

## BEING UNDER GRACE AND NOT UNDER THE LAW

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### Abstract

The theological debate around the subject of being under grace and not being under the law is a contemporary issue that calls for an exegetical investigation in order to explore it further for the purpose of addressing it. The law and grace are the singular divine character of God of holiness. They are the two sides of the same coin of the holy nature of God. It is the justice and mercy of God at play. Some Bible scholars and theologians view the Old Testament law as having been abrogated by Jesus Christ when He died on the cross. His death at crucifixion, therefore, ushered in a new era of grace apart from the Old Testament law. This view has an implication in that the law of God ceased to constitute the holy character of God at the cross. Moreover, the perspective insinuates that the law of God operated only in the Old Testament dispensation and that the God of the Old Testament law was stern and judgmental, but the New Testament God of Jesus is gracious and loving. Thus, there is no concurrent existence of the law and grace in the Old Testament and New Testament respectively. This inference presents one side of the coin of the holy character of God of grace in the New Testament while effacing God's holy character of law in the same and vice versa. The questions which are raised by the theology of being under grace and not under the law are: What entails to be under grace and not under the law? Is there a relationship between grace and law? This article argues that the nature of God of holiness, comprising of the law and grace is indivisible, for God is one. To be under the law is to be condemned by holy God through His holy law. To be under grace is to be redeemed from the condemnation of the law by God through the grace of Jesus Christ and being brought under the dominion of God's mercy. The methodology used in this research is inductive. An exegetical approach is employed to explore the following terms, phrases, and concepts: grace, law, under, under grace, and under the law. This is for the purpose of exploring their meaning and their relationship. A conclusion will be drawn based on the exegesis and theology of the Biblical texts under investigation.

**Key words:** grace, law, under, holiness, righteousness

### Introduction

The Biblical concept of being under grace and not under the law is profound. The idea is viewed by some Biblical scholars and theologians as grace replacing the law in the New Testament and therefore, the law is no longer applicable in

the New Testament dispensation of God's love through Jesus Christ (Hughes, 2005; Keumyoung, 1989; Bacchiocchi, 1985; Hawley, 2012; Davies, 2021). The death of Jesus Christ on the cross brought the law to an end (Ephesians 2:14,15; Galatians 2:14) (Rigaux, 1969). The Lord of the Old Testament is viewed in the "status of a

Ruthless Judge with which the God of the Old Testament was labelled, so that none of His closest collaborators managed to truly understand Him.” (Paşca-Tuşa, 2020)[3]. Therefore, “Jesus Christ fulfilled and terminated the Mosaic law, including the ten commandments.” (Keumyoung, 1989[4]).

The view above presents only one side of the holy character of God of grace, leaving out His other side of His holy nature pertaining to the law. Certainly, the holy character of God is comprised of God’s grace and law. His holiness is indivisible, for God is one and eternal (Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Timothy 1:17). Davies observes that Paul’s “dictum that we “are not under law but under grace” in Romans 6:15 is often misunderstood today by those who conclude that keeping God’s law is no longer required of the Christian.” (Davies, (2021[5]).

The questions which are raised by the discussion under grace and not under the law are: What entails to be under grace and not under the law? What does it mean to be under the law? Is there a relationship between grace and law? This article argues that the holy character of God is indivisible, because God is one and everlasting (Deuteronomy 33:27; Isaiah 57:15; 1 Timothy 1:17). To be under grace is to be under the Lordship of God through the righteousness of Jesus Christ; and to be under the law is to be condemned by God through the violation of His holy law. To be under grace and not under the law, therefore, is to be saved from the condemnation of the law and be brought under the dominion of grace of God. The law was not abolished by Jesus at the cross, but it is in force, being kept by the believer through the power of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament through love as it was in the Old Testament. “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord of hosts” (Zech 4:6). The praxis of God’s law is summed up in loving God and fellow

human, and the love of God in the New Testament cannot be pragmatically shown without the law of God comprised of ten commandments found in the Old Testament.

The methodology used in this research paper is inductive. An exegetical approach is adopted in order to explore the following terms, phrases, and concepts: grace, law, under grace, under the law, and not under the law. This is for the purpose of investigating their meaning and relationship. A conclusion will be drawn based on the foregoing exegesis and theology of the Biblical texts under consideration.

### **Biblical References for Under Grace and Under the Law**

The following Biblical texts provide some data of the usage of the phrases under grace and under the law:

Romans 6:14, 15	-not under the law, under grace [2x]
1 Corinthians 9:20	-under the law [4x]
Galatians 3:23	-under the law [1x]
Galatians 4:4, 5	-under the law [2x]
Galatians 5:18	-under the law [1x]

The following Biblical texts express the same idea of under grace and under the law in similar context:

Romans 3:9	-under sin
Romans 7:14	-under sin
1 Corinthians 9:21	-in the law of Christ
Galatians 3:10	-under a curse
Galatians 3:22	-under sin
Galatians 3:25	-under school master
Galatians 4:2	-under tutors and governors
Galatians 4:3	-under elements
Galatians 4:9	-under God

### Preposition Under *ὑπό* (Greek)

The preposition under translates *ὑπό* in Greek in the above Biblical texts dealing with the concept of under grace and under the law. When the preposition is used with the accusative, as it is in the case in all the above referenced Biblical texts, it suggests the idea of under authority or power (Rogers Jr, Rogers III, 1998). The Hebrew equivalent *תַּחַת* is used in connection with the covenant – the law of God (Ezekial 20:29).

God's covenant is essentially God's law whether in the Old or New Testament (Exodus 34:28; Hebrews 10:16; Jeremiah 31:31-34). This authority or power is final and controlling. Therefore, to be under grace or under the law is to be under the power or authority of grace or law respectively. Thus, to be under grace suggests the concept of being under the authority or power of God through the grace of Jesus Christ – the power is absolute and governing. Likewise, to be under the law submits the idea of being under the authority or power of the law of God – the law is definitive and overriding.

### Under *ὑπό* Grace

The word grace *χάρις* (Greek) *חֵן* (Hebrew) means favor. Grace is interchangeable with free gift of righteousness – a favor from God to humanity through the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Romans 5:15, 17). As a free gift *χάρισμα* is freely bestowed or given *χαριτόω*. Gift *תָּתַן* (Hebrew) shares the same root with *תָּתַן* to give – “to us a son is given” (Isaiah 9:6). Jesus is the Son of God (Matthew 3:17; Luke 1:32, 35). “As God's favor, grace is one, indivisible, perfect, and complete. Its embodiment is Christ himself, he is God's

favor extended to us, He is a gift before all gifts, a gift unlike any other” (Malysz, 2018). God's grace is “unmerited favor, a gift bestowed on the undeserving.” (Otey, 2017). Therefore, there is the Giver who is God, there is the Gift from God who is Jesus Christ, and there is the gifted with the Gift Jesus who is the undeserving sinner – the law breaker.

Righteousness *δικαιοσύνη* (Greek) *צְדָקָה* (Hebrew) is “conforming to the standard, will, or character of God; upright, righteous, good; just, right; proper, in a right relationship with God, acceptable to God; fair, honest, innocent” (Novum Testamentum with Dictionary 28<sup>th</sup> revised edition, 2012). To be under grace, then, is to be under the authority or power of grace –the free gift of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Jesus as human kept the law of God perfectly –His righteousness and character; and when a law breaker believes in Christ, the righteousness of Jesus –Christ's perfect obedience to the law of God is reckoned to the believer as if the outlaw is the one who has kept the law of God perfectly. The disciple has to maintain this righteousness of Christ accounted to them in obedience to God's law based on love by faith in Jesus Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. “Grace comes into its own in rendering us capable of doing good works God has graciously prepared for us. ‘Works’ are the gift of grace” (Yoder-Neufeld, 2012). “Grace is both God's mercy toward us and God's power in us” (Otey, 2017). “The grace of God is often set polemically against the law of God. The Christian view, allegedly, is that grace and law are opposites, the former being the root of salvation, the latter being the primary impediment to it.” (Charry, 2003).

## The Power of Sin and Sting of Death

According to 1 Corinthians 15:55-56, the power of sin is the law of God; and the sting of death is sin. Sin derives its power from the law of God and its sting or poison is death. The law of God gives power to sin in that sin comes into existence when the law of God is broken, resulting to death (Romans 7:9-11). Thus, the law of God sells the law breaker to sin in exchange for death, because the law demands the life of its violator and the only one who can merchandise death is sin. Therefore, the law of God trades the sinner to sin in exchange for death. The apostle Paul acknowledges that he has been sold under *ὑπό* sin saying, “I am carnal, sold under sin” (Romans 7:14). Elsewhere the Lord declares: ““You were sold for nothing, and you shall be redeemed without money”” (Isaiah 52:3).

The whole creation is under the power of the law –under a curse, because humans sinned by breaking the law of God. God cursed the ground and even so everyone who does not do according to the word of God (Genesis 3:17; Deuteronomy 27:26). “They have all gone astray, they are all alike corrupt; there is no one that does good, no, not one” (Isaiah 14:3).

## Under *ὑπό* the Law

The law תורה (Hebrew) νόμος (Greek) means instruction or teaching (Exodus 24:12). “Torah was, however, never simply legislation. It is best translated as “instruction” or “revelation” and must be taken to cover the folkloristic tales of Genesis and the words of the prophets as well as the moral precepts of the Decalogue” (Bruns, 1962). The law was an instructor or teacher

to make humans know that they are law breakers hence, sinners in need of a Savior. “Christ is the end of the law that everyone who has faith may be justified” δικίωσιν (Greek) קִיּוּם (Hebrew) (Romans 10:4; Isaiah 53:11). The law leads the believer to Christ to be made righteous, conforming to God’s law. “Paul clearly indicates that the obedience to the law of God is still the goal, for the law is spiritual” (Davies, 2021). “Luther explains that the commandments show us what we ought to do but do not give us the power to do it. They are intended to teach man [sic] to know himself, that through them he may recognize his inability to do good and may despair of his own ability” (Rewald-Alexander, 2006).

To be under the law is to be condemned by the law to die forever. “Torah demands...condemnation where one falls short of keeping it” (Charry, 2003). The law breaker is under the power or authority of the law of condemnation to death and cannot escape the sentence of God: “You shall die” (Genesis 2:17; cf. 3:19; Ezekial 18:20). Davies observes as regards to the ten commandments which God gave to Israel: “As we have in promulgation of the Ten Commandments at Mount Sinai, whereas the law was graciously given to Israel as their means of responding to God’s grace, at the same time the law brought condemnation to those who disobeyed” (Davies, 2021).

Besides being condemned by the law of God as law breakers just like the rest of humanity, Israel was also under *ὑπό* the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Davidic covenant law of circumcision, Levitical priesthood, and kingship respectively, subjecting them to the legal requirements (1 Corinthians 9:21).

The circumcision, Levitical priesthood, and kingship were teaching and guiding Israel concerning the circumcision of the heart, royal priesthood, and kingship of righteousness)  $\rho\tau\zeta$  ( $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta$ ) of Jesus Christ respectively (Colossians 2:11; Hebrew 7:1, 2, 11; 9:24, 27, 28; John 1:29; Ezekial 21:26, 27). Not only did Jesus fulfil the covenantal law spiritually, but also physically (Matthew 5:17). He was circumcised on the eighth day, His parents sacrificed according to the law of Moses when He was born, and He rode on a donkey as the hoped for king of Davidic lineage (Luke 2:21-24; Mark 11:10).

### Not Being Under $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{o}$ the Law

To be not under the law, therefore, implies that the breaker of the law, a sinner, has been released or liberated from the gripping power of the law of God –its condemnation to death. Jesus became sin itself and died on the cross, paying the demand of the law –death which sin occasioned (2 Corinthians 5:21). If the law breaker believes in Jesus, Christ buys them, releasing them from the authority of the law where they were peddled by the law in exchange for death. Jesus Christ brings the believer under  $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{o}$  the dominion or authority of God of grace through the gift of His righteousness)  $\rho\tau\zeta$  ( $\delta\iota\kappa\alpha\iota\sigma\acute{\upsilon}\nu\eta$ ) and the believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey the law of God through love in obedience to Jesus –the law of love of Christ. Contrary to the view that the believer in Christ is not under the law, meaning that the believer is not obligated to keep God’s law, the opposite holds true. The believer in Christ, that is in obedience to Jesus through

love which the law embodies, is enabled by Christ through the grace of Jesus to keep God’s law, conforming to the righteousness of Christ –the holiness of God. “Paul does not say that Christ has set us free from the ethical demands of the law, but that he has set us free from its condemnation” (Davies, 2021).

### Conclusion

The preposition under  $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{o}$  (Greek) as used in the Biblical texts investigated in this research infers coming under authority or power when used with the accusative as it is in the case with the texts considered. Grace is the free gift of righteousness. The righteousness is the righteousness of Jesus – His perfect obedience to the law of God as human, and it is given to a law breaker who believes in Christ for free. The believer in Jesus is placed under the grace of God, because the grace of God through Jesus Christ demands that the believer be accorded life eternal instead of everlasting death brought about by breaking the law of God and coming under its power or authority by its condemnation. The believer is, therefore, not under the power of the law by condemnation, but under the authority of the grace of Jesus by faith.

The law of God is an instructor, educating humanity about God. Moreover, the law becomes more relevant after sin in teaching the sinner that they have broken the law and come under its condemnation and therefore, they need a redeemer. Jesus Christ died for the sinner instead and fulfilled the demands of the law of death and righteousness simultaneously. “*There is therefore no condemnation for those who are*

in Jesus Christ. For the law of Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death” (Rom 8:12). The believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit to obey the law of God through love which Jesus Christ kept perfectly as human as opposed to breaking the law of God again and coming under its condemnation once more.

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