THE YOKE OF BONDAGE

The word of the Lord exhorts, "Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with the yoke of bondage." (Galatians 5:1) Who would ever choose to be entangled with a "yoke of bondage" again? Surely, once a man is freed from bondage he would not return to it. Yet, Christians in the churches in the region of Galatia were being tempted to return to a yoke of bondage.

Israelites being freed from Egyptian bondage comes to my mind. Having been made slaves by Egypt, the children of God cried out to God for deliverance, and with a mighty hand He did deliver them. At Mount Sinai Jehovah said, "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself." (Exodus 19:4) Later, the hardships of their journey to the fertile land which God had promised to give to Israel took a toll on them so that they actually longed to be back in Egypt. They complained, "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!" (Numbers 11:5-6) This example sadly reveals the tendency of man to look back longingly to what he joyfully left because present challenges cloud his thinking, forgetting why he desired freedom from bondage.

"Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, 'If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.'" (John 8:31-32) Freedom or liberty is in Christ Jesus. The person who has died with Christ through faith and baptism "has been freed from sin" (Romans 6:4, 7). His living way frees sinners from their spiritual slavery. Therefore, Christians are reminded throughout the New Testament not to be entangled and enslaved to sin again.

The wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23). "The sting of death is sin, . . . But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:56, 57). Salvation in Jesus grants forgiveness of sin, and with forgiveness there is the hope of eternal life through His resurrection. The Word became flesh "that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage" (Hebrews 2:14-15). The Lord frees obedient believers from sin and death. Therefore, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." (Revelation 14:13). Hold fast to faith and hope, and do not be subject to the bondage of death's fear again.

However, the specific "yoke of bondage" addressed in the letter to the Galatian brethren is the harnessing of oneself to the Law of Moses. "And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law. You have become estranged

from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." (Galatians 5:3-4) God's law given to Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai had fulfilled its divinely ordained purpose, and so men are no longer under that law anymore (3:24-25). Paul rebuked Peter's hypocrisy, saying, "Why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? . . . Knowing that man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ" (2:14, 16). Having been freed from the curse upon failing to continue in all things written in the book of the law, Christians should never seek to be yoked to the old law's commandments, precepts and ordinances because the Savior of the world has redeemed men from that law and its curse (3:10, 13).