

## **The Indicative-Imperative Dynamic**

### **A Tutorial for Teachers**

Therefore *I urge you, 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. (Ro 12:1, NASB95, emphasis added)

The purpose of this tutorial is help you understand the indicative-imperative dynamic and teach with it in mind.

### **The Indicative-Imperative Dynamic**

The words “indicative” and “imperative” describe how verbs are used in the Bible. A verb is said to be in the indicative mood when it asserts a fact or truth; a verb is in the imperative mood when it gives a command. In the Bible the indicatives precede the imperatives; or to state it another way, the imperatives of the Bible rest upon the indicatives. God’s people can obey the commands of the Bible because of the facts and truths of the Bible. This is called the indicative-imperative dynamic.

### **Examples**

There are many examples of the indicative-imperative dynamic in Scripture.

- Before God gave Moses the ten commandments in Ex 20, he reminded Moses of his name (“I am the LORD your God”) and his great acts (“who brought you out of the land of Egypt”).
- Before Joshua challenged the people to fear and serve the LORD and put away foreign gods in Josh 24, he reminded them how God led Abraham to Canaan, gave him sons, sent Moses and Aaron, plagued Egypt, split the Red Sea, fought their battles, and gave them the land.
- Before Paul urged the Romans to present their bodies as a living and holy sacrifice to God in Ro 12:1, he reminded them about the previous eleven chapters, which he described as the mercies of God.
- Before Paul implored the Ephesians to walk in a manner worthy of their calling in Eph 4:1, he described what it meant to be in Christ and made alive in him (Eph 1-3).

## Impact on Teaching

The character of God and the actions of God provide powerful motivation for his people to obey him. The relationship that God's people have with God, particularly the relationship of being in Christ, provide the ability to obey God. These are the indicatives of the Bible. When you teach the commands, exhortations, and ethics of the Bible, you must be careful to avoid divorcing them from the indicatives. God's grace motivates, and it alone enables obedience.

When you teach a book study, it may take several weeks or even months to complete. Sometimes the indicatives are in the first half of a book, while the imperatives are in the second half of the book. This is particularly true of Paul's writings. When you teach the imperatives, you must remember that they rest upon the indicatives. If it has been several weeks since you covered the indicatives, you must remind your class of them as you teach the imperatives. If you attempt to teach wives to be subject to their husbands (Eph 5:22) and husbands to love their wives (Eph 5:25) without reminding them that both are in Christ (Eph 1:3-14), then you are giving them commands they cannot obey on their own. This is unintentionally teaching and encouraging legalism.<sup>1</sup> You must keep the grace of God before his people. Teach the imperatives in light of the indicatives.

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<sup>1</sup> Legalism refers to obtaining salvation apart from grace, but it also refers to living the Christian life apart from grace. This was Paul's message to the Galatians: "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" (Ga 3:3, NASB95)