

WE ARE NOT “UNDER THE LAW”

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PROBLEM

Many Christians believe and teach that we are no longer “under the law”, meaning that some if not all of the commands of Scriptures (specifically the Torah) which God gave to Moses at Sinai are no longer applicable to believer today. While it is true that Paul says he is not “under the law”, a careful study of the context of this phrase will not support the conclusion that it means the law does not need to be followed. We should therefore be extremely careful in how we using this phrase, since it is all too easy to propagate misconceptions. While we are not “under the law,” as Paul teaches, what exactly does that mean?

The preposition “under” in the phrase “under the law” is actually translated from various Greek prepositions. In the ESV, for example, “under the law” is translated from the Greek prepositions in (ἐν), through (διὰ), according to (κατά), and under (ὑπό). This is one important factor that needs to be kept in mind. Another important factor has to do with the scope meaning of the word **nomos** “law.”

The Greek **nomos** usually translated “law” can have a variety of meanings. It can refer to law in general, such as the “laws of nature”, or it can refer to a specific set of laws, such as the Torah, which is the way Paul usually uses it. However even in that sense, it can refer to the written Torah, or potentially to the oral Torah, which is sometimes also referred to as the “traditions of the Fathers”. Furthermore, and crucial to understanding this portion of Scripture, First Century Greek had no separate word for “legalism”, so the same word **nomos** would be used to for either “law” or “legalism”. Thus, understanding the context is essential to understanding the writings of Paul when he uses the word **nomos**. Note the following by C.E.B. Cranfield (International Critical Commentary, Romans, p 853):

“...that the Greek language of Paul’s day possessed no word-group corresponding to our ‘legalism,’ ‘legalist’ and ‘legalistic.’ This means that he lacked a convenient terminology for expressing a vital distinction, and so was surely seriously hampered in the work of clarifying the Christian position with regard to the law. In view of this, we should always, we think, be ready to reckon with the possibility that Pauline statements which at first sight seem to disparage the law, were really directed not against the law itself but against that understanding and misuse of it for which we now have a convenient terminology. In this very difficult terrain, Paul was pioneering. If we make allowances for these circumstances, we shall not be so easily baffled or misled by a certain impreciseness of statement which we shall sometimes encounter.”

Given the above, it quite possible (I would say likely) that the phrase “under the law” could be better translated “under legalism” in some cases. If that were the case, it could be referring to the many traditions of the Fathers (the oral Torah) and the Rabbinic “fences” (the various yokes of the Rabbis), as well as the false notion that righteousness can be gained by keeping the commands of the Torah.

With the above in mind, the following sections look at every use of the phrase “under the law” in the ESV. Perhaps the most commonly reference passage used to support the view that Christians do not need to obey the law is found in 1 Cor 9. Therefore that passage will be reserved for last, since the context and meaning of the other uses may be helpful in gaining an understanding of that passage.

PHP 3:4-6

Philippians 3:4-6 (ESV)

⁴If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness **under the law**, blameless.

under the law = lit. “in (ἐν) the law”

In this passage Paul is arguing that from the traditional Jewish perspective of his day, he was as religious as anyone could be. He was of pure Jewish blood, raised according to the law, and a member of the highly esteemed group of

Pharisees. He kept all the law with such rigor that he could say in this he was blameless. No one, he argues, could obtain more righteousness under the law than he. Yet he goes on to argue in the following verses that this “righteousness of his own” is not enough. True righteousness can never come from doing the “works of the law”, but only through faith. It is through Messiah that Paul says he is now “*found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith*” (Phil 3:9). In summary, Paul used to think that he could obtain righteousness under the law, but he now realizes that true righteous can only be obtained through faith in Messiah. Note that nowhere does this imply the commands of Torah are not to be obeyed. Paul’s thesis here is simply that no matter how diligently one may keep the commands of the law, this alone, without faith in Messiah, can never result in our right standing (righteousness) before God.

HEB 9:22

Hebrews 9:22 (ESV)

²² Indeed, **under the law** almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.

“under the law” = lit. “according to (κατά) the law”

In the context of this passage, the Messiah as the mediator of the new covenant is being contrasted with the priests who mediated the first covenant. The priests and their sacrifices were “patterns” of the Messiah and his sacrifice. According to the law, there is no forgiveness of sin without the shedding of blood. Thus, the sacrifice of the Messiah provided the blood which “once for all put away sin” (Heb 9:26).

JAMES 2:12

James 2:12 (ESV)

¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged **under the law** of liberty

“under the law = lit. “through (διὰ) the law”

James is rebuking those in the *ekklesia* who are showing partiality to the rich. He is telling them that in showing partiality they are committing sin and therefore transgressing the law. James reminds them that the law says “love your neighbor as yourself” (James 2:8). This applies to those who are rich as well as to those who are poor. As believers in Messiah, we have been shown mercy. Our sins have been forgiven. This freedom from the bondage of living under continual sin is our freedom from the law. We are now under the law of liberty, and should live accordingly. This means we need to offer others the same grace and forgiveness that we have been offered through the Messiah. We are not to “become judges with evil thoughts” but rather to show mercy to all, for “mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).

ROM 2:12-13

Romans 2:12-13 (ESV)

¹² For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned **under the law** will be judged **by the law**. ¹³ For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.

under the law = lit. “in (ἐν) the law”; by the law = lit. “through (διὰ) the law”

In this passage Paul is teaching that both Jew and Gentile will be judged for their sins. Gentiles who do not keep the laws, will perish even though they do not “possess” the law as the Jews to. And as for the Jews who do actually “possess” the law, they too will be judged for their sins just as the law requires. In the subsequent verses Paul tells the Jews that they will be judged for their sins regardless of their heritage as keepers of God’s law. And not only will the Jews be judged for their sins in spite of the fact that they are in possession of the law, but furthermore the Gentiles will actually be justified for their obedience to the law even though they themselves do not possess the law, for in obeying the law they show that “the law is written on their hearts.” Paul concludes this argument by saying, “*For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God*” (Rom 2:28-29).

ROM 3:19-20

***Romans 3:19–20* (ESV)**

¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are **under the law**, so that every mouth may be stopped, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. ²⁰ For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since **through the law** comes knowledge of sin.

under the law = lit. “in (ἐν) the law”; through the law = lit. “through (διὰ) the law”

This passage in Romans 3 is really a continuation of Paul’s theme from Romans 2, in which he argues that Jews and Gentiles will both be judged alike for their sins. Jews are not any better off than Gentiles, since all are “under sin” (Rom 3:9). In Rom 2:12 the same phrase “under the law” (lit. “in [ἐν] the law”) is used to contrast those in possession of the law with those not having the Torah (Rom 2:14). Therefore in Rom 3:19 those “in the Torah” should also be understood to refer those who are “in possession of the Torah.” In other words, Paul is here referring to the Jews, who even though they are God’s chosen people and are keepers of His law, still stand condemned for their sins. How much more, he argues, will all the other nations who have not been chosen in that same special way also be held accountable to God for their sins. Rom 3:20 continues with Paul’s argument that simply doing the things commanded by the law will never save anyone. It can never be so, since by truly keeping the law one is constantly reminded that of sins that must continually be forgiven.

GAL 3:21-24

***Galatians 3:21–24* (ESV)**

²¹ Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. ²² But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. ²³ Now before faith came, we were held captive **under the law**, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴ So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith.

under the law = lit. “under (ὕπὸ) the law”

There is no law that can be obeyed which can give life. Righteousness can never come from obedience to any law. The law that we are given in the Scriptures is no exception. The law reveals our sin to us, and thus our need for continual forgiveness. The law shows us that we can never be freed from our sins. Therefore Paul says “Scripture imprisoned everything under sin.” In other words, without faith in Messiah, without His coming, we would be under the curse of law forever, always imprisoned with our sin. There is no justification without Faith in Messiah. This is similar to Paul’s arguments in Romans 3 and Romans 7:9-12.

Without faith in Messiah, all are “held captive under the law” because “the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin.” Here Paul equates with the law and Scriptures, since the Scriptures contain the law. The Scripture imprisons and the law holds captive. Those who are held captive “under the law” are also imprisoned by Scripture. This passage does not teach that people should not obey the law anymore than it teaches we should not obey Scripture. The point is that the law shows us our sins, and it is only by faith in what Messiah has done that we can be freed from the captivity of sin. By faith in Messiah we are no longer held captive under the Torah. We are no longer imprisoned by Scripture. The law guided us, as a tutor, showing us our sins and the need for salvation, so that when the Messiah came we could be justified by faith in Him.

GAL 4:3-5

***Galatians 4:3–5* (ESV)**

³ In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴ But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born **under the law**, ⁵ to redeem those who were **under the law**, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

under the law = lit. “under (ὕπὸ) the law”

In this passage it seems that Paul is talking primarily to the Gentile believers. This paragraph seems to start in Gal 3:29, with Paul reassuring them that they are indeed Abraham’s offspring. They are no longer enslaved to the elementary spirits of the world (Gal 4:3 and Gal 4:9). It seems that Paul is drawing a parallel between the kind of

slavery that the Gentiles had once lived in, with the kind of slavery that the “false brothers” in Galatia were now trying to impose on these Galatian Gentile believers. Both Jews and Gentiles were once “in slavery” to sin trying to live righteously according to the ways of man. The Jews were enslaved to the false teachings of the Judaism of their day, which taught them that righteousness came from their ethnicity or by the acts of keeping the law. Likewise the Gentiles were also slaves to sin and traditions and false teachings of man – but not from knowledge and teaching regarding Torah, but from the Greek philosophies of pagan religion, that believed in the pantheon of gods and goddesses, including the four “elementary spirits of the world”: earth (Demeter), water (Poseidon), air (Hera), fire (Hephaestus). In worship of the gods and goddesses, they had rites and rituals that they were taught they must observe. They were slaves to this pagan lifestyle. But through faith in Messiah have been set free.

The Messiah came “under the law,” meaning He came as a Jew, as the son of David, and as a part of the people in possession of the law. He was born and raised “under the law,” perfectly keeping all the commands of the law. Likewise he came as prophesied in the law. And by his own words he came to fulfill the law (Matt 5:17). He came to redeem those under the law (the people of Israel) so that the Gentiles might also be adopted as sons, and that all may be freed from their slavery to sin. As Paul says in Romans, salvation comes “to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek” (Rom 1:16).

GAL 4:21-23

Galatians 4:21–23 (ESV)

²¹ Tell me, you who desire to be **under the law**, do you not listen to the law? ²² For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. ²³ But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise.

under the law = lit. “under (ὐπό) the law”

Given the context of the prior chapter, when Paul addresses those “who desire to be under the law,” he seems to be talking to those people who are considering returning to the legalistic observance of the Torah practiced by the prevailing Judaism of the day. This prevailing Judaism taught that it was Jewish religious status and the performing of the works of the law which resulted in righteousness before God. This prevailing Judaism also taught that for Gentiles to obtain salvation, they must undergo ritual conversion to Judaism as the first step, after which performance of the works of the law was also required. Paul, however, consistently teaches that neither Jewish heritage nor the keeping of the law can ever make one righteous. There is no righteousness apart from faith in Messiah. It’s not about whether the law has value or should be followed, but rather what it is that people rely upon for their justification.

Paul’s allegory here contrasts between those who believe the works of the Torah save them and those who believe that faith in Messiah saves them. Trying to obtain righteousness through keeping the law is no different than Abraham trying to fulfill God’s promise by having a child through Hagar. Paul contrasts the method of having a son by Hagar, born out of the plans of man (man’s way), with the method of having a son by Sarah, born out of faith in the promise of God (God’s way). So those “under the law” would be paralleled with those who are trying to obtain their right standing with God by doing it man’s way... by keeping the legalistic traditions of the elders and fences of the Rabbis, and believing that keeping the law results in righteousness. Paul is using the phrase “under the law” here to describe a type of legalism – those who think that keeping the law, or following the traditions and teachings of man will give them right standing with God. God’s promises are not accomplished through humanly endeavors of the flesh. Righteousness comes through faith in Messiah, by His Spirit, just as God miraculously gave Sarah the promised child.

Paul ends this teaching by quoting from Genesis 21:10: “*Cast out the slave woman and her son, for the son of the slave woman shall not inherit with the son of the free woman*” (Gal 4:30). This is a very strong statement. Paul is saying that Jewish people who do not recognize that faith in Messiah is what justifies them, but instead believe they are justified through the works of the law, will be cast out and not receive the inheritance of eternal life.

GAL 5:16-25

Galatians 5:16–25 (ESV)

¹⁶ But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep

you from doing the things you want to do. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not **under the law**. ¹⁹ Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, ²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, ²¹ envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. ²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. ²⁴ And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. ²⁵ If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in step with the Spirit.

under the law = lit. “under (ὕπὸ) the law”

At first glance it is not clear how “you are not under the law” fits in the immediate context of Paul’s teaching believers they should walk by the Spirit. However it makes more sense in view of the larger context of Galatians. Throughout the book, Paul has been emphasizing that the righteousness comes from faith rather than from keeping the law. But note that he never teaches not to keep the law, only that the law can never be a means to righteousness. Because the law continually shows us our sin, apart from faith in Messiah we are held captive by the law, imprisoned by the Scripture because of our sin (Gal 3:21-24). But our faith in Messiah has freed us from this captivity to sin. Therefore, Paul writes, you should live your life accordingly!

It is my hypothesis that the “false brothers” who are trying to persuade the Gentile believers in Galatia to convert to Judaism and accept the perspective of the prevalent Judaism of the day were sowing seeds of discord in the community. Perhaps these “false brothers” were living their lives according to the flesh, as outlined in Gal 5:19-20. These were false brothers who were “under the law” and yet living lives of sin outside the law. In that case Paul is telling the believers not to live as those who are “under the law” seem to be living. There is a better way.

Paul tells them to serve one another through love (Gal 5:13), not because they are commanded by the law, but in freedom, because they want to from their heart. Paul reminds them (Gal 5:14) that the law is fulfilled by loving your neighbor as yourself. Thus there is no room for enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, and so forth. Walking in the Spirit means you do not gratify the sinful desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16-17).

Therefore, considering the wider context of Galatians, when Paul says, “*But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law*” (Gal 5:13), he is telling them they should live as though their lives are truly being led by the Spirit. They are no longer help captive to the law, imprisoned by Scripture because of their sin, because their sins have been forgiven once and for all by the Messiah’s sacrifice. So, Paul says, if your sins have been forgiven, then live that way. Let your life show that you are walking in the forgiveness of the Spirit and not still until the bondage of sin!

I COR 9:19-22

1 Corinthians 9:19–22 (ESV)

¹⁹ For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. ²⁰ To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those **under the law** I became as one **under the law** (though not being myself **under the law**) that I might win those **under the law**. ²¹ To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. ²² To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.

under the law = lit. “under (ὕπὸ) the law”

At first glance, in this section of Scripture Paul seems to say that he is no longer under the law, and therefore he no longer had to obey Torah. In other words, since he is now a “Christian” he no longer had to obey the Torah, since that is only for Jews.

The traditional Christian view is stated clearly by Constable:

Tom Constable’s Expository Notes (1 Cor 9:21):

The references to law in this verse may be confusing. In describing Gentiles as being without law, Paul did not mean that Gentiles are totally lawless (cf. Rom. 2:14). He meant they were not under the Law of Moses as the Jews were (v. 20). Paul wanted his readers to understand that even though he did not observe the Mosaic Law when he was with Gentiles (Gr. *anomos*) he was still under God’s authority (*ennomos*). As a Christian he was not under the Law of Moses, but he was under the Law of Christ (cf. Gal. 6:2). The law of God for Jews before

the Cross was the Law of Moses, but His law for Christians in the present age is the Law of Christ. The Law of Christ is the code of responsibilities that Christ and His apostles taught, which the New Testament contains. Some of the same commands are in the Mosaic Law though the codes, the Mosaic Law and the Law of Christ, are not the same.

While it may be technically possible to interpret these verses in this way, to do so requires them to be removed from the context of the whole of Scripture. This traditional view is based on an incorrect understanding of the Law of Moses (the Torah) and on Yeshua's and Paul's view of the Torah, as presented elsewhere in Scripture.

In this passage Paul is simply saying that he is trying his best to relate to people as they are. He wants to see things from their perspective; understand life as they see it. In that way he can more effectively communicate the good news to them. Paul is no longer "under the law" in the sense that he is no longer held captive by the law or imprisoned by Scripture because of his sin (Gal 3:21-24). Yet he diligently keeps not only the commands of Scripture, but also adheres to the traditions of the elders (see Acts 21:23-26, Acts 23:6-7, Acts 24:10-21). He was as a Jew to the Jews and as one under the law to those under the law.

David Stern, in the Jewish New Testament, offers a far better translation than most English versions:

1 Corinthians 9:19-22 Jewish New Testament.

¹⁹ For although I am a free man, not bound to do anyone's bidding, I have made myself a slave to all in order to win as many people as possible. ²⁰ That is, with Jews, what I did was put myself in the position of a Jew, in order to win Jews. With people in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the *Torah*, I put myself in the position of someone under such legalism, in order to win those under this legalism, even though I myself am not in subjection to a legalistic perversion of the *Torah*. ²¹ With those who live outside the framework of *Torah*, I put myself in the position of someone outside the *Torah* in order to win those outside the *Torah*—although I myself am not outside the framework of God's *Torah* but within the framework of *Torah* as upheld by the Messiah.

²² With the "weak" I became "weak," in order to win the "weak." With all kinds of people I have become all kinds of things, so that in all kinds of circumstances I might save at least some of them.

YESHUA'S VIEW OF TORAH

The notion that Christ or the apostles could have taught something other than complete obedience to the Torah is totally contradictory to the very words of the Messiah himself:

Matthew 5:17-19 (ESV)

¹⁷ **"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.** ¹⁸ **For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished.** ¹⁹ **Therefore whoever relaxes 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 will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.**

Even the least of the commands were to be obeyed. It is to be that way until all is accomplished; until heaven and earth pass away. Other Scriptures also show similar a perspective:

Mark 10:17-21 Yeshua first answer to the rich young ruler's question about how to inherit eternal life is basically "Keep the Commandments". And in Matt 23:23 he tells the Pharisees that they need to obey both the major and the minor commands of Scripture. In Mark 7:1-13 he instructs the people to obey the commands of God rather than the traditions of man.

Yeshua said:

John 14:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ **"If you love me, you will keep my commandments.**

But what were his commands?

John 14:24 (ESV)

²⁴ **Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.**

His commands were no different than those of the Father. How could they possibly be different? He and the Father are one. The Father's commands are the Son's commands.

John states it even more clearly when he teaches that to love God is to obey His (God's) commands:

1 John 5:3 (ESV)

³ **For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments.** And his commandments are not burdensome.

God's commandments are those found in His Word to us. Nowhere are we ever told not to obey them.

YESHUA WAS SINLESS

Scriptures are also clear that Yeshua was without sin:

Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, **yet without sin.**

1 Peter 2:21–22 (ESV)

²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. ²² **He committed no sin,** neither was deceit found in his mouth.

And what is sin? Most simply, sin is disobeying the commands of God. For Yeshua not to have sinned, he had to perfectly keep the Torah. And he did:

1 John 3:4–5 (ESV)

⁴ Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. ⁵ You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and **in him there is no sin.**

This is even a stronger verse when one understands the word “lawlessness” as “Torah-lessness”. Those who sin break Torah. They live outside Torah. Yeshua, however, had no sin. He lived within Torah. If we are to “live like Christ”, we are to live like he did. And He lived in obedience the commands of the Father. Yeshua is our example, tempted in all ways as we are, yet without sin.

Just as the twelve disciples were taught to live like their Rabbi, He instructed them to make other disciples, teaching them the very same thing:

Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV)

¹⁹ **Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,** ²⁰ **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

PAUL'S VIEW OF TORAH

When Paul was defending himself before the governor, countering the accusations of the Jewish leaders, he made it clear that he believes (and the clear implication was that he lives by) **everything** in the Torah:

Acts 24:14–16 (ESV)

¹⁴ But this I confess to you, that according to the Way, which they call a sect, I worship the God of our fathers, **believing everything laid down by the Law and written in the Prophets,** ¹⁵ having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust. ¹⁶ So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.

In Romans, Paul states clearly how he feels about the Torah. It is holy, righteous, and good:

Romans 7:12 (ESV)

¹² So the **law is holy**, and the commandment is **holy and righteous and good.**

Furthermore, when talking about salvation coming from faith and not the “works of Torah”, he makes it clear that that faith upholds Torah. Our faith does not nullify Torah. On the contrary, it should lead to obedience of Torah:

Romans 3:31

Romans 3:31 (ESV)

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! **On the contrary, we uphold the law.**

It should be remembered that Romans was written primary to a Gentile audience. So Paul is making it clear to Gentiles that their faith should lead them to keep Torah. Likewise, when Paul writes to the predominantly Gentile group of believers in Ephesians, he tells them:

2 Timothy 3:14–17 (ESV)

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ **All Scripture** is breathed out by God and **profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness**, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

“All Scriptures” does not refer to the “New Testament” since that did not exist yet. Paul was referring to the Torah, which can include not just the Pentateuch, but also the Writings and the Prophets; in other words, all of what we call the “Old Testament” today.

To Titus, Paul writes:

Titus 2:13–14 (ESV)

¹³ waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, ¹⁴ who gave himself for us **to redeem us from all lawlessness** and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

The Messiah came, not to free us from “the law”, but to redeem us from all lawlessness (Torah-lessness). He is the mediator of the New Covenant, which according to Jer 31 was to write the Torah upon our hearts:

Jeremiah 31:31–34 (ESV)

³¹ “Behold, the days are coming, declares YHWH, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, ³² not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares YHWH. ³³ For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares YHWH: **I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.** And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. ³⁴ And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know YHWH,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares YHWH. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

The New Covenant helps believers to keep Torah by writing it upon our hearts. In other words, we are given a heart-desire to keep the Father’s commands, because we know His love and grace and truly want to do whatever He asks in return for the love and grace He has shown us.

SUMMARY

When understood in context, the New Testament use of the phrase “under the law” is consistent with the teachings of both Yeshua and Paul, as well as those of the Torah itself. One who is “under the law” generally refers to one who is held captive by the law or imprisoned by Scripture because of his sin. Those who believe that righteousness can be obtained through legalism, either by keeping the commands of the Torah or by keeping the laws and traditions of man, will forever be held captive by their sins. There is no path to righteousness other than through faith in Messiah and the acknowledgement of what He did when He sacrificed his sinless life for us.

Those with faith in the Messiah, like Paul, are no longer under the law. This means we are no longer held captive by the law because of our sins. The law would require death for our sins, but the Messiah died on our behalf. Our faith in Messiah has freed us from the consequences of the law.

Nowhere in the Scriptures above is there any implication that God does not still intend for his people to follow the law He gave them. Therefore if we use the term “under the law” we need to be careful to explain the context of what Scripture teaches so as not to continue propagating false understanding.