

It is important then to understand that a right **balance** must be navigated continually between **indicative** and **imperative**. It is important to emphasize indicatives. The indicatives are the fuel and motivation for the imperatives. Kevin DeYoung comments on this; *“We ought to positively glory in the indicatives of the gospel. The indicatives ought to fuel our following of the imperatives. Our obedience must be grounded in the gospel. Sanctification is empowered by faith in the promises of God. We need to be reminded of our justification often and throughout our Christian lives. Our pursuit of personal righteousness will not go anywhere without a conviction that we are already reckoned positionally righteous in Christ. So let’s be passionately and repetitively gripped by the gospel of free grace.”*

But equally important is to insist on the imperatives that flow out of the indicatives. The **“grace of God instructs us to deny ungodliness.”** They go together and work for our sanctification. DeYoung comments further; *“Imperatives must be rooted in indicatives. The question, however, is whether we betray the indicatives by insisting directly and explicitly for Christians to work hard at obeying the imperatives. No one denies that obedience to the imperatives is crucial. But can we demand obedience to those imperatives? Or is that falling back on law? The central question in this discussion is not just a matter of emphasis between the indicatives and imperatives, but whether emphasizing the indicatives accomplishes the goal of the imperatives without ever insisting upon them. Or to put it another way, is sanctification by faith alone in our justification by faith alone? I think not. The last thing I want is to be the guy who says “stop making the gospel so important.” I never want to encourage people to emphasize the gospel less. But it is possible to emphasize the gospel in a wrong way. The Reformed confessions understand that obedience to God’s commands—which we all want—is not accomplished merely by insisting on indicatives, but also by insisting directly and explicitly on the imperatives that flow from them.”*

Let us see then that a healthy understanding of the grace of God in all of its promise and fullness is important and should be constantly emphasized in our Christian life. But equally important is the desire for God’s people to be holy and conform practically to God’s will and desire for our lives. This also then addresses the issue of the role of the Law for us. The Law is holy and good and rightly used when it is given to inform us of God’s will and also of His character. It helps us to understand who He is and what His purposes are for us in the world. DeYoung comments on this as well; *Let’s not be afraid to land on law—never as the means of meriting justification, but as the proper expression of having received it....The Lutheran Formula of Concord is absolutely right in when it says, “We believe, teach, and confess that the preaching of the Law is to be urged with diligence, not only upon the unbelieving and impenitent, but also upon true believers, who are truly converted, regenerate, and justified by faith” (Epitome 6.2). Preachers must preach the law without embarrassment. Parents must insist on obedience without shame. The law can, and should, be urged upon true believers—not to condemn, but to correct and promote Christlikeness. Both the indicatives of Scripture and the imperatives are from God, for our good, and given in grace.”*

Hear then is an application of using the Law in its proper role now to inform us of the will of God that we might conform to it. The Law leads us to a knowledge of God’s will, as does the entire Bible, Old and New Testaments. The Old is of course understood in light of the New, the

Law is interpreted from the perspective of the Gospel. It therefore has a glorious and sanctifying role of leading us to the knowledge of God's will when **rightly understood and applied.** And so we then seek to understand what the will of the Lord is and have our minds renewed with this knowledge so that we might please Him in every way.

Romans 12:1-2 - 1 I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. 2 And **do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.** NASB

Colossians 1:9-12 - 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that **you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects,** bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. NASB

Ephesians 5:15-17 - 15 Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men, but as wise, 16 making the most of your time, because the days are evil. 17 So then do not be foolish, **but understand what the will of the Lord is.** NASB

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3 - 4 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us **instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification;** that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; NASB

1 Peter 4:1-2 - 1 Therefore, since Christ has suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same purpose, because he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, 2 **so as to live the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for the lusts of men, but for the will of God.** NASB

See here that the New Testament explains that it is necessary for us to pursue an understanding of God's will for our lives as He has commanded us in these passages. But it also explains that the **Old Testament Scriptures are given for our learning** as well. The word for "*Scripture*" in 2 Timothy 3:16 is [*graphe 1124*] and it means the Old Testament Scriptures.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 - 16 **All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;** 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. NASB

2 Peter 1:19-21 - 19 And so we have **the prophetic word made more sure, to which you do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place,** until the day dawns and the morning star arises in your hearts. 20 But know this first of all, that **no prophecy of Scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, 21 for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.** NASB

To put this another way, **the New Testament prescribes that we use the Old Testament for teaching,** encouragement and correction in godliness. It was a common practice of the Apostles to refer to the Old Testament as a means of discerning God's will and how it should be applied and understood.

Romans 15:3-4 - 3 For even Christ did not please Himself; but as it is written, "The reproaches of those who reproached Thee fell upon Me." 4 For **whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures** we might have hope. NASB

1 Corinthians 9:8-11 - I am not speaking these things according to human judgment, am I? **Or does not the Law also say these things?** 9 For it is written in the Law of Moses, "You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing." God is not concerned about oxen, is He? 10 **Or is He speaking altogether for our sake? Yes, for our sake it was written,** because the plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops. 11 If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you? NASB

Notice that these passages are not merely *typology* pointing to some greater New Testament reality, but **historical narratives of God's dealings with His people teaching and warning us** about His nature and applying it to us in a very similar way that it applied to them.

1 Corinthians 10:5-13 - Nevertheless, with most of them God was not well-pleased; for they were laid low in the wilderness. **6 Now these things happened as examples for us, that we should not crave evil things, as they also craved.** 7 And **do not be idolaters**, as some of them were; as it is written, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and stood up to play." 8 **Nor let us act immorally**, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. 9 **Nor let us try the Lord**, as some of them did, and were destroyed by the serpents. 10 **Nor grumble, as some of them did**, and were destroyed by the destroyer. 11 Now **these things happened to them as an example, and they were written for our instruction**, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. 12 Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. 13 No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and **God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it.** NASB

Notice Paul's application from Israel's wanderings in the desert to the Corinthians and also to us. *"We should not crave evil things as they also craved and do not be idolaters, as some of them were."* Paul is not making nice suggestions for us to consider if we like, no indeed, **he is giving strict instruction and warning to the church to abstain from lust and also from idolatry and immorality.** He then reasons with **indicatives** explaining that *"God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, that you may be able to endure it."* See here the Old Testament Law preached and applied to New Testament Christians by the Apostle Paul. Peter does something similar.

2 Peter 2:6-9 - 6 and **if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly thereafter;** 7 and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men 8 (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day with their lawless deeds), 9 **then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment.** NASB

See here then the importance of understanding the Word of God, both Old and New Testaments so that we can **rightly discern the will of the Lord** and apply it to our lives so that we walk in a manner pleasing to Him. And this does in fact include **imperative** commandments that are repeated and applied to us of which God expects ready obedience from us. It is NOT **legalism** for the church to preach obedience to explicit commandments from Scripture, when rightly applied. Rather it is the duty of pastors and teachers to bring imperatives consistent with the Word to bear upon our lives and our consciences. However it is **extremely important that these imperatives not be confused with the indicatives** of the Gospel. Imperatives are now the proper expression of worship and godliness as a RESULT of our justification, and never a means to it. We are not saved by the works of the Law, or even obedience to New Testament commands, but by faith in Jesus Christ alone. He is Himself our righteousness before God. Therefore, the **indicatives** are where we rest by faith in the sovereign work of God through Christ and the Spirit for our righteousness and assurance of salvation. And the **imperatives** are the obedience which God fully expects of those of us He has called, saved and justified as an expression of the fact that we have indeed been saved and justified.

Colossians 3:12 - 12 And so, **as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience;** NASB

Legalism, License and Christian Liberty

So how do we wade through the water of imperatives without it seeming like they somehow merit our justification or right standing with God? After all, they are imperatives, they are necessary and mandatory. And what is legalism and how do we avoid the trappings and snares of