

BIBLE & BAGEL

Romans – Our Common Faith

4 January 2016

Christians today often say “we are not under law, we are under grace” as if to say that the law (Torah) is invalid and because of grace we can do whatever we like. This is a misinterpretation of the scripture. Neither Paul nor Yeshua ever declared the Torah invalid. If that be true then the Bible is wrong when it says that the Word of God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8), Yeshua Himself said that His words (which include the Torah since He wrote it) will never pass away (Matthew 24:35). So how do we understand that statement? Read on.

Romans 6:1-11

What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? 3 Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? 4 Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, 6 knowing this, that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. 7 For he who has died has been freed from sin. 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. NKJV

Apostle Paul asks a rhetorical question and then answers it himself; should we continue to live in sin since God is glorified when he forgives us, his answer is a very firm “no”. He points to baptism; in baptism we are united with Messiah into death and raised with Him into a new life. Death frees us from sin because a dead person cannot be tempted to sin, the sin nature no longer has control over him, this is spiritual truth that we have to make a reality in life.

The Gentiles of the first century did not live by the same moral standards as the Jews because they did not have the Torah, always remember that in the time of the Apostles the New Testament had not yet or were still in the process of being written. The Gentiles in Rome grew up with a very loose standard of morality, their religion included the practice of visiting temple prostitutes and homosexuality was an accepted part of life. The challenge for the Apostle, because he was called to the Gentiles was how to raise their standard of morality. What Jews considered sin (because they had God’s standards), they considered acceptable.

So the Apostle Paul tells them that we are not to live in sin any longer because we have been united with Messiah in baptism. Baptism is not just a symbolic gesture but a spiritual act of entering into covenant with Messiah Yeshua. In his letter to the Colossians he equates Baptism with circumcision¹ which to the Jew is a sign of his covenant with God.



Covenant is the basis on which God relates to man and it is an unbreakable bond, throughout the Bible we see that when a covenant is made there is always an action that would seal or ratify it. When God made covenant with Abraham, he walked through the sacrificed animal partsⁱⁱ, he also gave Abraham the physical sign of circumcision that all Jewish men carry on their bodyⁱⁱⁱ. When Yeshua made the new covenant he gave the bread and wine as the sign of that covenant. So Baptism is also a sign of our covenant with Messiah and a sign that we have new life in Him.

We need to be aware that when we went through baptism we have received a new life through Messiah and we need to walk in awareness of who we are now, even though we might look the same and everyone else thinks we are still the same person, in the spirit we are new and we need to live a new way by always reminding ourselves that the old person is already dead.

Romans 6:12-14

12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. NKJV

So the Apostle, speaking to people who were accustomed to the Roman lifestyle with its loose morals tells them that they must no longer allow their physical desires to control them but rather they must submit their desires to God and to do what is right in God's eyes i.e. to live by the moral standards of the Torah, not by of legalism or trying to do it by their own effort but by the grace that God has given us all.

This statement "we are not under law but under grace" has been misinterpreted by many Christians to say that we no longer need the law (Torah), this is not what the Apostle was saying at all, what he meant was that we are not to live the new life by legalistic practices of our own efforts but rely on the grace of God to live a life within the framework of Torah which are our moral boundaries.

If you have ever tried "to be good" on your own you will realize that you soon fail, but we rely on God's help, we are able to do it. The key is humbling ourselves before him and admitting we need His help; Proverbs 3:34 says that God gives grace to the humble and both Peter^{iv} and James^v quote this verse. So if we humble ourselves before Him he will give us the grace to overcome and live the life He desires for us.

ⁱ Colossians 2:11-12

ⁱⁱ Genesis 15:17-20

ⁱⁱⁱ Genesis 17:10-13

^{iv} 1 Peter 5:5

^v James 5:6

