

UNDER THE LAW OR GRACE (From the book of Romans) by David R Hughes

Romans 6:14 NIV For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Grace is the gift of mercy and forgiveness from God that is undeserved and cannot be earned. Sin is the transgression of God's law. **1 John 3:4** For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Romans 6:23** *To be under the law means one is under the penalty of transgressing the law, which is death. To be under Grace means that by faith in accepting God's sacrifice of Jesus Christ, one is undeservedly forgiven of all past sins and therefore, no longer under the law's death penalty. That person has died to sin and lives in righteousness through Jesus Christ who is now their Lord. Sin was their master but now Jesus is their Lord and Master.* "For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." **Romans 8:2.** *If you take Romans 6:14 out of context and conclude it means that being under grace, we no longer need to obey God's law and commandments, then you should seriously consider a few other verses in Romans and elsewhere to clarify Paul's meaning.*

Romans 6:15-18 NKJV ¹⁵What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! ¹⁶Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin *leading* to death, or of obedience *leading* to righteousness? ¹⁷But God be thanked that *though* you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. ¹⁸And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.

Matthew 6:24 The Amplified Bible ²⁴No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon [money, possessions, fame, status, or whatever is valued more than the Lord]

Matthew 5:17-18 NRSV ¹⁷"Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfil. ¹⁸For truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter,^[a] not one stroke of a letter, will pass from the law until all is accomplished.

Romans 3: 19 -20 NKJV ¹⁹Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

The Greek word “en” translated as “under” in Romans 3, verse 19 means in or inside. So, the law speaks to those (referring to the Jews) living or trying to live inside or within the law with its penalty of death, saying no one’s mouth (including Jews who think they are more righteous than Gentiles) can criticize another for being unrighteous because as the law speaks, it reveals that all people including Jews can become guilty (convicted by their conscience due to knowing the law and its penalty) and accountable for their sin (transgression of the Law with its penalty of death) before God. And because of that truth, no person can be made righteous and justified in God’s sight by just trying to live within the law because His law reveals to our human mind the sins, we all (Jews and Gentiles) have committed making us all guilty before God and subject to the law’s penalty of death.

Romans 3: 21-26 ²¹ But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, ²² even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all ²³ and on all who believe. For there is no difference; ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ being justified ²⁴ freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, ²⁵ whom God set forth as a ²⁵ propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, ²⁶ to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

Re: Verse 21-22 Aside from God’s law, the righteousness of God is also revealed to all who believe through their faith in Jesus Christ as it was witnessed by the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 11:13 NKJV Jesus says “For all the prophets and the law prophesied until John.” The yearly feasts and rituals commanded in God’s law pointed to Jesus Christ and His righteousness which was proven to mankind by His resurrection. Christ’s righteousness is God’s righteousness and Jesus would not have been raised from the dead if He was not the unblemished (righteous without sin) Passover lamb of God.

Re: Verse 23-26 Everyone has sinned, so no one has come close to the glory of God except the sinless glorified Jesus Christ who God glorified. Since all have sinned, there is no difference between Jews or Gentiles regarding unrighteousness. We can only be justified or made righteous before God by accepting in faith, the gift of undeserved and unearned forgiveness for past sins through the ransom Jesus Christ paid by freely offering Himself to be crucified and die in our place for our sins as set forth and depicted in God’s

law (particularly Passover and Day of Atonement). By freely offering this Grace to us, God showed mankind His righteousness and by refraining from enforcing the penalty for sin, God passed over past sins to demonstrate His righteousness at that time and even now, showing that He is just, and He justifies those who have faith in the Jesus for our redemption from sin and death.

Romans 10:4 NKJV ⁴For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

Starting in chapter 9 and continuing in chapter 10:1 Paul is expressing his concern for Israel, in this case the Jews who were rejecting Jesus as the Messiah. He explains in detail how they had great zeal for God but lacked knowledge of His righteousness, so they were trying to establish their own righteousness by keeping God's law and commandments. But keeping the whole law was not possible for mankind in our fallen condition, thus animal sacrifice was instituted by God to temporarily cover sins (transgressions of the law) until Christ came and fulfilled the sacrificial laws. Christ is the end of the old Jewish system of mistakenly believing that outwardly keeping the law justified them and made them righteous to God. The end purpose of the law was to reveal and produce in mankind the mind of Christ and therefore the mind of God.

Hebrews 10:16 NKJV ¹⁶This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; ¹⁷And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.” (a reference to Jeremiah 31: 31-33) *The law did not go away even for believers when Christ was crucified.* **Matthew 5:17-20 NRSVCE** Jesus said “Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets. I have come not to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I tell you until heaven and earth pass away, not one letter, not one stroke of a letter will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Therefore, whoever breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

The righteousness of the Pharisees as Paul explained was by keeping the letter of the law but ignoring the spirit of the law which Jesus kept and taught. So, in their pride and ignorance of God's righteousness they condemned Jesus as unrighteous revealing their hypocrisy and remained under the law and its penalty of death.

Romans 3: 27-31 ²⁷ Where is boasting then? (*concerning righteousness or being justified by God*) It is excluded. (*Our boasting is not valid*) By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith. (*What principle of law invalidates our right to boast? Not works but faith.*) ²⁸ Therefore we conclude that a man is ^[1]justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law. (*Justification by faith is separate from deeds of the law but the law is still valid*) ²⁹ Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, ³⁰ since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. (*God is God of both Jews and Gentiles and there is only one Justification for both: By and through faith. The Jews would be justified by accepting Jesus as their Messiah by the faith they already had in the One true and just God and the Gentiles would be justified by believing in Jesus through their newfound faith in the One true and just God after rejecting all their man-made gods.*) ³¹ Do we then make void the law through faith? Certainly not! On the contrary, we establish the law. (*Being justified by God through faith only, we do not invalidate or do away with the law. Instead, we institute the law (apart from faith) in our hearts as part of our Christian belief or doctrine, but not for justification that absolves us from our sins. Just as prophesied in Jeremiah 31:31-33*)

Romans 14: 1-2 NKJV Receive one who is weak in the faith, *but not to disputes over doubtful things.* ²For one believes he may eat all things, but he who is weak eats *only* vegetables.

We should not assume Paul is talking about Jewish food laws when he doesn't specifically say those words because in the Gentile world he could be speaking of food sacrificed or offered to idols which is a different issue. We must consider the context of the scripture to obtain the correct meaning when the author does not explain in detail. This scripture does not do away with God's clean and unclean food laws.

A person who is weak in the faith might be a newly converted Christian or one who is not yet well founded in Christian belief or doctrine. A Gentile who had been living a world of idolatrous practices all their life could find it difficult to completely remove those mental images, in this case eating meat offered to idols. Therefore, their conscience would make them feel guilty even though it was acceptable for Christians to eat clean meat offered to idols because idols are not gods. We can look at Paul's letter to the Corinthians who were dealing with the same issue of eating meat sacrificed to idols for more understanding.

1 Corinthians 8:4 KJV ⁴As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

1 Corinthians 8:7 KJV ⁷Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

1 Corinthians 10:25-27 NKJV ²⁵ Eat whatever is sold in the meat market, asking no questions for conscience' sake; ²⁶ for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." ²⁷ If any of those who do not believe invites you to dinner, and you desire to go, eat whatever is set before you, asking no question for conscience' sake. ²⁸ But if anyone says to you, "This was offered to idols," do not eat it for the sake of the one who told you, and for conscience' sake; ^[1] for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness."

The one who is weak may eat only vegetables because sacrificing meat to idols was so prevalent in the pagan world, they couldn't be sure if meat offered to them at someone's home or bought at the market was made unclean by being sacrificed to an idol. So, to be safe they would have to stop eating meat all together. Paul contrasts that vegetarian person with one who eats all things which in the context of this chapter's subject would mean eating meat (even if sacrificed to an idol) and also vegetables. The contrast obviously is not eating all things including unclean foods as opposed to Jews eating clean meats only, as some people mistakenly assume and teach. Romans 14: 2 plainly contrasts eating all things opposed to eating only vegetables. This scripture does not prove that the 1st century Christian Church of God did not observe the Biblical food laws. The term "eating all things" used by Paul most likely was intended to mean all clean meats even if they were sacrificed to an idol, because some "things" are poisonous to humans or detrimental to the body in some way. Hence, some of the "weak" Gentile Christians' concern about eating food being made unclean if it had been sacrificed to an idol. The ultimate message in Romans 14, verse 1& 2 is we are not to judge or look down on anyone because they only eat clean meat, or they don't eat meat at all.

Romans 14: 3-4 ³Let not him who eats despise him who does not eat and let not him who does not eat judge him who eats; for God has received him. ⁴Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

In Romans 14, verses 3 & 4 Paul moves on to another issue regarding eating. He makes the contrast between one who eats as opposed to one who does not eat. Since meat is not mentioned here, the only action Paul can be

referring to is fasting as opposed to not fasting. We are not to judge those who are fasting or not fasting because Jesus is the Master of each Christian, and everyone will stand or fall before Him, and He will make us to stand.

Romans 14: 5-6 ⁵One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind. ⁶He who observes the day, observes *it* to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe *it*. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks.

The subject of chapter 14 of Romans is eating food. Paul does not suddenly change the subject in these two isolated verses to Sabbath days as some people believe and teach. The last part of verse 6 proves that. Some translations such as NIV, NLT and NET substituted the word “above” in verse 5 with “more sacred than” or “more holy than” suggesting Paul changed the subject to Jewish holy days instead of eating food. But the subject continues to be about eating food all the way to the end of the chapter. These two verses refer to fasting days (he who does not eat) or feasting days (he who eats) and since the days chosen for them are “doubtful” or not crucial regarding righteousness, everyone can fast or feast on the day or days best suited for themselves. Some Jews fasted on certain days of each week and some fasted twice a week. In Luke 18:12 Jesus told a parable about a Pharisee who prayed at the temple proclaiming he fasted twice a week when stating his righteous deeds to God. In their “The Proper Day for Fasting” article, Ligonier Ministries states “With regard to the Pharisees, first-century Jews regarded fasting as a mark of general piety, not just repentance, and the Pharisees were known for fasting on Mondays and Thursdays.”

More scriptures in Romans pertaining to Law and Grace

Romans 2 12-16 Sinners without law die without law & sinner with law judged by law.

Romans 5: 12-21 Sin through Adam and justification through Christ

Romans 7: 7-12 Is law sin? The Law is holy and just.

Romans 8:1-12 The mind governed by the flesh is death. 14 Sons of God are led by the spirit

Romans 13: 8-10 Love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 15: 5-7 Unity in the church to the glory of God. Also 16:17-18

Romans 16 Unity and personal connections among Christians and warns about divisiveness and false teachers.