

Law Or Grace?

Joe Slater

People tend to be extremists. Nowhere is this more true than in religion. Is it faith or works? Law or grace? To hear some (most?) people tell it, faith is exclusive of works and grace is exclusive of law. They have one slight problem, however – that just isn't what the Bible teaches!

Paul wrote, "*for you are not under law but under grace*" (Romans 6:14b). That's it! Christians are not responsible to any law in any form or fashion, right? **WRONG!** Remember the old adage: a text taken out of context is a pretext.

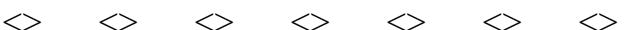
Paul's context shows that he is not denying that God has a law that He requires Christians to obey. Look at the whole verse: "*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*" Paul has been talking about our deliverance from the guilt and penalty of sin by the grace of God. If not for the blood of Christ that washes us from sin (not only at baptism, but from day to day as we repent and pray for pardon), sin would have dominion over us.

The late R.L. Whiteside correctly observed that "if we were under no law, we would be guilty of no sin, and there would be no need of grace to forgive our sin" (Commentary on Romans, p. 137). Paul himself put it this way: "Sin is not imputed (charged against you) where there is no law" (Romans 5:13). Paul's point in that verse is that even before the Law of Moses was given, people had law from God, and they sinned by violating it. We generally refer to this as Patriarchal Law. But the application is valid today. If we are under no law from God, then we cannot possibly sin. The fact that we

need God's grace to forgive our sins shows conclusively that we are under divine law. Paul himself wrote that he was not "without law toward God, but under law toward Christ" (1 Corinthians 9:21)

Why, then, does Paul say we are "not under law, but under grace"? He is employing a literary device to emphasize something greater (God's grace) by denying something lesser (law). Jesus did the same thing in John 12:44, saying, "He who believes in Me, believes not in Me, but in Him Who sent Me." Now, who would affirm that we do not really believe in Jesus? Obviously, the Lord's point is that we believe not *only* in Him, but also in the Father Who sent Him. Just so, Paul's point is that we are not *only* under law, but in a greater sense under grace. God's grace provides for our forgiveness, thus keeping sin (violation of God's law) from having dominion over us.

Remember, without law there can be no sin to be forgiven, and thus no need for grace.



Breaking Point

Speaking at a commencement, John A. Howard, director of the Rockford College Institute, recalled a childhood memory of his Uncle Ralph, whose home he often visited.

"It was a farm, and my uncle always began the day by going out at dawn to get a pitcher of water from the pump.

"One morning there was a crash of the screen door, and then there was another crash. My brother and I went to the window and looked down, and there was Uncle Ralph. He had slipped on some ice and fallen.

"Aunt Mary yelled through the door at him, 'Ralph, Ralph, did you break Mother's blue pitcher?'

'No, my dear, I didn't,' he said. 'But I will.'
"And he did!"

--via House-to-House/Heart-to-Heart

Trust The Lord

"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). Applying this verse is sometimes extremely difficult. The pressures and anxieties of life can lead us to trust in worldly wisdom rather than in our all-knowing God. However, real peace and strength are only found when we place our confidence in Him (Psa. 32:1;25:1) **We should trust the Lord:**

IN EVERYTHING. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). Many people seem to revel in their independence; they view themselves as being self-sufficient, and have little or no room for God in their life (Rev. 3:17). But nothing could be farther from the truth! Trusting the Lord in everything shows our realization of our own insufficiency (Jas. 4:10), and our desperate need for God's help. "And the LORD shall help them...Because they trust in Him." (Psa. 37:40).

FOR EVERYTHING. "Commit your way to the LORD, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass" (Psa. 37:5). Every good and perfect gift comes from the Heavenly Father (Jas. 1:17). It is easy for us to think that everything we have was attained solely through our own efforts, but this is simply not so. It is through God that we live and move, and have our very being (Acts 17:28).

WITH EVERYTHING. "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also" (Matt. 6:21). Some people cling to their possessions or pride as though they were going to have them forever. The folly of this thinking will sadly carry over into eternity. To the faithful child of God, the Father must come first (Matt. 6:33; Luke 14:25-33). When we trust in God with our all, then we have our priorities set properly.

THROUGH EVERYTHING. "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17). We need to trust in Him even in the midst of trials and sufferings, for although we may not understand the purpose of those difficulties, we still can live righteously before God and glorify Him. "The LORD redeems the soul of His servants, and none of those who trust in Him shall be condemned" (Psa. 34:22). May we truly be able to say, "In God We Trust!"

- Mike Vestal (Midland, TX)