

“You Are Not under the Law but under Grace”: A Study Of Romans 6:14

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Abstract

Romans 6:14 mentioned of the moral law and grace of God and is one of misunderstood texts. This research uses the methodology of theological study and analysis to elucidate the correct meaning of Romans 6:14. Paul understood that humans are no longer under the condemnation of the law, but under gracious dispensation and still under the jurisdiction of the law. Under grace means that men are justified by faith and redeemed from the curse of law through Christ. Christians living under the dispensation of grace are enabled to have victory over the dominion of sin as the Holy Spirit guided the life because law has now been written in the hearts of believers. The Ten Commandments does not provide salvation or remove sin, but it can lead the sinners to seek a remedy for guilt, to point out sins and at the same time point to Jesus.

Keywords: Dispensation, Condemnation, Jurisdiction

Introduction

In today’s time, through different means of communications, people simply hear and accept theology which most of the messages received may not be studied thoroughly and accurately prior to sharing it. In apostle Paul’s writing of Romans 6:14 mentioned about of the Law and grace and is one of misunderstood texts, according to Angel Manuel Rodriguez, “... understanding of the law in relation to sin and grace, and to qualify the negative meaning of the phrase “not under the law.” We should keep in mind that the discussion of the law occurs in the context of his controversy with false teachers who promoted the observance of the law for their own specific purpose.”¹ Therefore, it is essential to study carefully and truthfully of texts in the Bible before giving it to somebody.

Romans 6:14 seeks to explain that we are not under the law, but under the grace of God, according to Colin A. Dunbar,

We should not define “under the law” too restrictively. The person who supposedly lives “under grace” but disobeys God’s law will not find grace but condemnation. “Under grace” means that through the grace of God, as revealed in Jesus, the condemnation that the law inevitably brings to sinners has been removed. Thus, now free from this condemnation of death brought by the law, we

¹Manuel Angel Rodriguez, “Adventist World,” *The Power of Law, the Power of Grace* 2 (2018): 1.

live in “newness of life,” a life characterized by and made manifest through the fact that, being dead to self, we are no longer slaves to sin.²

In addition, through the grace of God, humans can obtain a life not being slaves to sin and condemnation may not be put unto humans because it has been removed.

Method

This research is based upon theological study which strive for the accurate understanding of “not under the law, but under the grace of God”. Accordingly, theological analysis is its main method. The meaning and understanding of “not under the law, but under the grace of God” is essentially important because of its truth and theology. Even at the beginning, apostle Paul zealously wanted humanity to perceive the original meaning of the phrase. Often, readers of the Bible oversee the profound root of meaning of the Scripture, whether most people just looking and reading on the surface of Scripture. This research will present the significance of the ‘law’, the objective of the Ten Commandments and the veracity of the phrase “not under the law, but under the grace of God”.

Discussion

The Meaning of “But Under Grace”

There are people who believed that the meaning of “but under grace” means under the covenant of grace. According to John Gill,

Under the covenant of grace, and in the enjoyment of the blessings of it. Under the Gospel, and the dispensation of it, which leads and teaches men to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts; under and in the possession of the grace of justification and pardon, which strongly influence to righteousness and holiness; and under regenerating and sanctifying grace as a reigning governing principle in the soul. The apostle's view in this is, to affect the saints with their present privilege, and to engage them in a cheerful conflict with sin, and to stir up in them an abhorrence of living in it.³

Also, Romans 6:14 is the end of the passage which talks about baptism.

According to Robert H. Gundry, “The sanctification of sinners justified by faith in Jesus Christ (6:1 – 8:39). Baptism as a representation of believers’ union with Christ in his death with reference to sin and in his coming alive with reference to righteousness (6:1-14).”⁴ which also characterized under the sanctification process in the book of Romans. Also, in the last part of Romans 6 explains that freedom from the law does not mean free from sin, according to Gundry, he stated:

²Colin A. Dubar, “Salvation by Faith Alone – Book of Romans,” in *Not Under the Law but Under Grace*, ed. Clifford R. Goldstein (Silver Spring, MD: Pacific Press), 59.

³John Gill, "Commentary on Romans 6:14," The New John Gill Exposition of the Entire Bible, accessed April 6, 2021(<https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/geb/romans-6.html>).

⁴Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament* (Michigan: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2012), 437.

Paul writes that freedom from the law does not imply freedom to sin, because freedom and slavery are relative terms. An unbeliever is free from the restrictions of Christian holiness but enslaved to the control of sin. On the other hand, a believer is free from the control of sin but enslaved to the restrictions of Christian holiness. In reality, captivity to Christian holiness brings the truest kind of freedom, freedom not to sin, freedom to live righteously.⁵

In Romans 6:12,13 talks about an evil tyrant of sin that seeks to enslave humans under its lordship. Therefore, believers are called to fight against sin and to resist its dominion by God’s grace. The only hope of escaping from its deadly grip is to accept the Lordship of Christ (5:14). While the believer has already died to sin in (6:11), living in a new life in Christ does not happen automatically which according to H.G Liddell, he stated:

In Rom. 6.1-11, Paul explains why the believer should refuse to cooperate with Sin: when the saints participated in the death of Christ through baptism, they, like Christ, died to Sin once and for all. Just as Death no longer rules over Christ, so also Sin no longer rules over Christians. Here for the first time in Romans, Sin is referred to as something internal as well as external; the apostle commands the believers to reject the reign of Sin in their bodies, to refuse to stand alongside of Sin and no longer to place themselves at the disposal of this slave master. Such actions cause them to become “a willing instrument in its system of domination.”⁶

In the entire discussion, Paul describes how Christians baptized into Christ are now in the redemptive story of God’s plan who were consecrated by and through His name. According to Michael F. Bird, he stated, “Christians go through a new exodus and become a new people living faithfully under a new Lord. He emphasizes that baptism into Christ means being plunged and placed into the redemptive story of God’s plan to consecrate a people worthy of his name.”⁷

Moreover, in a larger scope of the book of Romans chapter 6:1 – 8:17, it is not only focusing on freedom from sin’s penalty, but also from sin’s power as what stated according to Michael F. Bird, he says:

The scope of 6:1 – 8:17 is to trace the path of freedom, not only from sin’s penalty but also from its power, a path that does not use the Torah as a Winnebago to carry passengers to its destination. Paul places all of humanity between the figures of Adam and Christ. Adam stands as the head of the realm of sin, death, and condemnation, while Christ stands as the head of a new humanity by way of his obedience, life, grace, and righteousness. What Paul wants to do now, taking his cue from 5:21, is to map where believers are in relation to Adam and Christ. He wants to mark out where they sit in relation to the “reign” of sin and the “reign” of grace.⁸

Therefore, dying to sin means dying with Christ, according to Douglas J. Moo, he says, “In verse 12, it mentions that mortal body should not reigned by sin. He also

⁵Ibid., 442.

⁶H.G Liddell and R. Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1340.

⁷Michael F. Bird, Tremper Longman III, and Scot McKnight, *The Story of God Bible Commentary: Romans* (Michigan: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2016), 300.

⁸Ibid., 301.

said that sin is a hostile power that uses death as its seducer to make humans obey him and that sin elicits desire and desire is what controls the will.”⁹ Simply to say that sin should not be the master of the body which is verse 14 also mentions that sin should not be the ‘boss’ of the body.

From here, many people confuse about this statement and it can be seen that the significance of the future tense is hard gauge and according to Michael, he stated that, “Paul seems to mean it as an imperative in the sense that sin ought not be the boss and bane of their lives. The reason why sin should no longer lord it over them is because ‘you are not under the law, but under grace’ (v. 14b). These are important words and easily taken out of context.”¹⁰

The “not under law, but under grace” also implies not under a legal dispensation and under gracious dispensation. According to Justin Edwards:

Not under a legal dispensation, where perfect obedience to law, and freedom from all sin, are necessary to acceptance with God. The apostle had already shown that the law cannot deliver from either the guilt or the pollution of sin, but "worketh" wrath to all transgressors. Under grace means under gracious dispensation, under which men are justified, not by perfect obedience, but by faith in Christ, who died to redeem them from the curse of the law, being made a curse for them.¹¹

“Under grace” means no other than the grace of God which was revealed through Jesus Christ who died at the cross and resurrected again. Through the grace of God, humans are no longer slaves to sin, but live in the newness of life. The Researcher believes that to be under the covenant of grace is a blessing. Thus, to be in and comprehend the dispensation of grace means to deny ungodliness and worldly hanks which by the grace of God can humans live in righteousness and holiness of God. By living in the gracious dispensation of God, men are now free from law, but not free from sin. In other words, believers of God are free from the control of sin but enslaved to the restrictions of Christian holiness. Living under the grace of God enables the believers to resist and fight against the dominion of sin. Therefore, under gracious dispensation also means that men are justified by faith in Christ because Christ had died for humanity to be redeemed from the curse of law. Unfortunately, many people misunderstood and thought that through perfect obedience will they receive justification. Therefore, “under grace” means the condemnation of the law inevitably brings to sinners has been removed.

The Meaning of “Not Under the Law”

According to Joseph R. Dodson:

Romans 6:12-23 focuses more on the present cooperation between the believer and Sin in spite of their participation in Christ’s death to Death. According to Paul then, Sin will reign only if the believers do not reckon themselves to be dead to it. In other words, if Sin dominates the believer, it is only because the Christian

⁹Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 125.

¹⁰Michael F. Bird, 302.

¹¹Justin Edwards, "Commentary on Romans 6:14," Family Bible New Testament, accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/fam/romans-6.html>.

has accepted, or even embraced, that reign. Paul has claimed that the Law increases trespass (5.20) and rules with Sin (6.14).¹²

Moreover, there are people who believed that the words “for” in verse 14 have significance in itself which according to Grant, “The verse has two ‘for’ clauses. The first declares that the lordship of sin over Christians has ended and the second tells the reason why the lordship of sin is over. Not under the legal principle of the law, but under God’s blessing.”¹³ Also, some people believed that different people should be under the law and under the grace which either live for sin or for God. Simply to say that one is under the law or one is under the grace which according to Robert Jewett, Romans 5 Paul places Sin in juxtaposition to Grace, here he places it in juxtaposition to God one can either live for Sin or for God (v. 10). Paul also returns to the contrast of Law and Grace, figures which were previously personified in 5.12-21 and perhaps still carry that force here. Just as Law is associated with Sin, so Grace is associated with God. Therefore, according to Paul, one is either under Law, and thus under Sin, or one is under Grace, and thus under God (v. 14).¹⁴

Furthermore, some people understood that the law is like a source of knowledge which Paul himself says that the law is not sin but defines sin and also that the knowledge of sin is the beginning of salvation. Seneca stated that, “Through the law, it gives a knowledge of sin and that result to death. He also said about Paul mentioning that the law is not sin, but the law defines sin while at the same time, sin exploited the law in order to manipulate ego.”¹⁵ Moreover, it was that the law in Romans 6:14 refers to the Ten Commandments.¹⁶

Also, it was because most probably Paul goes back at the time the command given at Mount Sinai by which stated by T.L Carter that, “It is probable that Paul goes back even further than this command at Sinai to allude also to God’s command in Genesis 2 (*Paradiesgebot*).”¹⁷ Under law is like a code for understanding which according to John Dummelow, he stated:

A code of precepts gives no power of fulfilment. It only shows what is right, reveals man's sinfulness, stimulates him to opposition ... To be “under the law,” in St. Paul's language, means to avoid sin from fear of penalties attached to sin by the law. This principle of fear is not strong enough to keep men in the path of duty. Union with Christ can alone give man the mastery over sin.¹⁸

There are also people who said that the law mentioned by Paul is not the law of nature nor civil law but the law of sin or moral law. According to John Gill:

¹²Joseph R. Dodson, *The ‘Powers’ of Personification: Rhetorical Purpose in the Book of Wisdom and the Letter to the Romans* (Berlin: Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data, 2008), 143.

¹³Grant, “Romans 6:14,” *Romans*, accessed March 9, 2021, <https://versebyversecommentary.com/2012/03/09/romans-614/>.

¹⁴Robert Jewett, *Romans: Hermeneia* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2007), 409.

¹⁵Cf. Seneca, *Moral Epistles*, 180.

¹⁶J.A. Ziesler, *The Role of the Tenth Commandment in Romans* (1988), 50.

¹⁷T.L. Carter, *Paul and the Power of Sin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 186.

¹⁸John Dummelow. "Commentary on Romans 6:14," John Dummelow's Commentary on the Bible, accessed April 6, 2021, <https://www.studydrive.org/commentaries/dcb/romans-6.html>.

Not the law of nature; nor the civil law of the Jews nor their ceremonial law; but either the law of sin, as a governing principle or rather the moral law. This they were under, so as to obey it, but not in order to obtain righteousness by it or as forced to obey it by its threats and terrors they were not under its rigorous exaction nor under its curse and condemnation nor as irritating sin and causing it to abound or as a covenant of works.¹⁹

Furthermore, not only that the law mentioned as moral law, but there are also people who understood that the ceremonial law has also a connection which Christ about the plan of salvation and pointing to the coming of Messiah. In addition, because Jesus has accomplished His mission in the earth, therefore, the old system-along with its sacrifices and rituals and feasts-no longer was needed which simply means that Christians does not anymore practice ceremonial law nowadays, but by studying it, Christians can garner insights into the plan of salvation. According to Ellen G. White:

The ceremonial law was given by Christ. Even after it was no longer to be observed, Paul presented it before the Jews in its true position and value, showing its place in the plan of redemption and its relation to the work of Christ; and the great apostle pronounces this law glorious, worthy of its divine Originator. The solemn service of the sanctuary typified the grand truths that were to be revealed through successive generations ... Thus, through age after age of darkness and apostasy faith was kept alive in the hearts of men until the time came for the advent of the promised Messiah.²⁰

As a Seventh-day Adventist, the Researcher believes that the Law mentioned in Romans 6:14 is the moral law. All who live on earth are under the dominion of sin and only through faith in Christ can one receive freedom (Rom. 3:19-24). The meaning of not being under the law should not be define restrictively or as lawlessness and should not implies that Christians should live life committing sins. Paul was saying that those who understood the life of living under the dispensation of grace are those who will have victory over sin as the Holy Spirit allowed to guide because the law has now been written in the heart. It is sad to know that humans who are enslave to sin are under the condemnation of the law, but fortunately, sin is no longer the master of humanity after placing faith in Christ as what Romans 6:14 says. Why Paul mentioned that humans are no longer to sin is because what Paul meant to be “under the law” in Romans 6:14 is to be under the dominion of sin and not under the dominion of the grace of God. The Researcher now understood that humans are no longer under the condemnation of the law, but under the jurisdiction of the law which also means that the law reveals shortcomings and guilt before the Lord. Therefore, verse 16 of the book of Romans explains that humans should know that the law dispensation is no longer dominate, but gracious dispensation of the Lord is.

The Objective of the Ten Commandments

Most people may think that if by following the Ten Commandments cannot save, why not just keep on sinning, but Paul in his epistles to the Romans answers the

¹⁹John Gill, 19.

²⁰Ellen G. White, *Patriarch and Prophets* (Washington: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890), 367.

question by emphasizing the meaning of sanctification which according to Colin A. Dunbar:

Paul deals with what commonly is understood as “sanctification,” the process by which we overcome sin and, more and more, reflect the character of Christ. The word sanctification appears only twice in Romans. It appears in Romans 6:19, 22 as the Greek word *hagiasmos*, which means “sanctification.” In English, it appears in these two texts as the word holiness.²¹

Many people might ask to themselves, how could the Ten Commandments be done away with and sin still a reality, but the moral law is what defines sin which Paul is not saying that the law has been abolished. Colin A. Dubar says, “it would make no sense for Paul that in the midst of the discussion reality of sin, Paul would suddenly state that the moral law which is the Ten Commandments that defines sin has been abolished.”²²

Paul is simply saying that people are “not under the law, but under grace” means living under grace and have victory over sin because the law has been written in the heart. According to Colin A. Dubar:

Paul is saying to the Romans that the person living “under the law” that is, under the Jewish economy as it was practiced in his day with all its man-made rules and regulations will be ruled by sin. In contrast, a person living under grace will have victory over sin, because the law is written in his or her heart and God’s spirit is allowed to guide his or her steps. Accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, being justified by Him, being baptized into His death, having the “old man” destroyed, rising to walk in newness of life these are the things that will dethrone sin from our lives. Remember, that is the whole context in which Romans 6:14 appears the context of the promise of victory over sin.²³

In Romans 6:15 mentioned that we should not sin because we are under grace and not under the law. Basically, the Christians life should not be seen as a life of lawlessness, but the law should be obeyed from the heart of a Christian because faith in Christ does not abolished the law by upholds the law. Therefore, the law is a guide for the sanctification of Christian life and not a means of acceptance before God. It is through the law that gives a knowledge of sin and that result to death. Interestingly, Paul also mentioned that the law is not sin although it gives hint on what to do and not to do because the law defines what is sin. The Ten Commandments does not provide salvation whether the Ten Commandments actually is the standard of living as it points out sins and at the same time points Christians to Jesus. In other words, the Ten Commandments cannot remove guilt or sins before God, what the Ten Commandments can do is to lead the sinner to seek a remedy for it.

Summary and Conclusion

Summary

Romans 6:14 seeks to explain that we are not under the law, but under the grace of God. The person who supposedly lives "under grace" but disobeys God's law will not find grace but condemnation. It is essential to study carefully and truthfully of

²¹Colin A. Dubar, 59.

²²Ibid., 88.

²³Ibid., 89.

texts in the Bible before giving them to somebody. The meaning and understanding of "not under the law, but under the grace of God" is important because of its truth and theology. Even at the beginning, apostle Paul zealously wanted humanity to perceive the original meaning of the phrase.

This research will present the significance of the 'law' and the objective of the Ten Commandments. It will also examine whether or not the phrase "but under grace" means under the covenant of grace. Paul writes that freedom from the law does not imply freedom to sin. In Romans 6:12,13, Paul talks about an evil tyrant of sin that seeks to enslave humans under its lordship. Believers are called to fight against sin and to resist its dominion by God's grace.

Captivity to Christian holiness brings the truest kind of freedom, freedom not to sin, freedom to live righteously. The scope of 6:1 – 8:17 is to trace the path of freedom, not only from sin's penalty but also from its power. Paul places all of humanity between the figures of Adam and Christ by way of his obedience, life, grace, and righteousness. Dying to sin means dying with Christ, according to Douglas J. Moo, "Not under law, but under grace" also implies not under a legal dispensation and gracious dispensation. "Not under a legal dispensation, where perfect obedience to law, and freedom from all sin, are necessary to acceptance with God".

"Under grace" means no other than the grace of God which was revealed through Jesus Christ who died at the cross and resurrected again. By living in the gracious dispensation of God, men are now free from law, but not free from sin. Paul places Sin in juxtaposition to Grace, which according to some people means that one is either under the law or under grace. Seneca stated that, "Through the law, it gives a knowledge of sin and that result to death". Also, Paul says that the law is not sin but the law defines sin while at the same time, sin exploited the law in order to manipulate ego.

There are some people who believe that the law mentioned by Paul is not the law of nature nor civil law but rather moral law. There are also people who understood that the ceremonial law has also a connection which Christ about the plan of salvation and pointing to the coming of Messiah. According to Ellen G. White: The ceremonial law was given by Christ. Even after it was no longer to be observed, Paul presented it before the Jews in its true position and value. As a Seventh-day Adventist, the Researcher believes that the Law mentioned in Romans 6:14 is the moral law.

All who live on earth are under the dominion of sin and only through faith in Christ can one receive freedom (Rom. 3:19-24). The meaning of not being under the law should not be define restrictively or as lawlessness and should not implies that Christians should live life committing sins. The moral law is what defines sin which Paul is not saying that the law has been abolished. In contrast, a person living under grace will have victory over sin, because the law is written in his or her heart. Accepting Jesus Christ as the Messiah, being justified by Him, being baptized into His death, having the "old man" destroyed are the things that will dethrone sin from our lives.

In Romans 6:15 mentioned that we are under grace and not under the law. Paul also mentioned that the law is not sin although it gives hint on what to do and not to do because the law defines what is sin. In other words, the Ten Commandments cannot remove guilt or sins before God, what the Commandments can do is to lead the sinner to seek a remedy for it.

Conclusion

This research has helped the Researcher to elucidate Paul’s concept on Romans 6:14 “For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace”. After presenting the theological study which strive for the accurate understanding of “not under the law, but under the grace of God”, the Researcher discovered the correct theology and meaning of the phrase.

The Researcher found clarity that living “under the grace” or in the gracious dispensation of God, men are now free from law, but not free from sin. Sadly, numerous individuals misunderstood that by perfect obedience, will they receive justification. The Researcher highly believes that living under the grace of God enables the believers to resist and fight against the dominion of sin. Therefore, under gracious dispensation also means that men are justified by faith in Christ because Christ had died for humanity to be redeemed from the curse of law.

Paul understood that humans are no longer under the condemnation of the law, but under the jurisdiction of the law. Paul explained that those who understood the life of living under the dispensation of grace are those who will have victory over sin as the Holy Spirit allowed to guide because the law has now been written in the heart. This also means that humans should know that the law dispensation is no longer dominate, but gracious dispensation of the Lord is. Theologically speaking, the Ten Commandments does not provide salvation or remove sin, but it can lead the sinners to seek a remedy for their guilt, points out their sins and at the same time points the Christians to Jesus.

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