

INDICATIVE / IMPERATIVE

The terms "indicative" and "imperative" refer to two different verb moods commonly used by the New Testament authors in their teaching on sanctification.

What is a Verb Mood?

The mood of a verb designates the relationship of the verb's action relative to reality. The following is a simple list of moods of verbs in the New Testament and what they generally signify:

- a. indicative - mood of certainty, actuality
- b. subjunctive - mood of probability
- c. optative - mood of possibility
- d. imperative - mood of command

As the list indicates, the New Testament uses indicative statements when discussing what God has done, is doing or will do. Imperative statements are used when saying what we should do. It is important to realize, not only that both moods are present in the Bible, but that **there is a specific relationship between these two moods in the area of sanctification**. Namely, what God commands us to do (the imperative) is based upon what he has done, is doing or will do (the indicatives). God is signifying by this consistent pattern that sanctification depends on God, but involves human volition and cooperation.

IMPERATIVE = Command

INDICATIVE = WHO I AM BASED ON WHAT GOD HAS DONE, IS DOING OR WILL DO

Never does the Bible give an imperative without wrapping around it one or more indicatives.

OT: For example, let's look at the 10 Commandments. What is the first of the 10 commandments in Exodus 20? Actually, we see that they begin with, "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery."

LETTERS OF PAUL: Think about all of Paul's writings and the main themes of his letters:

Romans (1-11 = Indicative / 12-16 = Imperative),
Galatians (1-4 = Indicative / 5-6 = Imperative),
Ephesians (1-3 = Indicative / 4-6 Imperative),
Philippians 1-3 = Indicative / 4 = Imperative),
Colossians (1-2 = Indicative / 3-4 = Imperative), etc.

Think about the Bible as a whole – is it mainly about His commandments, or about what God has done, is doing and will do to redeem His people?

In the following examples, the imperative mood is underlined, while the indicative is in italics.

Romans 6:1-19 and 8:1-13 are two of the best examples of this relationship.

Philippians 2:12b-13

. . .work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.

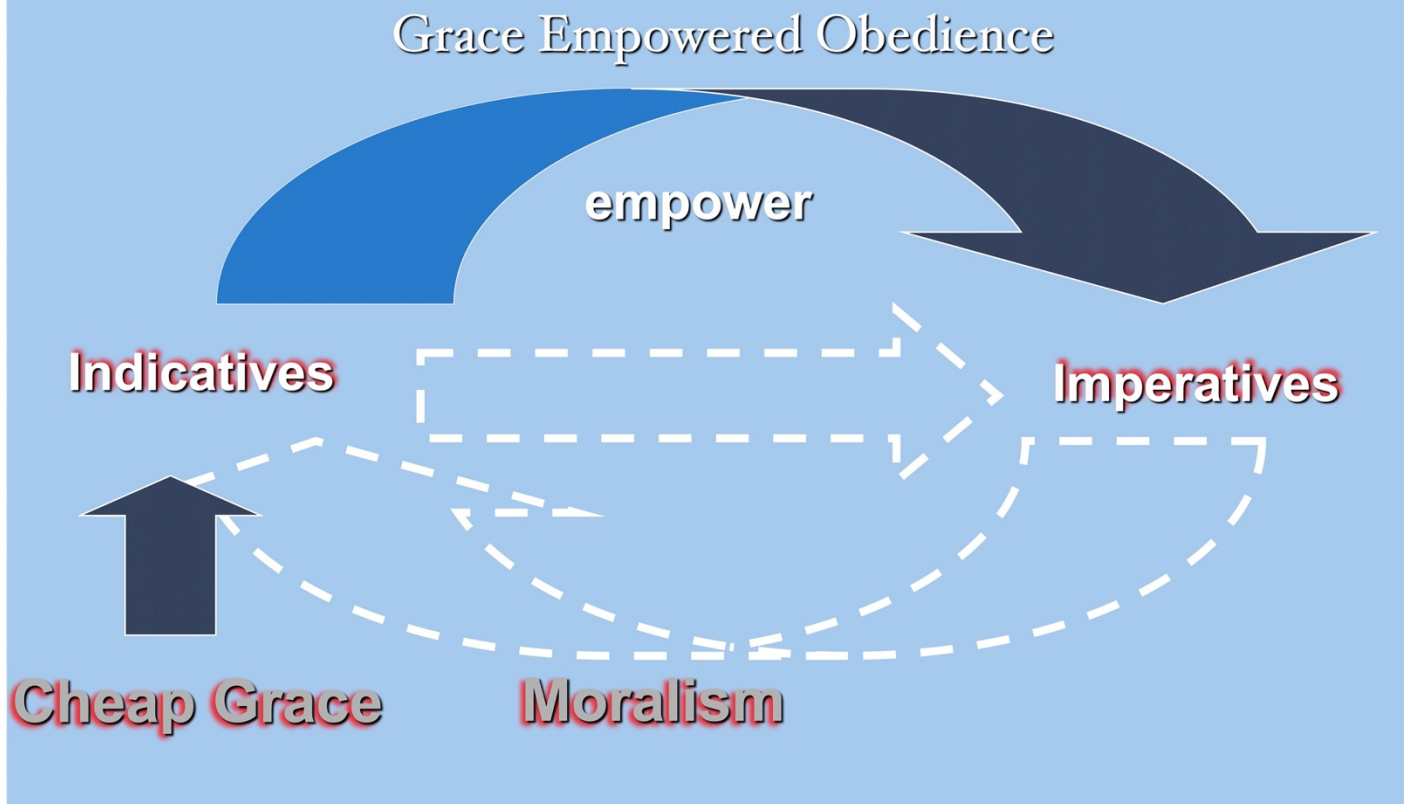
In this example, we see that the imperative command to work out our salvation is based on the fact that God is at work in us. The use of the word "for" indicates dependence or causality.

Hebrews 10:19-25

Therefore, brothers, *since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

In this passage, no fewer than five separate imperatives are tied to two wonderful indicatives: our confidence to enter the holy place by the new way, and our great high priest. Notice the word "since" before both indicative statements, indicating that they provide the basis for the imperatives to follow.

Two Opposing Traps: Cheap Grace and Moralism



QUOTES:

“Pointing to the commands that follow Paul’s great attestation of our union with Christ, Ridderbos notes that the relationship that God establishes with us by his grace does not erase his commands but is precisely the reason for them. Thus “the imperative (what we are to do) rests on the indicative (who we are by virtue of our union with Christ) and...this order is not reversible.” We are not in a relationship with God because of what we do (God’s imperatives); what we do results from who we are (God’s children) by his grace alone.

In colloquial terms, we must understand how to separate our “who” from our “do”. What we do does not gain us God’s affection. Who we are by virtue of his unconditional love constrains us through the power of our gratitude to obey him. If we ever invert these relationships (as is the instinctive, natural impulse of all humanity) by assuming that who we are before God is a consequence of what we do for him, then we make God’s love conditional and our security questionable. Yet when we grasp the wonder of how conduct can flow from love rather than secure it, then the gospel has the power profoundly to affect every relationship in our lives.

Freedom for our families

When the truths of grace began to touch my wife and me, we needed to change the way that we talked to our children. I used to say to my son, “Colin, because of what you did you are a bad boy.” I would characterize him by his actions. But then I recognized that this is not the way God

treats me. The grace that identifies me as God's child is not based on my actions. He characterizes me based on my relationship with him, not on the basis of what I have done. My union with Christ (the indicative of who I am) precedes and motivates my obedience (imperative). Thus, to treat our children as God treats us, my wife and I put ourselves under the discipline of saying to our son, "Colin, don't do that, because you are my child." In essence, we urged our son, "Be what you are, our beloved," rather than, "Do, so you will be beloved."

We made sure that the imperative (the command) rested on the indicative (the relationship), and that the order was not reversible. As we have attempted to reflect the truths of the gospel in our home, we have assured our children that their relationship with us hinges on the fact that they are our children, not on their conduct (cf. Rom. 8:12; I Thess. 5:5-8). Such assurance does not annul the need for discipline, but keeps correction from damaging a child's heart or creating doubt about his security in his family (cf. Heb. 12:5-11).

The grace that can change our parenting should affect every other relationship in our lives: spouses, friends, coworkers, and even enemies. This is not easy. For instance, when my wife has done something that frustrates me, my tendency is to punish her for it through silence, anger, or shame. My natural reflex is to relate to her on the basis of her actions rather than on the basis of our covenant relationship. A marriage that reflects Christ's love for the church operates under different principles (Eph. 5:21-33). I do not abandon all of my expectations of me. In a healthy Christian home, the imperatives must always rest on the indicative of a relationship, and the order is not reversible.

While we always struggle to live out completely the beauty of these truths, we do not despair. Rather we take strength and instruction from remembering that God does not let our failures to keep his imperatives erase the indicative of his love for us."

Holiness by Grace, by Bryan Chapell pg. 128-130.

"It has been asked, "Can keeping the law help with sanctification?" I think the big question is, "How do you treat the instructions of God for your life?" Do you treat them as imperatives that you have to do, or do you treat them as the work of God that He is planning to do in your life? If you do it the second way, then Christ will always be your hope rather than the keeping of the law.

As we understand the work of God more, as His work on our behalf becomes more prominent in our lives, we will be more inclined to yield to Him. I believe that a strong understanding of God's work on our behalf actually frees us to follow in His ways. When you have a small appreciation of God's work, you will have great struggles. "He who has been forgiven much, loves much.""

Summer 2006, Hans Bayer & Covenant Theological Seminary

We are to obey because Christ's LOVE COMPELS us, the indicative of who we are in CHRIST!