

Romans 6:14-15

Pastor: Romans 6:14-15: We are not under law, but under grace.

“For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace. What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!”

6:14-15 Many Christian theologians and Bible teachers will use Paul’s statements in Romans 6:14-15 as a proof text, to assert that born again Believers are not “under the Law,” with “under the Law” commonly interpreted as meaning that obedience to the commandments of the Torah or Law of Moses is not necessary for Messiah followers.¹ While it is very true that Believers are not *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμον) or “under law,” does this phrase really mean being obedient to God’s Torah? Given the emphasis within Romans ch. 6 on Believers being dead to sin (Romans 6:1-2, 7-13), immersed into Yeshua to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:3-5), and being crucified with Him (Romans 6:6)—how could an honest reader of this section of Paul’s letter think that he would somehow allow for disobedience to God’s commandments? Paul will actually go a little overboard in describing redeemed persons like slaves of righteousness, who have the steadfast need to be obedient to the Lord (Romans 6:16-19).

What are we to make of Paul’s statement in Romans 6:14: “For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace” (RSV)? The Greek verb *kurieuō* (κυριεύω) means “to be lord or master of people or of a country” and “to have legal power to do” (LS).² Sin not being the master or lord of a Believer is directly connected to: “you are not under law.” It would be a mistake of anyone to somehow equate the sin-master and the Torah as somehow being the same; Romans 7:7 will make it clear, “What shall we say then? Is the Law sin? May it never be!” The Torah is something given by God (Romans 7:22, 25; 8:7); the Torah is not the agent of sin. The sin-master is, however, quite capable of using the Torah for the purpose of causing disobedience in weak and fleshly people (Romans 7:6, 8), which in turn will merit God’s condemnation upon such sinners.

Sin is never the master over a person who has been spiritually regenerated. Sin is not the master of a born again Believer, because Messiah followers have made that key declaration of “Yeshua/Jesus is Lord!” (Romans 10:9) and have recognized His supremacy within their lives. By so doing, those who trust in Yeshua are able to receive permanent forgiveness for their sins.

How are readers of Paul’s letter to approach his usage of “under the Law,” when the obvious contrast of Believers being “under grace” has been placed before us? There are three main views present within contemporary examination regarding what “under the Law” is supposed to mean, including,

1. the Torah or Law of Moses to be obeyed by people
2. legalism, or an inappropriate abuse of the Torah³
3. the Torah’s condemnation or penalties pronounced upon Law-breakers

The popular, and almost ingrained, common Christian understanding that one encounters—of “under law” or *hupo nomon* being obedient to God’s Torah—**is most incorrect** and should be challenged. Why it is incorrect can be fairly easy to see. Too many Bible readers have the viewpoint of “under the Law” meaning obedience to the Mosaic Law calcified in their minds, that they have become a bit constrained from thinking critically. Yet, there are two serious albeit obvious questions that should be asked from Romans 6:14-15:

1. Who is “under the Law”?
2. Who is “under grace”?

Sin is the master of the non-Believer, the one who has not received Yeshua (Jesus) into his or her life, being granted a permanent forgiveness of and a reprieve from sins. Sinners who have not recognized the Messiah are surely not “under grace.” The person who has not received forgiveness of sins via the gospel

¹ This entry has been adapted from the commentary *Romans for the Practical Messianic*.

² LS, 458.

³ Cf. Stern, *Jewish New Testament Commentary*, 374.

may be rightly considered to be *hupo nomon* or “under law.” The person who is not saved is “under law”—precisely because the unredeemed are **subject to the Torah’s penalties and condemnation pronounced upon lawbreakers**. Disobedience to the Torah is sin (1 John 3:4), and the consequence of sin is death and subsequent eternal exile from the Creator. Paul testifies further on in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Messiah Yeshua our Lord.” The solution for human disobedience, to God’s Instruction, is receiving the gift of eternal life available in Yeshua the Messiah!

The Apostle Paul considers his Roman audience to comprise those who have received salvation in Yeshua, being considered people who are *hupo charin* (ὑπὸ χάριτι) or “under grace.” The status of being “under grace” is not something granted to all, but is something that is **only granted to those who are spiritually regenerated** and have been forgiven of their sins (Romans 6:3-5). *Sin is no longer the lord of these people*; Yeshua is recognized as the Lord. Those who do not have salvation in Yeshua and are not “under grace,” are instead “under law.”

The Holy Spirit given to the redeemed is to compel obedience. Having the covering of grace means that redeemed people are not severely punished for their sins when they err, because they can instead confess their sins before God and receive immediate forgiveness (1 John 1:9). Paul is quite clear, though, that being “under grace” does not at all mean that Believers have a legitimate license to sin:

“What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” (Romans 6:15, RSV).

The viewpoint of “under law,” meaning obedience to God’s Law, has done significant damage to modern Christianity. While some Messianics complain that contemporary Christians need to consider the value of practices like the seventh-day Sabbath/*Shabbat*, appointed times of Leviticus 23, or kosher dietary laws—many Christians live, at the very least, in a state of minimal obedience to God, because even the ethical and moral commandments of the Torah are not allowed to guide their discipleship. *Even the remaining Nine of the Ten Commandments are sometimes ignored* (after the Fourth Commandment to keep the Sabbath). Only the Father in Heaven, most thankfully, can determine who is *and* who is not “under grace.”

Many have never heard the idea or the proposal that “under law” or *hupo nomon* (ὑπὸ νόμου) means being subject to the Torah’s condemnation, and that being “under grace” or *hupo charin* (ὑπὸ χάριτι), means being provided with permanent forgiveness of sins and salvation. It is quite apparent, though, that when Romans 6:14-15 is read within the scope of Romans ch. 6 in total, that the Apostle Paul does not at all consider Moses’ Teaching to be abolished or irrelevant for Messiah followers, who are to certainly obey God. A status of being “under grace” given to the redeemed cannot be used as a warrant to disregard the value of God’s Law.

It need not be overlooked that equating “under law” with the Torah’s condemnation upon sinners, and “under grace” with the salvation provided to the redeemed—is something that theologians and commentators have certainly had to consider. It is not an interpretation new to the Messianic movement. The thought that born again Believers not being “under the Law” involves them not being condemned by the Torah’s penalties, is something witnessed from the early days of the Protestant Reformation, as detected in the comments of John Calvin:

“Not to be *under law*...means that it is a dead letter which condemns us, because we have not the power to perform it. It also means that we are no longer subject to the law in so far as it requires of us perfect righteousness, and pronounces death on all who have transgressed any part of it. Likewise, by the word *grace* we understand both parts of redemption, i.e. the forgiveness of sins, by which God imputes righteousness to us, and the sanctification by the Spirit, by whom He forms us anew to good works.”⁴

Calvin goes on to further describe,

“Since the law is the rule of good living, and has been given to govern men, we hold that if it is broken all discipline at once falls to the ground, the restraints are shattered, and ultimately no difference or distinction between good and evil is left. But our misconception here consists in our supposing that the

⁴ Calvin, *Romans*, pp 130-131.

righteousness which God approves in His law is abolished when the law is abrogated. This abrogation, however, does not at all apply to the precepts which teach us the right way to live, for Christ confirms and sanctions these, and does not abrogate them. The proper solution to the objection is that the only part of the law which is removed is the curse, to which all men who are beyond the grace of Christ are subject.”⁵

The Reformed theological tradition, among those in Protestantism, has been historically noted to have a rather high view of the Law of God, particularly in terms of the ethical and moral instructions of the Torah. Among more modern interpreters, C.E.B. Cranfield is among those few who concludes that *hupo nomon* or “under the Law” in Romans 6:14 means Believers not being subjected to the Torah’s penalties:

“[Romans 6:14] is widely taken to mean that the authority of the law has been abolished for believers and superseded by a different authority. And this, it must be admitted, would be a plausible interpretation, if this sentence stood by itself. But, since it stands in a document which contains such things as 3.31; 7.12, 14a; 8.4; 13.8-10, and in which the law is referred to more than once as God’s law (7.22, 25; 8.7) and is appealed to again and again as authoritative, such a reading of it is extremely unlikely. The fact that ὑπὸ νόμου is contrasted with ὑπὸ χάριτι suggests the likelihood that Paul is here thinking not of the law generally but of the law as condemning sinners; for, since χάρις denotes God’s undeserved favour, the natural opposite to ὑπὸ χάριτι is ‘under God’s disfavour or condemnation’. And the suggestion that the meaning of this sentence is that believers are not under God’s condemnation pronounced in the law but under His undeserved favour receives strong confirmation from 8.1...”⁶

Cranfield finds support for “under the Law” in Romans 6:14 meaning subject to the Torah’s condemnation and penalties, and *not* being obedient to the Torah, because of some key verses in Paul’s letter where the value, integrity, and instructive purpose of the Law of Moses in holy and upright living for Believers are somehow all in view:

“Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law” (Romans 3:31, RSV).

“So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Romans 7:12).

“For we know that the Law is spiritual” (Romans 7:14a).

“For I joyfully concur with the law of God in the inner man” (Romans 7:22).

“Thanks be to God through Yeshua the Messiah our Lord! So then, on the one hand I myself with my mind am serving the law of God, but on the other, with my flesh the law of sin” (Romans 7:25).

“[S]o that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:4).

“[B]ecause the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able *to do so*” (Romans 8:7).

“Owe nothing to anyone except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled *the law*. For this, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY, YOU SHALL NOT MURDER, YOU SHALL NOT STEAL, YOU SHALL NOT COVET [Exodus 20:13-15, 17; Deuteronomy 5:17-19],’ and if there is any other commandment, it is summed up in this saying, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF [Leviticus 19:18].’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of *the law*” (Romans 13:8-10).

⁵ Ibid., 131.

⁶ Cranfield, *Romans 1-8*, pp 319-320.

Among Messianic interpreters, Tim Hegg would be among those who would concur with the conclusion that for Romans 6:14-15, not being “under the Law/Torah” concerns redeemed people being freed from the Torah’s condemnation:

“[T]he context shows clearly that Paul’s point in this concluding phrase is that the reign of sin had its power or authority through the Torah, for the Torah condemns sin and the sinner. Paul has taught clearly that the power of sin to condemn is found in the Torah. Thus, when he concludes that the believer is not under the Torah but under grace, he is not putting the Torah and grace at odds with each other, but showing the means by which the believer is no longer a slave to sin but instead is alive unto God. The penalty of the Torah against the sinner, just and righteous as it was, was put entirely upon Yeshua and therefore the believer is no longer under its condemnation. In the place of condemnation has come forgiveness and grace.”⁷

“Under law,” meaning the condemnation of the Torah upon sinners, is not a view you will see adhered to in that many Romans commentaries—but it is surely a valid interpretational option. Paul in Romans 8:1 will enthusiastically declare, “Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Messiah Yeshua.” The venerable *NIV Study Bible* offers a similar, although slightly different, view for Romans 6:14:

“*not under law*. The meaning is not that Christians have been freed from all moral authority. They have, however, been freed from the law in the manner in which God’s people were under law in the OT era. Law provides no enablement to resist the power of sin; it only condemns the sinner. But grace enables.”⁸

Various Romans interpreters have taken the contrast seen in Romans 6:14-15 between being “under the Law” (*hupo nomon*) and “under grace” (*hupo charin*), not as a personal status of being condemned as a sinner versus being a recipient of salvation. They instead have taken this as a contrast between the previous age of sin and death, and the future eschatological Kingdom age in which God’s redeemed in the Messiah are to already be considered living.⁹ Of course, there should be no denying the Biblical reality that Yeshua “gave Himself for our sins so that He might rescue us from this present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father” (Galatians 1:4), and that born again Believers should consider themselves citizens of a future Kingdom of Heaven that will one day dramatically *and fully* arrive on Planet Earth at the Second Coming (Philippians 3:20-21).

But is it justified for readers to conclude that being “under the Law,” commonly thought to mean obedient to the Mosaic Torah, was just a part of the previous age dominated by sin—in which there was no permanent sacrifice for human disobedience? In the view of N.T. Wright, Romans 6:14 means that “those who belong to Christ, who have died and been raised in baptism, do not live in the Adam solidarity, *and hence do not live under the law*,” to some degree meaning obedient to the Torah. He continues, thinking, “if one did live under the law, sin *would* indeed have dominion.”¹⁰ For Messiah followers to demonstrate any strong fidelity to Moses’ Teaching, then, it would be like saying that there has not been a move forward in salvation history with Yeshua inaugurating the new era of the Father’s Kingdom.

Douglas J. Moo’s assessment of Romans 6:14 is a little better, as he does acknowledge how here “To be ‘under the law’ means to be subject to the curse of the law that comes because of the inevitable failure to accomplish the law.” He does continue, though, stating, “But confining the phrase only to the notion of condemnation fails to grasp the salvation-historical contrast that Paul sets up here.”¹¹ And so thinking that “under the Law” means being subject to a past time period, Moo concludes,

“‘Under law’ ...is another way of characterizing ‘the old realm’ ...To be ‘under law’ is to be subject to the constraining and sin-strengthening regime of the old age; to be ‘under grace’ is to be subject to the new age

⁷ Hegg, *Romans 1-8*, 151.

Cf. *Ibid.*, pp 152-155 where there is an analysis of places in the Apostolic Scriptures where *hupo nomon* is used.

⁸ Kenneth L. Barker, ed., et. al., *NIV Study Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1754.

⁹ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:339-341; Moo, *Romans*, pp 387-398; Wright, in *NIB*, 11:542-544.

¹⁰ Wright, in *NIB*, 11:543.

¹¹ Moo, *Romans*, pp 388-389.

in which freedom from the power of sin is available....Those who are joined to Christ by faith live in the new age where grace, not the law of Moses, reigns.”¹²

No Messianic Believer, who has experienced forgiveness from sins and an infilling of God’s grace, should look down upon the true statements that Moo has made regarding freedom from sin available in Yeshua. *None of us should want to be subject to the powers of the old age when no permanent solution for a human sin problem was available.* Yet, there are strong and compelling reasons why making “under the Law” and “under grace,” designations of the age of sin and death and the eschatological age of the Spirit, should be rejected.

While the salvation history motif of the two ages might seem to work for some of today’s contemporary Romans commentators, it has a tendency to *factor out* the First Century behavior of the Roman readers of Paul’s letter. Throughout the long history of Romans scholarship, too many have looked at Romans as just being a theological treatise, and not enough as an actual letter written to ancient Believers with some ancient issues needing to be resolved. Yet, a quick survey of Romans chs. 9-16 will certainly reveal that ancient issues are indeed addressed in the epistle, and so we should not be surprised to think that Paul describing the Romans, as not being “under the Law” and instead “under grace” (Romans 6:14-15), is designed to direct them in a correct spiritual path.

The main support that is offered, for the claim that God’s Torah is to be associated with the pre-resurrection era of sin and death, is Paul’s statement in Romans 5:20: “Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more.” Here, it is said that the Torah was introduced just to see sin and death increase. But to associate the Torah *only* with the pre-resurrection era of sin and death is a definite mistake. Take important note of how Romans 5:20 also says “**grace abounded all the more.**” God’s grace or *charis* (χάρις) was present in the pre-resurrection era *every bit* as much as God’s Law was, even with Yeshua’s final atonement still to be offered in the future and some new realities still to present themselves in the post-resurrection era.¹³

Those who take “under the Law” and “under grace,” as representing two different ages, have to admit to their position’s weakness. James D.G. Dunn indicates, “The distinction between epochs is not an absolute before and after Christ, since Abraham accepted the promise and was justified κατὰ χάριν [*kata charin*] (4:4, 16),”¹⁴ recognizing how Abraham was justified according to grace. Wright also notes that for Romans 6:14-15, “the terms of [Paul’s] argument are on the two spheres in which humans can belong,”¹⁵ which would lend support to the idea that a personal condition of being might indeed be a better way of viewing the passage. And, probably working from the paradigm that “under the Law” means obedient to the Torah, F.F. Bruce surprisingly concludes, “The law demanded obedience, but grace supplies the will and the power to obey; hence grace breaks the mastery of sin as law could not,”¹⁶ which is surely to be the condition of those who are redeemed in Yeshua, as a status of being saved and “under grace” sees that Believers are transformed by the Holy Spirit and hence can obey God’s Torah.

Ultimately, the question that many of today’s Christians answer a staunch “No!” to, is: *Is God’s Torah a part of the future eschatological Kingdom age, or not?* Grace was definitely a part of the previous age of sin and death (Romans 5:20b), and those who are not covered by God’s grace in the Messiah are not to be regarded as people of the future Kingdom age. They are condemned as criminals by God’s Law and stand under its curse. However, while the redeemed in Yeshua are people of the future Kingdom age—before it has fully manifested—such a future Kingdom age indeed also does include a respected place for the Torah. Not only does the promised New Covenant inaugurated by Yeshua in the lives of His followers intend to see the Law of Moses supernaturally transcribed upon the heart and mind (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27;

¹² Ibid., pp 389, 398.

¹³ For some further thoughts, consult “The Significance of the Messiah Event,” by Margaret McKee Huey and J.K. McKee, appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

¹⁴ Dunn, *Romans*, 38a:340.

¹⁵ Wright, in *NIB*, 11:544.

¹⁶ Bruce, *Romans*, 132.

Hebrews 8:8-12; 10:16-17), but the famed word of Micah 4:1-3 (and also Isaiah 2:2-4) details how the nations are to come to Zion to be taught the Torah, thus inaugurating global peace:

“And it will come about in the last days that the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains. It will be raised above the hills, and the peoples will stream to it. Many nations will come and say, ‘Come and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD and to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us about His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For from Zion will go forth the law, even the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between many peoples and render decisions for mighty, distant nations. Then they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks; nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they train for war.”¹⁷

God’s Torah certainly has a place in the future Kingdom age, and should not at all be exclusively consigned to the previous age of sin and death! But in order to arrive at such a future Kingdom age, when it is fully manifested and Yeshua reigns from Jerusalem—we each need to make sure that we stand under the covering of God’s grace *and not* under the condemnation of the Law. ***We need to make sure that we have truly been saved and spiritually regenerated!***

In Romans 6:15, easily concerned about the conduct of the Roman Believers, Paul communicates, “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!” (RSV). Unfortunately, many take a condition of being forgiven of their sins as a kind of self-justification to commit sin. But Paul would have no part of such an attitude or idea—and none of us living today should either!

Even though redeemed and blood-washed Believers are “under grace” and have been provided salvation in the Messiah, it does not mean that we are to ignore God’s Instruction. Paul is clear to issue the direction, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” (Romans 6:1-2, RSV). A life once lived under the condemnation and penalties of the Torah, bereft with guilt and anxiety before God, is not something to which anyone should want to return. God’s grace overcoming the power of sin is not something that born again Believers are to provoke! If we are spiritually regenerated, our natural desire should be **to want to obey God and please Him as much as we can**, as His grace transforms us from within (Titus 2:11-12). This obedience grows as we seek more of Him, study His Word, and ask Him to convict us of areas of our lives that need improvement.

Are we allowed to sin and break God’s Torah because we are not “under the Law,” but instead “under grace” as redeemed saints? No. Prior to salvation, the master of the unredeemed is sin, a status which causes people to be “under the Law.” When the Lord Yeshua becomes a person’s Master, he or she changes and is “under grace.” Born again Believers are not to find themselves “under the Law,” *precisely* because they are covered by the blood of the Messiah. We are no longer subject to the condemnation pronounced by the Torah upon sinners, because sin is no longer our lord.

Even while accepting the common view that “under the Law” means having to follow the Torah, Colin G. Kruse’s conclusion is not at all off the mark. He states, “by saying that they ‘are not under law, but under grace’ the apostle foreshadows his discussion of a new life in the Spirit that makes possible what the law could not achieve because of the weakness of sinful flesh (8:1-17).”¹⁸ He does have to remark, though, “While believers who live under the new covenant of grace no longer live under the Mosaic law as a regime, this does not mean they are free to flout the moral imperatives found in the law, for these are the moral standards required of humankind by God himself,”¹⁹ referencing Romans 8:4 and Galatians 5:14. Unfortunately, too many Christian theologians have not totally probed the Tanach significance of the New Covenant precisely providing the spiritual impetus needed for people to properly follow God’s Torah (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27), even though they recognize significant principles from the Torah not to be discarded as a means of good conduct.

¹⁷ For a further review of Micah 4:1-3 and Isaiah 2:2-4, consult the author’s exegesis paper “The Torah Will Go Forth From Zion,” appearing in the *Messianic Torah Helper* by Messianic Apologetics.

¹⁸ Kruse, *Romans*, 269.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp 268-269.

Believers who are born again and redeemed are not subject to the Torah's punishments pronounced upon sinners; **they are not "under the Law."** Romans 6:14-15 demonstrates our need to live responsibly being covered by God's grace, living in obedience to Him. If we have been spiritually regenerated, we need to take to serious heart what Yeshua had to endure to take away the penalty of *our disobedience* to the Law via His sacrifice (Colossians 2:14)! Being redeemed from eternal punishment should definitely be *a good motivation* for us to obey God.

Our faith in Yeshua does not nullify our need to obey God, just as Paul has said, "Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law" (Romans 3:31, RSV). Torah obedience comes as we emulate our Lord and Savior, and are transformed by God's love.