While love for one another tests the depth of our relationship in Christ, service tests its length. When one truly is ready and willing to serve his brothers, he will consider it an opportunity, not an irksome necessity, nor a tiresome drudgery. He will joyfully recall the Lord's example as One who came not to be served, but to serve (Mat. 20:26-28). Let our service be to the glory of God (Mat. 5:16).

Christians are free from selfishness. Love motivates mutual service. "What can you do to serve me?" springs from the lips of the selfish. It assaults the ears of the godly, and reverberates through the daily walk of life. It opens the door to the criticisms of the ungodly. We have allowed the world to teach us how to spell--and the world spells service as "serve us." Not so with God's people who are freed from the deadly bondage of sin, in order to serve in the bonds of Christian love. Brethren will serve one another cheerfully and faithfully because they serve God cheerfully and faithfully.

In what ways can we serve one another? We can seek the good of one another, serving with a sympathizing ear, a voice of admonition and exhortation, an uplifting hand, a watchful eye, a shoulder upon which to cry, a back ready to bear the burden, and feet that will take both of us to where we need to go. We can speak the good of one another, serving by encouraging and praising, and by telling the truth, but not to our brother's hurt.

Love looks for opportunities to serve and rejoices in serving. If the biblical principle of serving one another sounds foreign to us, the problem may well be a lack of loving. Love makes service meaningful, selfless, and enduring for the one serving, and requires neither praise, promise, nor payment from the one served. When we mirror the love of God in our love one for another, we will happily be in bondage to one another, and will "through love serve one another."