

## An Elephant In the Room

by

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Ohev Yisrael, similar to other Messianic Jewish congregations, seeks to observe the laws of *Torah* that God gave to the Israelites at Mt. Sinai. While endeavoring to do so though, we become aware of an “elephant in the room” – one of the Apostle Paul’s allegedly antinomian statements – Romans 6:14 – that says: “*For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace.*”

This sounds like Paul is saying that God’s “grace” releases us to do anything we want, and from having to obey any of God’s laws. Why would the Apostle Paul, a confessed keeper of the Law (Acts 21:17-26), say such a thing? Did Yeshua’s appearance on earth and subsequent sacrifice cause God to change into a permissive liberal? I knew that wasn’t the case, but still, what Paul said perplexed me, so I decided to ask God about it.

What I believe I heard prophetically in reply is this: Being “under grace” is not automatically permissive as some would like it to be. Grace does sometimes imply permissive allowance or forgiveness, but being under God’s grace does not mean that He always applies it to us. Rather, it means that we are subject to the operation of God’s grace, and that He (and only He) decides when to extend it and when to withhold it.

Theologians often define “grace” (*kharis*) as “God’s unmerited favor” (which is correct) but, in his writings, Paul uses it metaphorically to mean “God Himself,” whose very person embodies grace.” Romans 6:14 is therefore informing us that our accountability is no longer merely to the “statutes” of God’s written Word (His *Torah* or Law), but is now directly to God Himself through the living Word, who is Yeshua (John 1:14). Our being “under grace” is Paul’s way of saying that, in this direct accountability to God, God may either extend His grace to us or withhold it, on a case by case basis, according to His supreme sense of mercy and justice. Our being “not under law,” (the Greek word here for “under” is *hupo*, meaning “underneath”) connotes that we are no longer “underneath” the Law’s enforcement; that is, we no longer automatically receive the Law’s penalties for disobedience, but there is no doubt that we continue to be (and are now directly) subject to God’s correction and punishment (as well as His praise and reward) when we are deserving of them. Meanwhile, the commandments of *Torah*, as interpreted by the Holy Spirit, retain their relevance in being a main source for our determining God’s Will, but our “obedience” relationship with God is now direct rather than indirect. That is why Paul says in Galatians 5:18: “*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.*” And similarly in Galatians 3:24-25: “*Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Messiah, that we might be justified by faith. But after faith [meaning “Messiah”] has come, we are no longer under a tutor.*”

What I have said about “grace” thus far has been in response to Paul’s juxtaposing “grace” and “law.” I would, however, be remiss were I not to mention another kind of grace that God never withholds. It is God’s empowerment, through the Holy Spirit, to do as well and as much as God, in His sovereignty, is willing to release to us. So it would seem, for example, that God always

extends grace to a person who seeks His power for obedience, and to do good. We depend on this grace to perform His will.

This article is part of a larger message that I will (or already have) delivered at Ohev's *Shabbat* service. If you find this exposition valuable, I encourage you to ask me for a transcript of the text because it will help you explain Paul to those who oppose observing *Torah* in the New Covenant.