

See here that Paul has shown the **ineffectual** nature of the Law as it was “*hostile to us*” and was a “*certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us*” and he then has explained the **effectual** work of the Gospel in contrast to the Law. What negative enmity our transgressions were because of the Law, God has positively overcome by the Gospel “nailing them to the cross.”

Here then, in the Pauline corpus, we have seen the Apostle show a definitive contrast between the **temporary** and **ineffectual** nature of the OLD Covenant and the **eternal** and **effectual** nature of the NEW Covenant. Let us then see clearly how to understand and apply the Law as a New Covenant Christian, as a curb, mirror and guide for us, clearly showing the will of God for our lives. Let us therefore press on to our heavenward call in Christ by the effectual and glorious transforming power of the Spirit, because of the freedom that has been granted to us in Christ through the Gospel.

The Role of the Law for Christians

The Issues and Challenges

Well now that we have spent some time looking at the text of Scripture and understood the contrast between the Old Covenant Law and the New Covenant Gospel, let us consider what **role** then that the Law does in fact serve for us. If in fact the Christ has cancelled the debt of the Law for us, being the fulfillment of the sacrificial system and priesthood contained in the Law, do the moral commandments of the Law still bind us to strict obedience and make us vulnerable to threatening's that the Law holds forth for disobedience? And if not, does the New Covenant then hold forth any requirement of obedience for us? And if so, then do we have a new set of laws that bind us to obedience, and is then not a legalistic system of righteousness before God?

Of course the answers are that we have entered into a state of grace wherein the debt of our sins, past, present and future has been cancelled and we have been set free from the principle of sin and death, because of Christ. Nevertheless, the grace that has come to us in the Gospel is not apart from imperatives to so live and act in such a way as to **please God** and seek to **fulfill His will** for our lives. In fact, the New Testament is filled with exhortations and imperatives to live in a manner worthy of the calling to grace and faith that we have received. The Gospel is not antinomian. No rather, in the midst of the complete forgiveness and wonderful promises that the Gospel holds forth for us [**indicatives**], are the instructions and directives that accompany living in grace and walking by the Spirit [**imperatives**]. We are exhorted to put off the old man of sin who was crucified with Christ, and to put on the new man who has been created in true righteousness and holiness.

Ephesians 4:17-24 - 17 This I say therefore, and affirm together with the Lord, **that you walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk**, in the futility of their mind, 18 being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; 19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. 20 But you did not learn Christ in this way, 21 if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, 22 that, **in reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, 23 and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind, 24 and **put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.** NASB

Colossians 3:5-11 - 5 Therefore **consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.** 6 For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them.

8 **But now you also, put them all aside:** anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive speech from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since **you laid aside the old self with its evil practices, 10 and have put on the new self who is being renewed to a true knowledge** according to the image of the One who created him NASB

If then we have been set free from the legalistic demands of the Law and its threatening's by the grace of the Gospel, then isn't the New Testament imperatives yet a new system of legal bondage? Well of course the answer is by all means no, the Gospel sets us free. But **it sets us free FROM sin, it does not set us free TO sin.** Therefore, we live in the freedom and grace of forgiven sins because of the complete forgiveness and atonement that Christ has provided for us, and we having embraced this glorious truth by faith, are by this same faith motivated to pursue life of separation from sin in order to please God in every way. Because of the wonderful grace of forgiven sins that we have by **faith** in Christ, the wonderful **loving** union with Christ and the Father that we enjoy by the Spirit, and the **hope** of immortality in the age to come, we now by this same **faith, hope and love**, seek to do God's will and please Him. In short the glory of grace motivates us to live for Christ.

Indicative and Imperative

In 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. 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. These are the **indicatives** which indicate the fullness of the grace that we now stand in. Nevertheless, in the Gospel we have been commanded by Christ to repent of our sins, to trust in 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 commands to both continually repent of sins and also to do good works. These things are BOTH true. 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.

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. If we have been given such great and precious promises, then our proper response is one of conformity to God's will.

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