

What Does it Mean “Not Under the Law”?

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Speaking to Christians, Paul said, “...if you are led by the Spirit, **you are not under the law**” (Gal. 5:18). Also speaking to Christians, he said, “...you are not under the law but under grace” (Rom. 6:14).

What did Paul mean by these statements? Did he mean, as most churches teach, that God’s law does not *apply* to Christians?

First of all, we must understand what “sin” is. The *definition* of “sin” is given in I John 3:4 — “sin **IS** the transgression of the law” (KJV). Likewise, in Rom. 6:16, “sin” is shown to be the *opposite* of “obedience.”

But obedience to *what*? Transgression of *what* law? Paul *answers* that in the seventh chapter of Romans. There, he said, “I would not have known **what sin was** had it not been for the law. For I would not have known what coveting really was if the **law** had not said, ‘You shall not covet’” (verse 7, NIV). Plainly, the “law” Paul is referring to is **The Ten Commandments!**

A few verses later, Paul said that “the law **is spiritual**” (verse 14). Therefore, it is the transgression of God’s *spiritual law*—as summarized by the Ten Commandments—that constitutes “sin.” That’s what sin **is**... disobedience to God’s spiritual law!

Now that we know what sin is, is there a **penalty** imposed by God for our sinning—for our disobeying His spiritual law? Both the Old and New Testaments reveal that the penalty for sin is **death!** “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezek. 18:4). “For the wages of sin *is* death...” (Rom. 6:23).

Furthermore, we are told that “**all** have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). Therefore, *all* who have ever lived (except Jesus Christ) have sinned and *earned* the death penalty! “...death spread to all men, **because** all sinned” (Rom. 5:12).

Salvation *From* the Death Penalty

When the Bible speaks of “salvation” or “being saved,” it is speaking of being saved **from** the death penalty. And unless we *are* saved from the death penalty, then eternal death is what awaits us all!

“Salvation” is the granting of life after death, as a glorified, spirit being... eternal life in the Kingdom of God.

Let’s notice now the *entirety* of the scripture which we just partially cited: “For the wages of sin *is* death, but the gift of God *is* **eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6: 23).

Jesus Christ is the only person to have *never* sinned. He **never earned** the death penalty! Yet, He **paid** the death penalty *in our stead!* And it was because of the fact that His life is *worth*

more than the sum total of all people who have ever lived, that His death **could** pay the penalty for all mankind.

Yet, this is what many people don't understand: The Bible clearly shows that Christ's sacrifice is **not automatically applied** to everyone! Rather, there are two *conditions* that a person must fulfill in order for Christ's sacrifice to be applied to the individual: **(1)** You must accept Christ as your personal Savior (John 3:16), and **(2)** you must **repent**—that is, turn *from* your past way of life (Rom. 6:3-6) and make an unconditional *surrender* to God (Luke 4:4; 22:42) that you will henceforth *strive* (Luke 13:24)—with the help of the Holy Spirit in you—to live in accordance with God's spiritual *law*, as summarized by the Ten Commandments (Matt.19: 16-19; 7: 21-23; 13: 41-43).

Now, regarding these two *conditions* for Christ's sacrifice to be applied to a person, most church-goers *accept* the first condition, but reject the condition of repentance (and what true repentance is). Yet, notice the following two scriptures: **"Repent** therefore and be converted, **that** your sins may be blotted out..." (Acts 3:19). **"But IF** we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7). So, here we see that it is only **IF** we walk in the light... **IF** we "walk in **newness** of life" and are no longer "slaves of sin" (Rom.6: 4, 6)... no longer slaves of *transgressing* God's law (I John 3:4)... it is only **then** that the blood of Jesus Christ "cleanses us"!

What Paul Meant

So, let's now answer the question posed at the beginning of this article: What did Paul mean when he said that a Christian is "not under the law but under grace"?

He meant that a *Christian* is not under the **penalty** of the law! A Christian is one who has *fulfilled* the two conditions of accepting Christ and turning his life unto obedience to God's law. And, having *fulfilled* those conditions, Christ's sacrifice is then applied TO that individual. The person is then under *grace*—divine **pardon** from the death penalty. His sins are *forgiven*—"blotted out" (Acts 3:19).

Jesus Christ's blood pays the death penalty *in that person's stead*. That person had **earned** the death penalty, by *transgressing* God's law. But the penalty has now been paid, and so the individual is no longer *under* the penalty of the law—he's no longer "*under* the law," as Paul phrased it. He's now under grace (divine pardon).

In Romans 6:14, Paul said, "you are not under law but under grace." People think that this statement does away with the law; but if they would just read the *very next* verse—verse 15—they would see that when you come under grace, you are **not** then free to transgress God's law: "What then? Shall we sin [transgress God's law] because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly **not!**" answered Paul (verse 15).

Consider this. Suppose that you had been caught *stealing* something, and you were brought to trial. The judge decides that in your particular case, he's going to *pardon* you. Do you then think to yourself, "Wow, **there's no longer a law** against stealing!"?

Did the judge do away with the *law*... or did he only do away with the *penalty* in your case? If stealing was unrighteous *before* you were forgiven, then isn't it *still* unrighteous? (Ps.119:172). Has the *definition* of moral and immoral changed? No!

Again, Paul said that "**BY** the law *is* the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20). (Also see Rom.7:7 and Matt. 13: 41-42.)

Why is it that people believe that the law which **defines** "righteous" and "moral behavior" has been done away?! A law that is of such **paramount importance**, that God sent His only begotten Son to **DIE**, as payment for our *breaking* that law?!

God's spiritual law is the **way** to a happy and fulfilling life! Why would He *do away* with such a law?!

Finally, let's realize that the Apostle Paul *totally advocated* the keeping of God's spiritual law! Paul fully realized that God's spiritual law *applies* to Christians! (See the article "Did Paul Do Away With God's Law?")