

## Christian Growth Week 5: Faith

### Introduction

We have seen how God gives all Christians the same new identity and the same Holy Spirit as the bases and resources for spiritual growth. If God plays His role continuously and perfectly, why then do some Christians keep growing while others stall out? Why do *we* stall out at times?! The answer is that we have a role to play—and the Bible calls that role “faith.” Therefore, we must look closely at the nature of biblical faith.

### Key Romans passages on faith

**Rom. 1:16,17** <sup>16</sup> I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. <sup>17</sup> For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: “The righteous will live by faith.” (NLT)

Paul says that salvation (justification, sanctification & glorification) are all received by faith.

**Rom. 3:21-30** <sup>21</sup> But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses\* and the prophets long ago. <sup>22</sup> We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are.

<sup>23</sup> For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God’s glorious standard. <sup>24</sup> Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. <sup>25</sup> For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when he held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, <sup>26</sup> for he was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate his righteousness, for he himself is fair and just, and he declares sinners to be right in his sight when they believe in Jesus.

<sup>27</sup> Can we boast, then, that we have done anything to be accepted by God? No, because our acquittal is not based on obeying the law. It is based on faith. <sup>28</sup> So we are made right with God through faith and not by obeying the law. <sup>29</sup> After all, is God the God of the Jews only? Isn’t he also the God of the Gentiles? Of course he is. <sup>30</sup> There is only one God, and he makes people right with himself only by faith, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. (NLT)

Every single person can be justified as an absolutely free gift. Jesus earned this gift by His atoning death. The only condition we must fulfill is to put our faith in Jesus.

**Rom. 4:1-5** <sup>1</sup> What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. <sup>3</sup> What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup> Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a

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\* Greek *in the law*.

**gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup> However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. (NIV)**

Even before Jesus came, people were never justified by their works; they were always justified by faith in God's promise.

**Rom. 10:17 So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ. (ESV)**

God's Word—especially His message about Christ, stimulates and builds our faith.

**Rom. 15:13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. (NIV)**

As we live by faith in God, the Holy Spirit ignites peace, hope and joy in our hearts.

## What is biblical faith?

*Pisteuo* is the New Testament word commonly translated “believe” or “trust;” *pistis* is usually translated “faith.” It means to personally entrust yourself to another. It implies knowledge of the object of faith, but it is more than just mental assent (Jas. 2:19).

Biblical faith is personal trust in God. We can further define this trust in God as *a willingness to act according to God's will with **dependence** on God to perform his will through us.*

ILLUSTRATION: A tight-rope walker strung a wire across the Niagara Falls as a crowd gathered on both sides of the falls. First, he walked across using a balancing pole. Next, he walked back across with the pole. Then he wheeled a wheel-barrow across. On the other side, he shoveled 150 pounds of dirt and rock into the wheel-barrow and wheeled it back across the falls. The crowd's applause was louder than the roar of the falls! The man asked the crowd, "Who believes that I can wheel a man across the falls?" Everyone shouted their affirmation. Then he asked, "Who's going to get in the wheel-barrow?" The crowd dispersed immediately. The crowd had a certain kind of faith—mental assent. They intellectually agreed that the man was capable of wheeling a person across the falls. But they did not have another kind of faith—personal trust—because no one was willing to get in the wheel-barrow and entrust their lives to his expertise. Such a step would involve a definite *action*, but it would also involve genuine *dependence* on the tight-rope walker.

ILLUSTRATION: In Lk. 1:26-38, the angel Gabriel told Mary that God wanted to bear the Messiah through her apart from the agency of a human father. Her response was a response of biblical faith: “*Behold, the bondservant of the Lord; may it be done to me according to Your word.*” On the one hand, Mary's response was *dependence*—she depended on God's Spirit to conceive the child rather than trying to get pregnant by a man. On the other hand, her response was *active*—she actively gave herself to God and his will rather than passively saying, “Whatever.”

Thinking back to last week, see how Mary's faith personifies KNOW-CONSIDER-PRESENT.

- She KNEW that God's will was to one day bring the Messiah into the human race.
- She CONSIDERED what it meant personally to her - that God's Spirit wanted to conceive the Messiah in her womb, even though she was a virgin.
- Then she PRESENTED herself to God, offering herself to Him to become the mother of the Messiah.

## Justification & sanctification occur by the same dynamic: Faith

Many churches/Christians affirm that we are justified by grace apart from works, but they then teach or imply that we are sanctified by law through works—that as Christians we have the ability and the obligation to live the Christian life by our moral will-power, and that God blesses us based on our performance. But Paul insists that Christians get sanctified in the same way they get justified—by God’s grace and appropriated by our faith.

**(Col. 2:6) Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him.**

The way we received Christ is the way we are to walk in Him. Since we know that we are justified by grace through faith (Gal. 2:16), we are also sanctified by grace through faith in Christ.

**(Gal. 3:2,3) This is the only thing I want to find out from you: did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?**

Some of the Galatians evidently felt that while they were justified by grace through faith, they now had to get sanctified by self-effort. Paul is horrified by this development!

**FAITH & JUSTIFICATION:** Do you remember how you became a Christian? You recognized your need for God’s forgiveness, and you turned in faith to Jesus. This faith had two aspects:

On the one hand, you simply *depended* on Jesus’ righteous work to make you acceptable to God, rather than saying “I will earn God’s acceptance by my own righteousness.” (see Gal. 2:16)

On the other hand, you *actively* embraced this gift that Jesus offered you by humbly calling out to Him, rather than saying “I’m sure you’ll force upon me whatever I need.” (see Jn. 1:12)

Francis Schaeffer says that justifying faith is like holding up empty hands to receive God’s free gift of justification on the basis of Jesus’ work on the cross. Holding up empty hands is both *dependent* (“I have nothing to offer; I depend on you give this to me”) and *active* (“I choose to turn to You in this way.”)

**FAITH & SANCTIFICATION:** You see your need to change morally, to love others as God commands you to. How does this change take place? By faith in Christ. Once again, this faith has two aspects:

On the one hand, you must *depend* completely on Christ’s power to change your life rather than trying to change your life through your own moral will-power.

On the other hand, you must *actively* appropriate (seek) God’s power for sanctification and giving His, love rather than just sit passively and expect God to change you apart from your cooperation. *But whereas justification is appropriated once for all time by one act of faith, sanctification must be continually appropriated by ongoing decisions of faith.* (see Francis Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, Chap. 5).

For the rest of tonight, we will study how sanctifying faith is described in two ways in the New Testament:

- Walking by/according to the Spirit
- The New Testament letters’ use of indicative and imperative

## Sanctifying faith & walking by/according to the Spirit

Paul calls sanctifying faith “walking by/according to the Spirit.” “Walk” emphasizes the ongoing nature of sanctifying faith. The Bible views our lives as a long journey down a path along which we walk. So this is a figure of speech that means: “*Continue to live your Christian life by the resources of the Holy Spirit,*” in contrast to living your life by your own resources. In two parallel passages, Paul explains two key ways to walk by/according to the Spirit.

**(Rom. 8:4-6\*\*) 4 . . . so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. 5 For those who are according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who are according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. 6 For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace.**

Walking by the Spirit involves “*setting our minds on the things of the Spirit.*” The “things of the Spirit” refer to the things of God and especially what He has freely given us through Jesus (1 Cor. 2:12)—especially our new identity in Christ (Col. 3:1-3). Refer to Week 3 for a summary of this.

This is the “*dependence*” aspect of sanctifying faith—we are to continue to “set our minds on” or fix our focus on Jesus—our relationship with Him and everything He provides. “Setting our minds on” implies that there is a struggle for our mental focus—and indeed there is! Our sinful nature is constantly tempting us to focus on “the things of the flesh”—our old identity, the world’s provisions, self-absorption, etc.

This also relates to what we learned in Week 3 about KNOW-CONSIDER-PRESENT:

**KNOW:** Continue to remind yourself of your new identity in Christ, the ministries of the Holy Spirit, etc.

**CONSIDER:** Personalize what you know by continuing to monitor your thought-life, reject lies, and replace them with God’s truth—especially lies about God and your identity.

**HOW** do we set our minds on the things of the Spirit? Primarily by participating in the “means of grace/growth” (WORD, PRAYER & FELLOWSHIP). The MOG truly are both “means of *grace*”—avenues through which we continue to receive God’s love and sanctifying grace, and “means of growth”—ways by which we grow spiritually.

- Through regular exposure to the *Bible* (teachings, personal study, discussion),
- Through *prayerful meditation and praise/thanks*.
- Through this kind of interaction with other Christians in *fellowship*, we continue to receive God’s love and provision for us.

We will study the MOG in more detail in Weeks 7-10.

**(Gal. 5:16-25\*\*) 16 But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. 17 For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. 18 But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. 19 Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, 21 envying,**

drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. **22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. 24 Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. 25 If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk (literally “keep in step with”) by the Spirit.**

Walking by the Spirit involves being “led by,” (ago) or “keeping in step with the Spirit.”

“Keep in step with” (*stoicheo*) refers to responding obediently to someone else’s (a superior) direction or guidance. As we will learn next week (5), God’s Spirit will personally guide us down His path for our lives—guidance in both His moral will and in giving His love to others.

This emphasizes the “action” aspect of sanctifying faith.

As God’s Spirit personally convicts us of sinful, selfish attitudes and/or actions, we are to actively cooperate with Him by agreeing with His conviction (*vs.* rationalizing), by consciously appropriating God’s forgiveness (*vs.* beating ourselves), and by re-embracing this specific aspect of His will for our lives (*vs.* ongoing rebellion).

Scripture warns us repeatedly against saying “No” to the Holy Spirit:

**(Ps. 32:8,9) 8 I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you. 9 Do not be as the horse or as the mule which have no understanding, whose trappings include bit and bridle to hold them in check, otherwise they will not come near to you.**

**(1 Jn. 1:6,7) 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.**

#### TEACHER’S EXAMPLES

As God’s Spirit personally leads us to give his love to other people, we are to actively respond to his leadership by serving others in the specific way He is directing.

Sometimes this direction is very specific and situational (see Phillip in Acts 8:29 and Paul in Acts 16:6,7; TEACHER’S EXAMPLES).

At other times, this direction is more general and ongoing (e.g., Paul’s calling to be an apostle to the Gentiles; TEACHER’S EXAMPLES).

HOW? Primarily through the “means of grace/growth”, including reaching out to non-Christians.

#### Summary:

So “walking by the Spirit” is just another way of saying “live every day of your Christian life by faith in Jesus:” keep *depending* on His love for you, and keep *acting* to give His love others.

- As we respond obediently to the Spirit’s direction, we experience his redemptive love at work through us, *and* the capacity of our hearts to receive his love increases!

<b>SET YOUR MIND ON THE THINGS OF THE SPIRIT</b>	↔	<b>KEEP IN STEP WITH THE SPIRIT</b>
The “dependence” aspect of faith	↔	The “action” aspect of faith
Seeks and focuses on God’s love	↔	Obeys God’s direction into love
Primarily via MOG (devotional)	↔	Primarily via MOG (ministry of love)
This only: Leads to “Rust out”	↔	This only: Leads to “Burn out”

*How does walking according to the spirit relate to know, consider, present?*

This also relates to what we learned in Week 3 about KNOW-CONSIDER-PRESENT:

**PRESENT:** Take the active steps of faith to obey/serve God that are consistent with what you **KNOW** and **CONSIDER** to be true.

We keep in step with the Spirit primarily by participating in the MOG. It is important to understand that the MOG are not only avenues through which we *receive* God’s love (see above), but also avenues through which we *give* God’s love to others. For example, you may teach the Bible at an outreach group, or pray for and with a friend, or purposefully edify someone after home group. We also keep in step with the Spirit by showing and sharing God’s love to non-Christians as He guides us.

### **Sanctifying faith and “indicative and imperative”**

We can also get insight into sanctifying faith by exploring the New Testament pattern of indicative and imperative.

“Indicative” and “imperative” refer to two different moods commonly used by the New Testament authors in their teaching on sanctification.

“Indicative” is the mood of certainty; it “indicates” what is actually true (“I throw the ball”).

New Testament indicatives refer to / indicate what God has done, is doing, or will do for us through Christ. They are similar to promises.

“Imperative” is the mood of command; it calls on us to act (“Throw me the ball!”). New Testament imperatives refer to what God calls on us to do. They are commands.

Look at Eph. 4:32 and identify the indicative and imperative parts of this verse.

**(Eph. 4:32) Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.**

The indicative portion is: “God in Christ has forgiven you.”

The imperative portion is: “Be kind and tender-hearted, forgiving one another.”

How does this relate to sanctifying faith?

The indicatives provide content for the *dependence* aspect of sanctifying faith. What does God promise or declare? The New Testament indicatives, as illuminated by the Holy Spirit, inform and remind us of God’s utterly dependable loving provision for us which are often contrary self, others, feelings, human wisdom, etc.

The imperatives provide content for the *action* aspect of sanctifying faith. How do we follow God? The New Testament imperatives, as applied by the Holy Spirit, provide concrete opportunities to act in faith. They inform us and remind us of God's will for our lives—a will that is good and well-pleasing and perfect (Rom. 12:2b).

Note also the relationship between the indicative and the imperative: “Forgive each other, **just as** God in Christ has forgiven you.” The imperative (“Forgive each other”) is based on the indicative (“just as God has forgiven you”). God always bases His commands on His provisions. This is the essential difference between Christianity and legalism.

*In legalism/religion*, the indicatives are based on the imperatives—God's provision is contingent to our obedience. In legalism, Eph. 4:32 would read: “Be kind and tender-hearted, forgiving one another, *so that* God in Christ forgives you.”

Whether we were raised in a religious background or not, this is the instinctive way we relate to God. For example, “Why should God forgive me or bless me?” Legalism answers: “Because I have done my best, worked hard, etc.”

*But in biblical Christianity*, the imperatives are based on the indicatives—my obedience to God is in response to God's provision. Thus, Eph. 4:32 reads: “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, *just as* God in Christ also has forgiven you.” Why does God forgive me? Christianity answers: “Because He chose to through Christ, even though I deserve His judgment. Because God gave me this gift, I can extend forgiveness freely to those who sin against me.”

See Jesus' response to the woman caught in adultery in Jn. 8:11. If Jesus was a legalist, He would have said: “Leave your life of sin, and then I will forgive you.” But Jesus said: “I do not condemn you; now leave your life of sin.”

Practice identifying indicatives, imperatives, and how they relate to one another. Put a parentheses around the (indicative portion), bracket the [imperative] portion, and underline the words that identify the relationship between these two portions (this underline instruction is not in their notes). The last two passages summarize the Christian's life of sanctifying faith.

**(Rom. 12:1) 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.**

**(Matt. 28:18-20) "(All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth). [Go] therefore and [make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you]; and (lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age).**

**(Phil. 2:12,13) . . . [work out your salvation with fear and trembling]; for (it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure).**

**(Eph. 5:1,2) [Be imitators of God], as (beloved children); and [walk in love], just as (Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us) . . .**

**(1 John 4:11) Beloved, if/since (God so loved us), [we also ought to love one another].**

How does indicative/imperative apply to:

- Faith: indicatives = dependence aspect; imperatives = action aspect
- Know, consider present: indicatives = know, consider; imperatives = present

## Faith & Christian experience

Christians who live by faith live confident in God's love for them. They also experience God's love, power, forgiveness, etc. on a relatively consistent basis. Put differently, they interact properly with God's indicatives and imperatives. (See "Relating to God's Indicatives & Imperatives" illustration)

- The indicatives remind us that sanctification is not something we do by our own effort. God is with us, and he is going to give us all the resources and motivation we need to live for him and do his will. If we understand this, it will build our *confidence* and *motivation* to live for God.

*If we depend on God's love for us (indicatives), we will be motivated and empowered to give His love to others (imperatives).*

What do we call a Christian walk that is ignorant of or neglects God's indicatives? This is a primary form of *legalism*—just focusing on God's commands without proper dependence on Him. Such persons are quick to emphasize what God says we must do, but they become either self-righteous (if they dilute God's commands), or they wallow in guilt, fear and discouragement (if they see God's commands for what they actually require).

- The imperatives remind us that many times, our experience of God's blessing is dependent upon our willingness to *act* on His imperatives by faith. This corrects a common misconception among Christians: that even after we have understood God's promises, we should wait until we experience God's love, power, forgiveness, etc. before we act on his imperatives.

In reality, we often have to take a scary step of faith against our feelings before we experience God's love and power. In Josh. 3:13-16, God called on the Israelites to "get their feet wet" before He acted to stop the waters. By doing this, God called on them to take a step of faith before they experienced his power.

The experience of God's provisions *flow from* a life of faith.

The normal biblical order (the faith-walk) is LEARN-ACT-EXPERIENCE. *If we actively give God's love away to others, we will consistently experience God's love; our relationship with Him will grow.*

The modern person's order of events: LEARN-EXPERIENCE-ACT

EXAMPLES: Usually, I must choose by faith to forgive an offender before I feel God's love for him/her. Usually, I must choose by faith to serve someone else before I feel freedom from anxiety. Usually, I must choose by faith to share about Jesus with someone before I feel Him empowering and guiding me.

*Practice identifying how acting on God's imperatives leads to experiencing God's blessing. Bracket the [imperative] involved, put the (blessing promised) in parenthesis, and underline the words that identify the relationship between these two (if applicable).*

**John 13:17** If you know these things, (you are blessed) *if* [you do them].

**Jas. 1:22-25\*\*** But [prove yourselves doers of the word], and not merely hearers who delude themselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. But [one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer], *this man* (shall be blessed in what he does).

**1 Jn. 3:18-20** Little children, [let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth]. (We will know) *by this* (that we are of the truth, and will assure our heart before Him in whatever our heart condemns us); for God is greater than our heart and knows all things.

What do we call a Christian walk that is ignorant of or neglects God's imperatives? This is *super-spirituality*, or *licentiousness*—God's love for me cancels out the importance to actively and practically love God and others. Such persons are quick to react against calls to action as legalism, but their Christian lives become spiritually stagnant because they don't experience God's power in character change or ministry.

Do you find that you tend to wander off the path in this area? Do you usually tend toward legalism or licentiousness, or do you bounce back and forth between them? Are you a legalist in some areas, but licentious in others? These problems are common in the Christian life—we don't learn to walk by faith quickly or easily!

But remember: God is the Good Shepherd—He will correct you when you wander, normally by bringing to mind the complementary biblical truths. Sometimes He does this as you read Scripture. Often He does this through input by Christian friends. Just respond to His correction! And help your other brothers and sisters in this area—this is an important aspect of ministry.

*Through these positive experiences God reinforces the cycle of know, consider, present. We come to know Him on a relational level, and the result is a growing eagerness to present ourselves as "those alive from the dead."*

"There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, in the end, "Thy will be done." All that are in Hell, choose it. Without that self-choice there could be no Hell. No soul that seriously and constantly desires joy will ever miss it. Those who seek find. Those who knock it is opened." — [C.S. Lewis, \*The Great Divorce\*](#)

## Memory verses

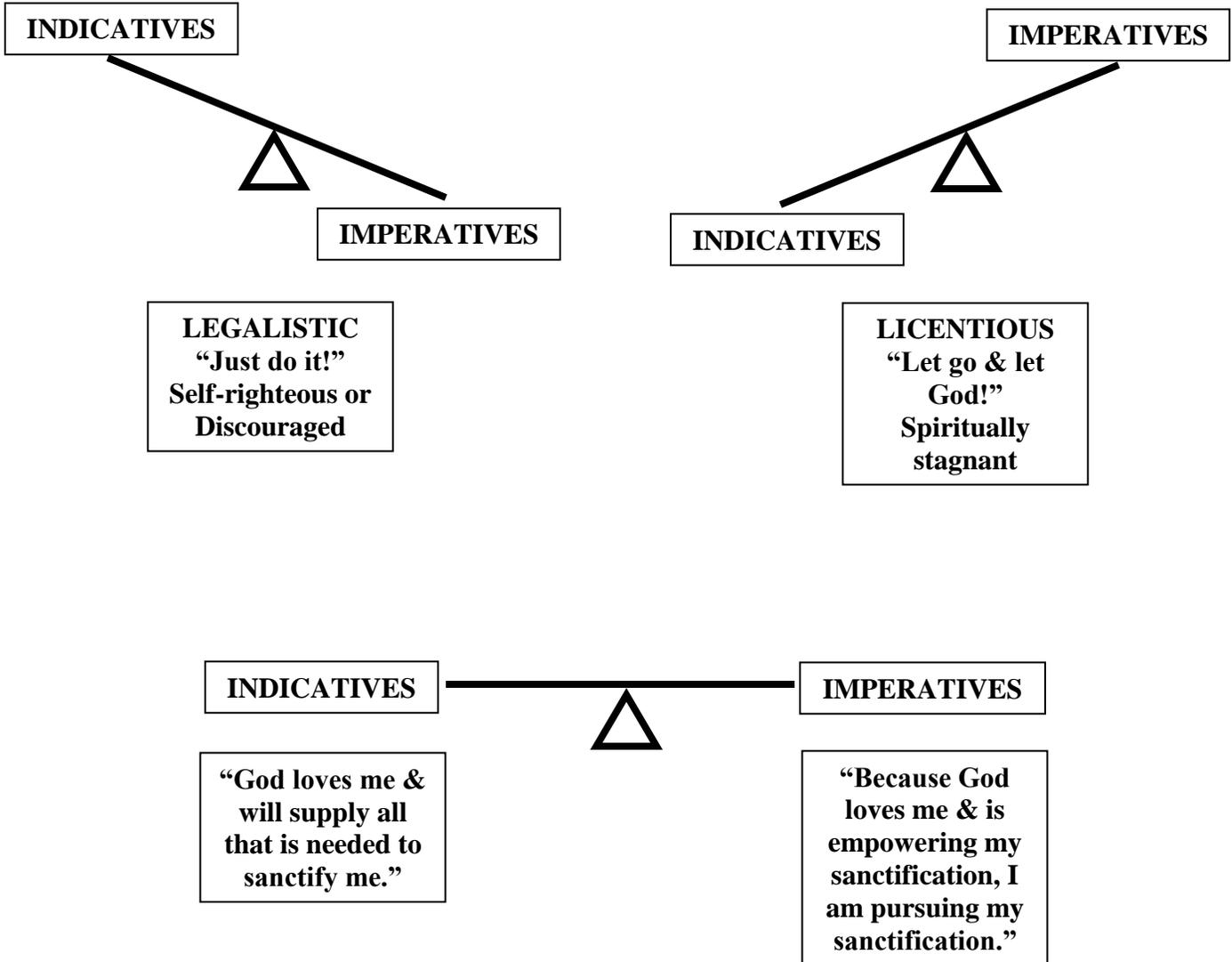
Rom. 8:4-6\*\*

Gal. 5:16-25\*\*

Jas. 1:22-25\*\*

## Assignment

## Relating to God's Indicatives & Imperatives<sup>1</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Elyse Fitzpatrick, *Because He Loves Me* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2008), p. 115.