

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

religious hypocrisy and self-righteousness? And what about our sin as Christians, how does God see this? After all, we all sin rather frequently. Is it possible to be so libertine as to live in license and lose our justification? In order to answer these questions, let us first define a few terms.

What is legalism?

Legalism is anything we do or don't do to earn favor with God that we or others insist or impress upon us. This can either be the favor of justification in salvation or a lesser form of favor in regard to God's will for daily living and sanctification. It is a sinful way of either self-righteously exalting self or controlling and demeaning others.

First and in its worst abuse, **legalism** is the idea that one can be **saved by the works** of the Law. As we have seen in Romans 3:19-28, salvation come by grace, through faith, in Christ alone. No one can be justified in God's sight by the works of the Law (Rom 3:20, Gal 2:16). This kind of legalism then is a violation of essential Christian orthodoxy. In this sense we speak about a dangerous and damning heresy concerning salvation. This is a destructive and Gospel denying form of legalism. It is the Galatian heresy of the Judiazers, the first century heretics who taught that one must be circumcised in order to please God and be saved. CJ Mahaney comments on this legalism... *"Legalism is seeking to achieve forgiveness from God, justification before God, and acceptance by God, through our obedience to God. In other words, a legalist is anyone who behaves as if he or she can earn God's approval and forgiveness through performance. At its heart legalism is self-atonement for the purpose of self-glorification and ultimately self-worship. Many of us (and I include myself here) can approach legalism casually. But legalism is serious and it is deadly."* We most certainly divide with any so called Christian who maintains this kind of doctrinal position and who will not be swayed when carefully shown the biblical basis for justification by grace, through faith, in Christ alone.

Second, legalism is the making of **man-made religious rules** or requirements that we or others expect and insist conformity to. This is a less lethal form of legalism, but still nonetheless destructive and sinful. It is usually a list of do's and don'ts, or church traditions or rules that are even at times, unspoken or vague. This kind of legalism is how other people think we should live instead of how the Bible tells us to live, or at least how they think the Bible says we should live. This kind of legalism is also sinful and can cause Christians to live under huge burdens of guilt, create hurtful conflict between Christians, and cause many forms of resulting sins. It can also discourage unbelievers by misrepresenting true Christianity as it casts a dark shadow on the grace of the Gospel.

It can also become complicated when people use the Bible to support the man-made religious rules or requirements they have made, causing us to discern whether or not the Scriptures are being rightly applied. This is because we do desire to please God and live according to His clearly revealed will in the Bible, to maintain our holiness and sanctification and to please Him in every way. But the Bible tells us not to let others hypocritically judge us or put us under bondage, and to maintain and defend our freedom. It also tells us to be careful not to judge one another hypocritically and to exercise wisdom and grace as we serve one another in love. It exhorts us to bear with the failings of those who have weak faith, and to be careful not to offend our dear family in Christ out of a pure heart of love toward them. We will examine the Scriptures concerning these principles below in Romans 13 & 14, Colossians 2, and 1 Corinthians 8 & 10.

What is license or licentiousness?

License is an **abuse** of the **free grace** of God in order to indulge the sinful nature. Jerry Bridges comments... *“It is the attitude that, since God’s grace is unconditional, I may live as I please; I may sin as much as I want because God will still love me and forgive me. That is license. It results from focusing exclusively on liberty and denigrating God’s Law.”* This has historically been called **cheap grace** and also **antinomianism** meaning, *“without the law, or against the law.”* In its extreme form license is basically doing what is right in your own eyes, apart from any constraining influence of God’s Word, thinking that God’s grace, love and forgiveness is broad enough to cover all willful sin that one might commit. Of course the Bible emphatically rejects this kind of thinking and acting. Rather it implores us to pursue a life of separation from sin and to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Romans 6:1-2 - 1 What shall we say then? **Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? 2 May it never be!** How shall we who died to sin still live in it? NASB

Romans 6:12-15 - 12 Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body** that you should obey its lusts, 13 and **do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness;** but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under law, but under grace. 15 What then? **Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? May it never be!** NASB
2 Corinthians 7:1 - 1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.** NASB

This license of course comes in less lethal forms as well. Many Christians have an attitude of license in order to justify sinful behavior. They reason that they are “free in Christ” and have a rather loose sense of how this applies to their pursuit of holiness and separation. Or even worse, because they lack spiritual disciplines in their Christian walk, they have a very weak knowledge of God’s will and weak or even unholy influences from others and this causes them to live in ways that are largely displeasing to God and in varying degrees, rather sinful. This of course is very destructive, provokes God’s fatherly discipline, and results in an ineffective, unproductive and a largely unsanctified Christian life. It taints our the purity of our worship of God. It’s a miserable place to be. Of course the Bible warns against this as well.

Galatians 5:13 - 13 For you were called to freedom, brethren; **only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh,** but through love serve one another. NASB

1 Peter 2:16 - 16 Act as free men, and **do not use your freedom as a covering for evil,** but use it as bondslaves of God. NASB

Many Christians are so weak in this regard, they do not even realize the low degree of biblical conformity that they are living in and are in desperate need of discipling and restoring influence from some godly Christians (Gal 6:1-2).

Liberty - Called to be free

There exists then the wonderful reality that we **have been set free from sin** and death by Christ, and yet at the same time our defining life purpose has become living in union with Christ and seeking to be like Him and please Him with our whole life and in every area of our life. We have been set free from the penalty of every sin we will ever commit and yet we press onto to **live a life of separation from sin.**

Galatians 5:1 - **It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore keep standing firm and do not be subject again** to a yoke of slavery. NASB

Galatians 5:13 – 13 For **you were called to freedom, brethren;** only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but **through love serve one another.** 14 For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 15 But if you bite and devour one another, take care lest you be consumed by one another. NASB