

## COMMANDS IN SCRIPTURE (see chap.12 of Future Grace by John Piper), 7 pgs

*Six days shall you labor ... (Ex.20:9)*

Is this a **requirement to work** six full days out of every seven?

It is common to hear preachers speak of rejoicing, praying, giving thanks, etc. as if they were NT commands. I once heard a pastor mention that one of the reasons Christians sing is that we are commanded to. Is that why you sing ... for obedience? Is that also why you rejoice, because God told you to or forces you - like "Dance!" while shooting at the feet as in westerns and cartoons? What is it about us that seeks to turn every encouragement in the Bible into an earth-shaking TEN COMMANDMENT type ORDER or INJUNCTION? There is something about the way we speak exhortations that creates the climate of law and has the effect of law. My son, Kevin, once made the comment about services he was attending, *Even though grace is taught, it still feels like law.*



It's ridiculous to think that a command would be either necessary or appropriate for men and women to have sexual relations. The controlling statement is **he blessed them [saying, may you] Be fruitful and multiply, a BENEDICTION (a pronouncement of blessing), not a COMMAND (a demand for specific performance upon threat of consequences for dereliction of duty, under performance, or disobedience) though both use the same imperative-sounding language.** [ Compare **blessings** **Gen.1:22, 28; 5:2; 9:1, 7, 18-19, 17:16** with **commands, Gen.2:16-17; 3:11; 6:14-7:5; 8:15-17; 9:4-6**] The difference is obvious, but that's not all there is to the matter.

God's call to Abram began with a command, *leave your country ...* Coupled with the command was an assurance that God would show him where, and a promise to make him *a great nation*, **Gen.12:1-3**. The story continues with *So Abram left as the Lord had told him, v.4*. His obedience is noted in **Heb.11:8** as being *by faith [confidence in God's word]*. Abraham's same trust and prompt response is noted when God *tested him* by telling him to sacrifice Isaac, **Gen.22:1-3; Heb.11:17-19**. *He rose early the next morning* to prepare for the journey, **Gen.22:3**. Thus he secured the promises God had given him.

-----  
... I have chosen [Lit. know ] Abraham so that he may [or will] command his children and his household after him **to obey me and to do what is right and just, so that the Lord will bring about for Abraham** what he has promised him. **Gen.18:18-19**. **It was to be an ongoing practice to pass on the fear of the Lord from generation to generation in order to maintain the promise.** Keeping his laws and obeying his commands was a prerequisite to receiving his blessings for the descendants of Abraham.

In **Gen.48:3-4** Jacob recounted his dream at Bethel (**28:12-15**) in which God renewed the promises to him that he previously gave to his grandfather, Abraham, and his father, Isaac. <sup>3</sup>*Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and **there he blessed me*** <sup>4</sup>*and said ... I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants ...*

*See, I [Moses] have **taught you decrees and laws as the LORD my God commanded me, so that you may follow them in the land you are entering to take possession of it.** Observe them carefully ... watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them fade from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them, Dt.4:5-6, 9. [see discussion on p.1-2 of Beyond Moses, **(5) universal factors** relevant to the people of God **(1) When we sin**, God knows. **(2) The blessing slows or stops.** It can even stop for a whole group on the basis of the sin of one or a few. **(3) There will be judgment** either from ourselves in confessing our sin or from God. **(4) If we return**, the blessing flows on once more ... **(5) In the midst of unconditional promises, God has conditional portions where the blessings are dependent upon OBEDIENCE to him]***

CAVEAT: **Every encouragement** [be not afraid, **Gen.26:24; 46:3-4**], **comfort** [the Lord goes with you, he will never leave you nor forsake you, **Dt.31:6**], **assurance** [I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you, **Gen.28:15**], **blessing** [I will bless you, **Gen.26:2-5**], and **promise** [You (Abram) will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age, **Gen.15: 15**] **is understood to be conditioned upon continued loyalty to God. God's favor is upon those who follow the Lord because God cannot be mocked [will not be ridiculed] . A man reaps what he sows, Gal.6: 7**

### **some imperatives regarding worship:**

*Oh give thanks to the LORD; call upon His name; make known His name among the peoples! Sing to Him, sing praises to Him; tell of all His wondrous works! Glory in His name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice! Seek the LORD in His strength; seek His presence continually! Remember the wondrous works that He has done ... (Ps.105:1-5)*

*... do not rejoice in ... but rejoice that ... (Lk.10:20)*

*Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone ... do not be anxious about anything, but in everything ... let your requests be made known to God. (Phil.4:4-6)*

Uh oh, we blundered into another problem. Ever heard “worry” depicted as a sin? Why, because we are **COMMANDED not to, right?** Let’s stray a little further:

*We ask you, brothers, to respect ... and to esteem ... Be at peace among yourselves. And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good ... Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances ... Do not despise prophecies, but test everything; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thes.5:12-22)*

*... let each of you speak the truth ... Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and give no opportunity to the devil. Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor ... (Eph.4:25-28)*

**What! - There is a COMMAND to be angry?**<sup>0</sup> I thought commands were fairly straightforward and simple like do this and don’t do that. It sounds like God is laying on us every burden He can think of. Do we need to know Greek and Hebrew to understand this? Well, it wouldn’t hurt, and some Greek is included as footnotes. But just like the essays on the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission, these things take some thought. For instance, what is the sense of Greet every saint ... in Phil.4:21? Is Paul’s statement more along the lines of asking (as in requesting a favor) or telling (as in making a demand)? Ask yourself, what is the spirit of Scriptural imperatives as you encounter them. Wait, did I just tell you to do something?

Remember **the three step process and order for understanding and responding to revelation**: (1) *what does the passage say - translations vary*, (2) *what does it mean by what it says - commentaries differ*, (3) *what response is the passage calling for? Or what is an appropriate response to this passage?*

<sup>0</sup> Besides **superintending** through the issuance of formal demands, directives, and instructions, imperative language has a wide range of uses along the lines of directing, **managing**, reminding, or helping: advising; requesting; entreating; counseling; prompting; emphasizing; steering; urging; admonishing; encouraging; recommending; cautioning; warning; dissuading; advocating; etc. [Because language is flexible, adding phrases to clarify the meaning is not adding to God’s word]

<http://www.dabar.org/BurtonMoodsTenses/Imperative.html#180>.

**180. THE IMPERATIVE MOOD** is used in **commands and exhortations**. For other methods of expressing a command, see **67, 160-167, 364**.

**181.** in **entreaties, petitions, and requests**.

**Mk.9:22**; *but if thou canst do anything, **have compassion on us and help us** [a plea for help].*

**Lk.17:4-5**; *[every time a man repents, forgive him, to which the apostles responded] **Lord, Increase our faith** [we don’t have enough faith to do this].*

**Jn.17:11**; *Holy Father, **keep them in thy name**.*

**182.** to express consent, or merely to propose a hypothesis.

**Mt.8:31-32**; and the demons **besought him** saying, If thou cast us out, **send us away** [request] into the herd of swine. And he said unto them, **Go**.

**Jn.2:18-19**; [when the Jews demanded a sign to prove his authority] Jesus ... [answered them], **Destroy this temple** [physical body], and in three days I will raise it up.

**1 Cor.7:36**; and if need so require, **let him** [allow him to] **do what he will**; he sinneth not; **let them marry**.

**183.** An Imperative suggesting a hypothesis may or may not retain its imperative or hortatory force. **Lk.6:37**; **judge not, and ye shall not be judged**. Cf. **Jn.2:19**, above.

**184. Any tense of the Imperative** may be used in positive commands, the distinction of force being that of the tenses of the dependent moods in general. Cf. **95 ff**. In prohibitions, on the other hand, the use of the Imperative is confined almost entirely to the Present tense. A few instances only of the Aorist occur.

**67. The second person of the Future Indicative** is often used as an Imperative.

**Jas.2:8**; **thou shalt** [you must, you better] **love thy neighbor as thyself**.

**160. The Hortatory Subjunctive.** The Subjunctive is used in the first person plural in exhortations, the speaker thus exhorting others to join him in the doing of an action.

**Heb.2:1**; **let us run with patience the race that is set before us**.

**1 Jn.4:7**; **beloved, let us love one another**.

**162. The Prohibitory Subjunctive.** The Aorist Subjunctive is used in the second person to express a prohibition or a negative entreaty. **Mt.6:34**; **be not therefore anxious for the morrow**. **Heb.3:8**; **harden not your hearts**. **Mt.6:13**; **and bring us not into temptation**.

**164. (a) The Aorist Subjunctive** forbids the action as a simple event with reference to the action as a whole or to its inception, and is most frequently used when the action has not begun. **Acts 18:9**; **speak and hold not thy peace**. **Rev.7:3**; **hurt not the earth**.

**165. (b) The Present Imperative (180-184)** forbids the continuance of the action, most frequently when it is already in progress; in this case, it is a demand to desist from the action. **Mk.6:50**; **it is I, be not afraid**. **Jn.5:14**; **sin no more**.

When the action is not yet begun, it enjoins continued abstinence from it.

**Mk.13:21**; **and then if any man shall say unto you, Lo, here is the Christ; or, Lo, there; believe it not**. Cf. **Mt.24:23**.

**167.** The strong negative occurs rarely in prohibitions with **the Aorist Subjunctive**.

In **Mt.21:19**, on the other hand, the emphatic predictive sense, **there shall be no fruit from thee hence forward forever**, is more probable, being more consistent with general usage and entirely appropriate to the context.



<sup>o</sup> <http://helpmewithbiblestudy.org/11Church/DisciplineBeAngryYetDoNotSin.aspx>

What does it mean: *Be angry, and yet do not sin*? In making the English translation of the Bible, the Greek text of **Eph.4:26** posed a challenge. Throughout the Bible, there aren't any verses that speak positively of the human emotion of anger. Was this verse a command to be angry? Does this passage suggest that anger is not sinful? When read within the context of **Eph.4:27**, how does "sundown" and "Satan" shed light on our understanding of what Paul was trying to tell the church? And how does this all square with **v.4:31**?

Grammarians approach this issue by examining the **syntax and grammar** of the Greek text. This specific case is an example where a study on the **mood of the verbs** provides the basis to understand Paul.

**Mood is a feature of verbs** that indicates **attitude of the speaker and the likelihood of the verbal action occurring**. It reflects the reality of the speaker's statement regardless if the statement is true or not: does he think the verbal action will occur or possibly occur? **The Greek language has four moods: indicative, imperative, subjective, and optative.**

The **indicative mood** indicates an assertion where a statement is presented as something real or certain regardless of whether the speaker believes it or not. Example: *God is not mocked* (**Gal.6:7**).

The **imperative mood** indicates an action of intention such as a command instructing another to a certain action. Example: *Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind* (**Mt.22:37**).

The **subjective mood** indicates probability with some uncertainty of an action. It is often used with a conditional statement (if – then clauses) and, under certain circumstances, it may indicate a definite outcome. Example: *so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known* ,, (**Eph.3:10**).

The **optative mood** indicates an action that is possible and is often used to communicate a wish or hope. Example: *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete ...* (**1 Thes.5:23**).

When studying the verbal mood of **Eph.4:26**, scholars have debated the merits of several possible syntactical translations; however, **the following four represented the best possibilities**. Each interpretation is listed with their verbal mood and is simplified without any presentation of the Greek terms.

1. *If you are angry* - **conditional imperative** imposes a demand to do what is commanded under certain conditions.
2. *Although you may get angry* - **concessive imperative** imposes a demand to do what is commanded as one may yield or concede.
3. *Be angry (if you must)* - **permissive imperative** is rarely used to indicate permission. This usage of the imperative does not normally imply that some deed is optional or approved. It often views that act as a *fiat accompli*. In such instances, the mood could almost be called an imperative of resignation.

**The first three interpretive options are considered as one view**, because there is little difference

between them. For example, a *concession* is a type of condition, and *permissive* is very similar to the *conditional* as seen below. Despite their subtle differences of meaning in English, they all view Paul speaking of anger in a conditional sense.

[*Be angry* is in the **middle voice**, possibly meaning, *Be angry with yourselves*]

**4. *Be angry* command imperative.** - The basic force of the imperative of command involves somewhat different nuances with each tense.

The **academic discussion** between those favoring the conditional view verses the command view will never be completely concluded; however, the following are the main points of how most see Eph.4:26. Verse 26 does not follow the typical conditional imperative grammatical structure, because its pattern is: imperative (i.e. *angry*) + conjugation (Greek term *kai*) + imperative (i.e. *do not*)

If **Eph.4:26** was a conditional imperative, it would have carried an injunctive force (*if you are angry, and you should be, then you will not sin*). However, **its grammatical structure carries the force of a command**, and Paul seems to encourage anger with the assurance that sin will not be the result (be angry and do not sin). But what does this really mean?

**Literary Context:** **Eph.4:26** is found within a section that is defined at its border by two indicatives: *we are members of one another* (v.25) and *God in Christ has forgiven you* (v.32) Grammarians studying the verbal moods in **Eph.4:25-32** have ten imperatives and two hortatory subjunctives. A *hortatory subjunctive* is a statement **urging** others to join in some action. It will always be the first person plural form of the subjunctive mood, and this often is found near the beginning of the sentence. It is usually translated as *let us ...*

This section, **Eph.4:25-32**, speaks to the relationship of one Christian to another within the church body: *neighbor ... one body* (v.25); *building others up* (v.29); *one another ... Forgiving each other ...* (v.29). Paul's exhortation of anger, which some commentators call *righteous indignation*, is directed within the church body! It is not righteous indignation directed towards non-Christians.

**Theological Context:** The prohibition of *all bitterness, rage, and anger* found in **Eph.4:31** creates a contradiction with v.26. If v.31 prohibits *all* anger, then v.26 cannot permit *some* anger. To base an interpretation by appealing to either verse by itself is wrong: all anger is the righteous duty of a Christian is just as wrong as claiming that all anger is sinful. **What is Paul saying about anger in these two verses?**

In v.31, Paul is speaking of malicious anger. There is an ascending progression to v.31: *bitterness [and, kai] rage [wrath] [and] anger [what about the remainder of the sequence, and clamor and slander?]*. In this context, v.31 is not prohibiting all anger but *all* anger arising from bitterness and rage. In v.26, Paul makes a distinction that there is a type of anger, *righteous [justified] anger*, which is not sinful. When **Eph.4:26b** is considered (Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry.), Paul seemingly sets a temporal limit to this righteous anger, *be angry*, but limit that anger.

In this context, Paul appears to be exhorting Christians to deal with the cause of one's anger immediately [The noun is a strengthened form of the verb referring to what provoked the anger]. And

in the context of this section dealing with relationships between one Christian with another, Paul is encouraging Christians to deal with their "righteous indignation" immediately when the cause of their anger is another Christian. This is theologically consistent with **Mt.18:15**: *if your brother sins, go and rebuke him*. [a directive that answers the question, What do we do about this?] Instead of an exhortation of personal anger, Paul is addressing the issue of church discipline. In essence, Paul appears to be saying, *do not sin* by doing nothing – act quickly to discipline your brother [hold him accountable].

**SHEESH!**