The Gospel - Faith, Promises & Motives

Let us consider the **relation** of **faith** to **sanctification**. As we have seen, **sanctification** is that work of God conforming us into the image of Christ progressively over time. We have noted that it is a **cooperative process** where we are also called to **exert effort** and **diligence** to see it come to fruition. **God works** in **sanctification** and **we work**. It is an ongoing **cooperative process**. God's work is primary and **our effort** is **secondary.** Therefore we are called to **God-dependent effort** throughout the New Testament. Now what we mean by God dependent effort is that we are dependent on God's power to give us the **necessary energy** and **divine enablement** to both forsake the old nature of sin and also to exercise the virtues of the new nature within us by the Holy Spirit. As we **look to God in faith** in seeking these virtues, and seek the **filling** of the **Holy Spirit,** we receive power from God both to put off the old nature and to put on the new. This calling to exert effort is what we call **imperatives**. They are commandments, **exhortations** and **admonitions** to obedience.

This **dependence** of looking to God for His power is **an exercise of our faith** in God's promises to lead us, guide, us and fulfill His good work in us and through us. And this faith is **belief** in **God's Word** and **based** upon the grace that God has shown us in Christ, through His good work in the Gospel, and the **sufficient grace for us to persevere in faith** to the end of our life that is our possession because of Christ. Not only has God promised that we are now justified by grace, through faith in Christ alone, but He has promised to fulfill His good work of **sanctification** in us causing us to **bear His image** in greater degree over time until the Day of Christ when we are finally glorified.

> **Philippians 1:6** – 6 For I am confident of this very thing, that **He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus**. NASB
> **1 Peter 1:3-5** - 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 **to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable** and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are **protected by the power of God through faith** for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. NASB

These **promises** to us are what we call **indicatives**. They *indicate* to us all of God's promises that are ours because of Christ and are also sometimes expressed as **warnings** and warnings with consequences. So we believe the powerful Word of God with all of its promises and warnings to us (**indicatives**), and we seek to obey its exhortations and admonitions to us (**imperatives**).

Imperatives always grounded in Indicatives

In believing the Gospel, we have been justified by grace, through faith in Christ alone. This justification we could not have achieved by legal obedience to the Law because all have sinned. He has merited God's favor for us, we have laid hold of it by faith, and Christ's life, death and resurrection have sufficiently covered all of our sins and provided perfect righteousness for us, reconciling us to God so that he has adopted us into His family as His own children, having caused us to be born again by the Holy Spirit resulting in eternal life (Rom 3:21-28, 5:8-10, 5:19-21, 6:23, 1 Cor 1:30, Eph 2:5-9, Col 1:21-22, 2:13-14, 1 Pet 1:3-5). These are the **indicatives** which indicate the fullness of the grace that we now stand in. Nevertheless, in the Gospel we have **imperatives** from Christ to repent of our sins, to trust in Him and believe Him fully for righteousness, and to go and sin no more, pursuing a life pleasing to God which expresses both love toward God and love toward our neighbor. These are the **imperatives** that are non-negotiable exhortations and admonitions to become in practically who we already are in

position. We have been set free from legal obedience for justification and righteousness, and yet we have been commanded to live a life of love toward God and neighbor.

Moreover, the Gospel of free grace also undergirds us in the midst of our own **personal failures** and the **great trials** and difficulties that we face in our daily lives. The hope and assurance (the confident assertions of faith) that God is in control of our circumstances and that He is working everything for our ultimate good in order to conform us into the image of Christ, is a **bulwark against despair** and **discouragement**. The fact that our forgiveness and redemption is an accomplished reality that can never be changed gives us much faith in the midst of the doubt that personal sinfulness and failure can cause. The indicative promises of God's favor toward us in Christ and His ultimate triumph in sanctifying us **reminds us that God loves us** in spite of our struggle with sin and that **He forgives us** and is **using even our failures** to conform us into Christ's image.

> **1 John 1:6-10** - 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; 7 but **if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin**. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 **If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness**. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us. NASB
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> **Romans 8:1-4** - 1 **There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.** 2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. 3 For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, **He condemned sin in the flesh, 4 in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us**, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. NASB
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> **Romans 8:28-36** - 28 And **we know that God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. 29 For **whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son**, that He might be the first-born among many brethren; 30 and whom He predestined, these He also called; and whom He called, these He also justified; and **whom He justified, these He also glorified**. 31 What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? 32 He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, **how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?** 33 Who will bring a charge against God's elect? God is the one who justifies; 34 who is the one who condemns? Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, **who also intercedes for us. 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?** Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? ..... 37 But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height, nor depth, **nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord**. NASB
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> **1 John 5:4-5** - 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and **this is the victory that has overcome the world — our faith**. 5 And who is the one who overcomes the world, but **he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?** NASB

See in these indicative promises the great triumph and victory that is ours no matter what we face or how we fail if we believe in Christ holding fast our hope in Him and His righteousness alone.

However, the **imperatives** are the fruit of having benefitted from the **indicatives**. They are the proper expression of the powerful grace of God that changes us into the ever increasing likeness of Christ. This is clearly taught in the New Testament.

> **Titus 2:11-14** - 11 For **the grace of God has appeared**, bringing salvation to all men, **12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age**, 13 looking for the blessed **hope** and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus; 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and **purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds**. NASB

Grace has appeared and brings us salvation, this is **indicative**. But notice that this grace ***"instructs us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires"*** and to ***"live sensibly, righteously and godly in this present age."*** This is an **imperative**.

> **2 Corinthians 6:18-7:1** - 18 "And I will be a father to you, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me," Says the Lord Almighty. 7:1 **Therefore, having these promises,** beloved, **let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God**. NASB

God will be a father to us, and we will receive all the benefits of having the Almighty as our Father. This is **indicative**. But Paul reasons, ***"having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*** This is an **imperative**. This idea appears many places in the New Testament. Since we have been given such **great** and **precious promises**, then our **proper response** is one of conformity to God's will, and here that is cleansing ***"ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."*** Our work of cleansing ourselves is rooted and grounded in the fact that God is a father to us to shepherd us, and provided for us and to protect and care for us as His very own children. The **imperatives** are **grounded** in the **indicatives** so that we won't lose heart and that our **faith and hope** are **in God** as the primary worker, working His good purpose in us, causing us the **bear the image** in greater degree and so partake in the divine nature and both **glorify** and **enjoy Him** in a rich and full way.

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; "W*e 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."* End quote. See then why the New Testament is loaded full of imperatives calling us to the work of faith and the heavenward call of both mortifying the ***"defilements of flesh and spirit"*** and living in or putting on the virtues in very practical ways.

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. These **indicatives fuel** and **motivate** our **faith**. 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. These **imperatives express** our **faith** and put the glory of God on display in our lives so that we **bear the image**. 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."*

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 (Rom 3:28, Gal 2:15-16, 1 Cor 1:30). 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, and are now longing to **bear His image** and become like Him, pleasing Him in all our ways and in the thoughts and meditations of our hearts.

> **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

Believing the promises for future grace motivates

Now here is where it is crucial to see how faith relates to sanctification and image bearing. As we hear about the beauty and glory of God's free grace to us in the indicative promises of the Gospel, our faith is bolstered and strengthened like a great bulwark against the world, the flesh and the devil. As we **believe** or **exercise faith**, that is **trust in** and **rely upon God** who gives us the promises, our **faith** is **motivated** to give expression so that the imperatives are fulfilled. This literally **involves us** in the **working** and **power of God**, as we are powerfully **changed by the Spirit** and bear the fruit of the Spirit in the midst of a wicked culture, shining as lights in the darkness of this world putting the glory of God on display.

> **Philippians 2:12-16** - 12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure**. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing; 15 that **you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of**

God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, 16 holding fast the word of life, so that in the **day of Christ I may have cause to glory** because I did not run in vain nor toil in vain. NASB

In Philippians 2:12-16 Paul is calling the Philippians to **continued obedience** of the imperatives of the Christian life, and so reminds them of the great promise that God is ***"at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*** As a result, he calls them to obey, ***"do all things without grumbling and disputing; that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world."*** Notice he says, do the **imperatives** of not ***"grumbling or complaining"*** because ***"God is at work in you"*** and so you will glorify Him, as His own ***"children,"*** in the midst of the shameful and wicked world that you live in putting His glory on display as **"lights"** in the dark world. And this happens as we ***"hold fast the word of life,"*** that is, as we **believe** or **have faith** in the ***"word of life,"*** that is, the **Gospel**. Our **faith** is **fueled** and **motivated** by the promise that we are His children and He is at work in us, and this gives expression in our obedience of not grumbling and complaining and this temperance and serenity of **Christian character** puts God's glory on display in our life like lights in the darkness of this world. This faith in the God of the promises has **involved us** in the very **working and power of God**, conforming us into **His image**, causing us to **participate** in the **divine nature** itself.

2 Peter 1:4 - 4 For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, **in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature**, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. NASB

Faith expects God to intervene in the affairs of our daily life

And so we should expect God to show up and intervene in the affairs of our daily life because He is in fact at work in us and through us to cause us to bear the image and put His glory on display, the thing He loves and seeks for above all other things, the manifestation of His own glory and excellence as God. This is God's main purpose in our salvation, to cause us to bear the image and be powerfully sanctified and transformed, and therefore we should expect that this is what God will do in our lives. **We expect God to show up powerfully and change us!** Let us not see the difficulty of trials and tribulations as some strange thing happening to us (1 Pet 4:12), but the hands of the Potter molding us into the image of Christ. God by His loving Providence is *"conforming us into the image of His Son"* (Rom 8:29). Therefore we are to **find joy even in the difficulties of life** because we know that they are working the exceeding great privilege and blessing for us of sanctification, causing us to **bear the image**. What greater privilege can there be in this natural world that God would conform us into His supernatural image and cause us to become *"partakers in the divine nature"* (2 Pet 1:4) and so come to enjoy the highest and best of experiences, even becoming like God and Christ in our very own character, as children of God? And so we are exhorted in the Scripture to **"rejoice"** in this process knowing that *"God is at work in us both to will and to do according to His good pleasure"* (Phil 2:13). We should count it ALL JOY!

Romans 5:3-5 - 3 And not only this, but **we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; 4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope**; 5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. NASB

James 1:2-4 - 2 **Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance**. 4 And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. NASB

1 Peter 1:6-7 - 6 In **this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, 7 that the proof of your faith**, being more precious than gold which is