

# Biblical Notes – Romans 6:14

**14 – For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law but under grace.** (14. ἀμαρτία γὰρ ὑμῶν οὐ κυριεύσει· οὐ γάρ ἔστε ὑπὸ νόμου ἀλλὰ ὑπὸ χάριτος.)

"My chapter in this book on the dispensational approach includes an extensive section dealing with passages arguing for cessation of the Mosaic law. Bahnsen's rejection of Romans 6:14 as presenting discontinuity with Mosaic law is based on the lack of article with *nomos*. To him, it does not discuss Mosaic law. Yet there are ample examples of *nomos* without the article that clearly represent the Mosaic law (e.g., Luke 2:23-24; Acts 13:39; Rom. 4:13). The identical expression *hupo nomon* (without the article) is found in 1 Corinthians 9:20, where it clearly refers to the Mosaic law that bound the Jews. The term *nomos* appears without the article in Romans 10:4, a passage Bahnsen admits refers to the Mosaic law."

— Wayne G. Strickland, Response to Greg. L. Bahnsen in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 163.

"Following a typical Reformed exegesis, then, Bahnsen claims that the text teaches only that believers are free from the spiritual condition of bondage and impotence. As I have indicated in my essay, I am sympathetic to, but finally unconvinced by this interpretation. In my view Paul is claiming here that believers are no longer subject to the binding authority of the law; a salvation historical shift has occurred and the Mosaic law is no longer central to God's administration of the promise. However this may be, Bahnsen is surely wrong in suggesting that Paul may not even here be speaking directly about the Mosaic law. As we have seen, "law" in the New Testament denotes the Mosaic law unless there are good reasons to the contrary; no "specifying" additions to the word are needed. Moreover, Paul's immediately preceding (5:13, 20) and following (7:1-25; see esp. v. 7) uses of "law" clearly refer to the Mosaic law."

— Douglas J. Moo, Response to Greg. L. Bahnsen in *Five Views on Law and Gospel*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 169.

"Closely related to this use is a set of Pauline passages where *nomos* describes the epoch or dispensation of Mosaic law. Perhaps the clearest example is found in Romans 6:14-15. In the context, Paul is discussing sanctification rather than justification (v. 12-13), and he sets up a contrast between law and grace. He writes, "because you are not under law [hypo nomon], but [alia] under grace [hypo charin]" (v. 14). The identical preposition *hypo* governing each prepositional phrase and the employment of the strongly contrastive particle *alia* demonstrate that Paul's purpose is to set in clear antithesis the ideas of grace and the law of Moses. He is not suggesting that there was no grace under the law, but that in the Mosaic economy, sanctification came via obedience to the demands of the law, and that this economy has now been superseded by the dispensation of grace. Paul repeats this contrast in the next verse (v. 15). The apostle employs the same phraseology, "under law" (*hypo nomon*) four times in 1 Corinthians 9:20, contrasting it to the obligation of the church saint, who is "in the law of Christ" (*ennomos Christou*). The contrast clearly demonstrates Paul's understanding of a former period dominated by the commands of the Mosaic law (see also Gal. 3:23; 4:4-5). This first category of usage is generally not disputed within Pauline studies. The second category of Pauline usage regards *nomos* as the general principle of law. Contrary to the contention of Sanday and Headlam, it is not true that Paul intends for the articular *nomos* to refer to the principle of law. Paul seldom uses the term in this way, but Romans 7:21 is a clear example: "So I find this law [principle] at work." In the subsequent phrase he identifies or explains the principle, that whenever a person wishes to do good, evil appears to be close at hand. This "law" is derived from Paul's experience or the experience of others. Other debated passages where Paul may be using *nomos* in the sense of principle are Romans 3:27; 7:23, 25; v 8:2; and Galatians 4:21. The third way that Paul uses *nomos* recognizes the major development in history associated with the Incarnation. Just as Paul occasionally uses *nomos* to refer to the Mosaic dispensation, it is apparent that in spite of changes in the dispensations, there still is law. In Romans 3:27b Paul refers to it as the "law ... of faith," contrasted to the principle or *nomos* "of works" (RSV) found in the earlier portion of the same verse. Later, Paul describes the law as the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:2 RSV). Again, this law is clearly different from the former Mosaic law discussed in Romans 8:2-3, for this law liberates from the "law of sin and death." Elsewhere Paul refers to the law of the present period as "the law of Christ" (Gal. 6:12). As previously mentioned, some would argue that Paul occasionally uses *nomos* in a fourth manner, meaning legalism or the misuse of the law. It must be admitted that Paul does identify the misuse of the Mosaic law and condemns such an approach to the application of the law. However, it is noteworthy that wherever Paul addresses such concerns, it is not the term itself that conveys the meaning legalism, but the description in the context of the way in which the law is used that indicates that legalism is in view. For example, in Romans 4:13-14

Paul makes it clear that the Mosaic law is misused if it becomes the means of attempting to attain the promise to Abraham. The term *nomos* itself is not designating legalism; rather, it refers to the Mosaic law as revealed to Moses. But the way that the law is used is presented as inappropriate; the ones seeking justification through the law are "the adherents of the law" (RSV; see also Rom. 10:5; Gal. 3:18; 3:21). If the term *nomos* itself meant legalism, Paul could have merely written "law" rather than "the righteousness that comes by [law]." This explanation about people seeking justification by following the law was only necessary if the audience did not understand "legalism" as part of the semantic range of *nomos*. Likewise, when Jesus refers to those who misunderstand the law, he does not give the term itself the meaning of "misuse of the law." Rather, he understands "law" in its ordinary sense and addresses the corruptions of the law by the Pharisees.

— Wayne G. Strickland, *The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View in Five Views on Law and Gospel*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 246-248.

"It seems clear that the term *nomos* here refers to the Mosaic law. J. Murray has argued against this view, stating that many "who were under the Mosaic economy were the recipients of grace"; instead, law should be understood in the more general sense as commandment. It is argued that the lack of a definite article before the term "law" demonstrates that the principle of law is in view, not the Mosaic law. But there is nothing in the context that warrants a shift in understanding from the previous meaning in Romans 5:20. Likewise, the following context regards the law as the Mosaic law (7:4-14). In addition, general law does not provide a sufficient contrast to grace, because there is law in this sense in grace too—see Paul's reference to "the law of Christ" in Galatians 6:2. It makes sense only if we understand Paul as contrasting two periods, one characterized by the Mosaic law and the other characterized by grace. Westerholm has noted studies of *nomos* which show that Paul used *nomos* with and without the article with no "change in nuance or meaning."<sup>88</sup> Of the eight places where he employs the term "law" with the preposition "under," the article is never found, nor are there any other examples in Scripture where the noun in the accusative case is found with an article. Only in James 2:9 is the preposition found with the articular noun "law," and there it is in the genitive case. Note also that H. Hubner's contention that Paul refers to the termination of the "Lordship of the perverted law" is to be rejected as without support, since there is no discussion of the perversion of the law in the immediate context. Paul argues in Romans 6:14 that the authority of the law has been replaced by a different authority, grace. The two phrases "under law" (*hypo nomon*) and "under grace" (*hypo charin*) are set in contrast to each other. The phrase "under law" occurs several times in Pauline literature (e.g., 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 3:23) and clearly refers to the Mosaic economy. In 1 Corinthians 9:20 (where the phrase occurs four times), it clearly designates the Mosaic law. Paul states in Galatians that Christ was born under the law (Gal. 4:4); that is, he was born during the Mosaic or law dispensation, when the law was operative and authoritative. The same contrast between the present dispensation and the previous law period is presented in Galatians 5:18, where the work of the Holy Spirit, placing believers into the body of Christ and guiding them, shows that the law period has been preempted. As E. P. Sanders remarks: "Paul views all Christians, whether Jew or Gentile, as having died to the law. It is part of the old world order, just as are sin and the flesh, and it must be escaped."<sup>90</sup> With the inauguration of a new epoch, our relationship to law has changed. Whereas the law formerly dominated and controlled, it now has no authority over the life of the saint. This clear articulation that the law is no longer the dominant authority leads to a new discussion launched by Paul that the believer is now obligated to obey Christ as his slave (Rom. 6:15-23). There again Paul makes his case for a dispensational change. The former state was characterized as being "under law" (i.e., under the dominion of law), but since we are now under the authority of grace we must obey as slaves of righteousness. While one might be tempted to engage in sin since the law has been terminated, Paul makes it clear that this termination gives no such warrant, for with the change in dispensations has come a union with Christ that results in believers now being slaves to righteousness."

— Wayne G. Strickland, *The Inauguration of the Law of Christ with the Gospel of Christ: A Dispensational View in Five Views on Law and Gospel*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 263-266.

"I think, then, that not being under the law means not living under the regime or power of the law. Such a concept fits naturally into Romans 5-8, where Paul employs the metaphors of slavery, freedom, and transfer from one regime or power to another to denote the new status of the believer. Christians die to sin and are joined to Christ (6:1-11); are set free from sin and enslaved to God and righteousness (6:15-23); die to the law (7:4), being set free from it (7:6), so as to be joined to Christ (7:4); are released from the sphere of the flesh (7:5; 8:9) and placed within the sphere of the Spirit (7:6; 8:9). That Paul would designate another such transfer from one regime to another by speaking of Christians as no longer under law but grace makes good sense. His point, then, is that the Christian lives in a new regime, no longer dominated by the law with its sin-producing and condemning power, but by Christ and the Spirit. We conclude that as in Galatians 3-4 and 1 Corinthians 9, "under the law" in Romans 6 refers broadly to being under the dominating influence or binding authority of the Mosaic law. The condemnation incurred by failing to obey that law may be included, but it is not the only or even the basic idea. Christians, Paul is asserting and implying in these texts, are no longer subject to the Mosaic

law in the most general possible sense."

— Douglas J. Moo, *The Law of Christ as the Fulfillment of the Law of Moses: A Modified Lutheran View in Five Views on Law and Gospel*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1996), 366.

"The next for gives the reason why sin shall not have dominion over them. For ye are not under the law — literally, under law. — A great variety of interpretations are given of this declaration. But the meaning cannot be a matter of doubt to those who are well instructed in the nature of salvation by grace. It is quite obvious that the law which believers are here said not to be under, is the moral law, as a covenant of works, and not the legal dispensation, — to distinguish it from which may be the reason why the article is here omitted. To affirm that law here is the legal dispensation, is to say that all who lived under the law of Moses were under the dominion of sin. In the sense in which law is here understood, the Old Testament saints were not under it."

— Robert Haldene, *Haldane's Exposition on the Epistle to the Romans and Hebrews, Commentary on Romans 6:14*.

"The basic reason for this is that we are not under the Mosaic Law as the authority under which we live but under grace. Satan can no longer use the Law to hinder the believer's progress (cf. Romans 3:23). God has redeemed us, not by the Law but by grace. We now live under that authority. Paul dealt with the tension this situation creates for the believer in chapter 7. Usually "grace" refers to the principle by which God operates. Yet it also describes the sphere in which the believer lives, as here (cf. Romans 5:2), as "the Law" describes the old realm. "Under grace" is not, however, a condition in which we are free from any responsibility (cf. Matthew 11:28-30; Titus 2:11-12), as Paul proceeded to clarify in Romans 6:15-23. Neither was there no grace under the Mosaic Law."

— Thomas Constable, *Expository Notes of Dr. Thomas Constable, Commentary on Romans 6:14*.

"You are not under the law of Moses, as some of you were before: but now you are all under grace, or the law of grace, where you may find pardon for your sins."

— George Haydock, *George Haydock's Catholic Bible Commentary, Commentary on Romans 6:14*.