

Are we under the law or under grace?

As you read this study, I encourage you to study the corresponding scriptures for yourself to develop a personal, confident understanding of biblical truth. Study to show thyself approved unto God, a workman that need not be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. Study like the Bereans, who listened to Paul but did not take his word for it. They studied the scriptures for themselves so they would know for sure.

Acts 17:11 “These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” I ask that you do the same with this study. Please pray before you begin.

What the Bible says

What does “under the law and under grace” really mean? This passage is cited more often than any other as an objection to the perpetuity of the law. That the law here is the Ten Commandments, we all agree. What, then, is meant by the term ‘under the law’? We understand it to mean being condemned by the law. Our opponents claim that it means being under obligation to obey the law; and since Paul says we are not under the law, they claim that we are not now obliged to keep the law. Can it be that we need not keep the commandments against adultery, murder, theft, idolatry, etc.? If their position is correct, this is true; for these are a part of the law. Paul’s entire argument in this book shows that this is not his meaning.”

Read Romans 6:1-14. What subject has he under consideration in this chapter? It is not the difference between the old law and the new, the change from the old dispensation to the new, but the change that takes place in individuals at their conversion, a change from the old man to the new man, from sin to holiness, from condemnation to grace. In verse 2, he first asks, ‘How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?’ In Verse 4. Then he says, ‘We are buried with Him [Christ] by baptism.’ In Verse 6. This shows that he is speaking only of converted men. Next, he says, ‘Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.’ That this refers to conversion, not to a change from the old covenant to the new, will be seen by every candid mind. Further on, he says, in Verse 11, ‘Likewise reckon you also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.’

Of whom is this true? Only of the converted man. He is not speaking of all men in general, but only of saints. Again: in verse 12, ‘Let not sin, therefore, reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in the lusts thereof.’ What is sin? John says in 1 John 3:4, ‘Sin is the transgression of the law.’ Paul then exhorts them not to let their fleshly members and passions lead them to transgress the law. In verse 14, “For,” said he, ‘sin shall not have dominion over you.’ Why not? Because the law is abolished?

No, because they have left the service of sin and have ceased to transgress the law of God. His whole argument shows that is what he means. ‘For sin shall not have dominion over you; for you are not under the law, but under grace.’ Verse 14. That is, having broken off your sins, you have ceased to break the law, believed in Christ, and been baptized. You are no longer ruled over by sin, nor condemned by the law, because you have found grace in the sight of God and your sins are pardoned. Then he asks, in the next verse, ‘What then? Shall we sin [that is, transgress the law, for remember, “sin is the transgression of the law”] because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid.’

“This conclusion of Paul’s utterly demolishes our opponents’ theory. For if ‘not under the law’ means we are not to obey the law, it follows that we could transgress it at will. But Paul vetoes this with a ‘God forbid.’

Take two more places where Paul uses the term ‘under the law’ to mean being condemned by the law. Thus, he says in Galatians 5:16-18: ‘This I say, then, Walk in the Holy Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to each other, so that you cannot do the things that you would. But if the Holy Spirit leads you, you are not under the law.’ Now, in this case, who are not under the law? Those whom the Holy Spirit leads, and those only. And who are those whom the Holy Spirit leads? Those who do not fulfill the lusts of the flesh do not sin.

No other meaning can be given to this text. Then those who are not under the law are converted men, whose sins are pardoned, who have received the Holy Spirit of God, and who hence do not transgress His law any more. The text has no reference to the abolition of the law. Paul says that those whom the Holy Spirit leads are not under the law.

Then it follows that those whom the Holy Spirit does not lead are under the law. This conclusion is so plain that no candid man will deny it. But are the wicked led by the Holy Spirit? No. Then they are under the law. But if the law has been abolished, no one can now be under it, no more the wicked than the righteous. This shows that the law still exists and can hold men under its power.

Now consider the absurdity of our opponents’ position. They claim that by the term ‘not under the law,’ Paul means the law is abolished, and hence we need not obey it. If this is true, then no one is under the law, whether or not the Holy Spirit leads him. But Paul declares that in order not to be under the law, we must be led by the Holy Spirit. How plainly this contradicts their conclusion.

Final Summary of Romans 6:1-23

1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

2 God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we live in it any longer? (Paul speaks to those who have given their lives to Jesus and are no longer living a sinful life.)

3 Are ye ignorant that all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (He died so that we may live a Christlike life.)

4 We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life. (We should no longer be living the old sinful life.)

5 If we have been united with him in the likeness of his death, we shall also be in the likeness of his resurrection; **6** knowing this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away, that we should no longer be in bondage to sin; (One is in bondage when he feels he must do something or is addicted to a habit like sin.)

7 For he that hath died is justified from sin. (You are justified from sin because you no longer practice it.)

8 But if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him; (If we are to live with Him, we are to live like Him and not practice sin.)

9 Knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has dominion over him. **10** For the death he died, he died unto sin once: the life he lives, he lives unto God. (Christ died once and for all to offer us salvation. We are to live unto God and put away selfishness, sin, and pride.)

11 Even so, reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin, but alive unto God in Christ Jesus.

12 Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that you should obey the lusts thereof: **13** neither present your members to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God, as alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. (We are no longer to practice sin in thought or deed.)

14 For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. (They were no longer under the law because they were no longer living a sinful life.)

15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under the law but under grace? God forbid. (God knew some would misinterpret this, and it clearly says that we shall not live a sinful life and claim we are under grace, thinking it's okay to keep sinning as we please. Satan was kicked out of heaven for wanting to do as he pleased. How much more will you be kept out of heaven for doing the same?)

16 Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? (One must ask oneself, "Who is my master?" If I continually sin, my master is Satan. Just as Lucifer chose to be his own master, we do the same, following in his footsteps, or we can follow in the footsteps of Christ Jesus and live life as He did (since He is our example). Are you like the obedient Christ or the rebellious Satan? Your eternity depends on this. The choice is yours.)

17 But thanks be to God, that whereas you were servants of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were delivered; **18** And being freed from sin, you became servants of righteousness. (Here we are described as obedient followers of God, keeping His commandments.)

19 I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as you presented your members as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity, even so now present your members as servants to righteousness unto sanctification. (In other words, do not continue to practice sin.)

20 When ye were servants of sin, ye were free regarding righteousness. **21** What fruit then had ye at that time in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? For it leads to death. (They were ashamed of sin, not proud boasters, thinking they could continue in sin when it leads to death. Jesus saves us from our sin, not in it.)

22 But now, having been set free from sin and made servants of God, you have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end is eternal life. **23** For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (We are free from sin because we no longer serve it or are in bondage to it; instead, we serve Jesus.)

If grace voids the law, why would the apostles continue to observe the law and the Seventh-day Sabbath throughout the New Testament? **Acts 13:14, 42 16:13 17:1-2; 18:3, 4, 11 Luke 4:16 Romans 3:31 Mark 15:42, 47 16:3.**

Ecclesiastes 12:13: Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Corinthians 7:19: “Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but {that which is important is} the keeping of the commandments of God.”

Exodus 20:5, 6 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; **And shewing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments.**