



## STUDY 12

# Not Under the Law, but under Grace?

Often we hear this argument in an effort to belittle the law of God: "Well, since we are not under the law but under grace, we do not need to keep the Ten Commandments any longer." Is this a valid point? The Bible certainly does say that we are not under the law, but does that imply that we are free from the obligation to obey it? The text is found in **Romans 6:14, 15**. "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace. What then? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace? God forbid."

How easily we could prevent confusion if we accepted exactly what the Bible says. Paul gives his own explanation of his statement. After stating that we are not under the law but under grace, he asks, "What then?" This simply means, "How are we to understand this?" Then notice his answer. In anticipation that some will construe his words to mean that you can break the law because you are under grace, he says, "Shall we sin (break the law) because we are

not under the law but under grace? God forbid." In the strongest possible language Paul states that being under grace does not give a license to break the law. Yet this is exactly what millions believe today, and they totally ignore Paul's specific warning.

If being under grace does not exempt us from keeping the law, then what does Paul mean by saying that Christians are not under the law? He gives that answer in **Romans 3:19**. "Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God." Here Paul equates being under the law with "being guilty before God." In other words, those who are under the law are guilty of breaking it and are under the condemnation of it. This is why Christians are not under it. They are not breaking it—not guilty and condemned by it. Therefore, they are not under it, but are under the power of grace instead. Later in his argument, Paul points out that the power of grace is greater than the power of sin.

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This is why he states so emphatically, "For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace." Grace overrules the authority of sin, giving power to obey God's law. This is the effective reason that we are not under the law's guilt and condemnation and also why Paul states that we will not continue to sin.

Suppose a murderer has been sentenced to death in the electric chair. Waiting for the execution the man would truly be under the law in every sense of the word—under the guilt, under the condemnation, under the sentence of death, etc. Just before the execution date the governor reviews the condemned man's case and decides to pardon him. In the light of extenuating circumstances the governor exercises

**If you love me, keep my commandments (John 14:15)**

his prerogative and sends a full pardon to the prisoner. Now he is no longer under the law but under grace. The law no longer condemns him. He is considered totally justified as far as the charges of the law are concerned. He is free to walk out of the prison and no policeman can lay hands upon him. But now that he is under grace and no longer under the law, can we say that he is free to break the law? Indeed not! In fact, that pardoned man will be doubly obligated to obey the law because he has found grace from the governor. In gratitude and love he will be very careful to honor the law of that state which granted him grace. Is that what the Bible says about pardoned sinners?

"Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law" (**Romans 3:31**). Here is the most explicit answer to the entire problem. Paul asks if the law is nullified for us just because we have had faith in Christ's saving grace. His answer is that the law is established and reinforced in the life of a grace-saved Christian.

The truth of this is so simple and obvious that it should require no repetition, but the devious reasoning of those who try to avoid obedience makes it necessary to press this point a bit further. Have you ever been stopped by a policeman for exceeding the speed

limit? It is an embarrassing experience, especially if you know you are guilty. But suppose you really were hurrying to meet a valid emergency,

and you pour out your convincing explanation to the police-man as he writes your ticket. Slowly he folds the ticket and tears it up. Then he says, "All right, I'm going to pardon you this time, but ..." Now what do you think he means by that word "but"? Surely he means, "but I don't want to ever catch you speeding again." Does this pardon (grace) open the way for you to disobey the law? On the contrary, it adds compelling urgency to your decision not to disobey the law again. Why, then, should any true Christian try to rationalize his way out of obeying the law of God? "If ye love me," Jesus said, "keep my commandments" (**John 14:15**).

## Obedience is a Test of Love

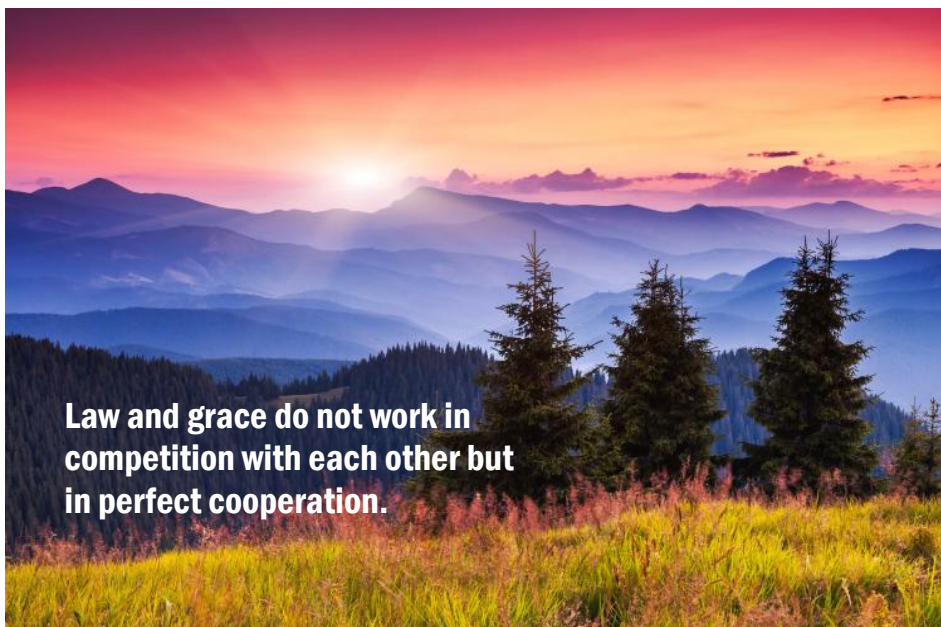
Someone may bring up the objection that after the law has accomplished its purpose of pointing the sinner to Christ for cleansing, it will no longer be needed in the experience of the believer. Is that true? No, indeed. The Christian will always need the watchdog of the law to reveal any deviation from the true path and to point him back to the cleansing cross of Jesus. There will never be a time when that mirror of correction will not be needed in the progressive growth experience of the Christian.

Law and grace do not work in competition with each other but in perfect cooperation. The law points out sin, and grace saves from sin. The law is the will of God, and grace is the power to do the will of God. We do not obey the law in order to be saved but because we are saved. A beautiful text which combines the two in their true relationship is **Revelation 14:12**.

"Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus." What a perfect description of faith and works! And the combination is found in those who are "saints."

The works of obedience are the real test of love. This is why they are so necessary in the experience of a true believer. "Faith without works is dead" (**James 2:20**). No man ever won a fair maiden's heart by words alone. Had there been no flowers, no acts of devotion, no gifts of love, most men would still be searching for a companion. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (**Matthew 7:21**).

Words and profession are not enough. The true evidence is obedience. Today's bumper stickers reflect a shallow concept of love.



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They say, "Smile if you love Jesus," "Honk if you love Jesus"; but what did the Master Himself say? He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (**John 14:15**). And that is exactly what most people don't want to do. If love makes no demands beyond a smile or wave, then it is welcome; but if the lifestyle must be disturbed, the majority will reject it. Unfortunately, most people today are not looking for truth. They are looking for a smooth, easy, comfortable religion that will allow them to live the way they please and still give assurance of salvation. There is indeed no true religion that can do that for them.

One of the strongest texts in the Bible on this subject is found in **1 John 2:4**. "He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." John could write that with such assurance because it is one of the most deeply established truths in the Bible. Jesus spoke of those who said, "Lord, Lord," but did not do the will of the Father.

Then He described many who would seek entrance to the kingdom claiming to be workers of miracles in the name of Christ. But He would sorrowfully have to say, "I never knew you: depart from me" (**Matthew 7:21-23**). You see, to know Christ is to love Him, and to love Him is to obey Him. The valid assumption of the Bible writers is very clear and simple: If one is not obeying Christ, he does not love Christ. And if he doesn't love the Master, then he doesn't know Him. John assured us, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (**John 17:3**). Thus, we can see how knowing and loving and obeying are all tied closely together and are absolutely inseparable in the life of God's faithful people. The beloved John summed it up in these words: "For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous" (**1 John 5:3**).

## NOTES

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