The New Testament ringingly proclaims the "indicatives" of salvation—those unequivocal statements concerning the accomplished, historical facts of the gospel. No less surely, however, does it confront us with the "imperatives"—those commands to participate in the salvation already established. This too is an indispensable factor in redemption.

Norman H. Young

Imperatives of salvation

New Testament scholars frequently use two grammatical functions of the verb—the indicative and the imperative—to describe two aspects of the Christian gospel. The indicative mood is the form of the verb that makes statements and asks questions. When scholars refer to the "indicatives of salvation," they mean the great statements of the New Testament concerning the accomplished historical events of the gospel. For example: "Christ died for our sins" (1 Cor. 15:3);* "Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6); "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law" (Gal. 3:13).

The imperative mood describes that function of the verb that makes commands or requests. For example, "Sit still"; "Come here"; "Spare a penny"; "Help me." In its proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the New Testament uses what may be called "imperatives of salvation." These imperatives, in the main, are addressed to two distinct groups, those who are apart from faith and those who are in faith.

Those imperatives that present a call *to* faith we can describe as "imperatives of evangelism," while those that exhort a member to remain *in* the faith, in the community of believers, or the church, we can call "imperatives of the ecclesia." The distinction is not, of course, rigid. When apostasy threatens, imperatives of evangelism can be directed to believers. However, imperatives of the ecclesia are never addressed to the world. In general, then, the categories are reasonably well defined, and a study of these two groups of imperatives will illuminate our understanding of the New Testament's doctrine of salvation.

The basic meaning of many of the verbs used as imperatives of evangelism has to do with physical motion or receptive action; others move more in the realm of the intellect or senses. But common to all the examples discussed here is the appeal to change one's position or attitude.

The New Testament conceives of the man who is apart from faith as "away from the living God" (Heb. 3:12), "without God" (Eph. 2:12); so it is understandable that imperatives of evangelism challenge the unbeliever (or one whose faith is failing) with appeals demanding movement or receptive action. We find, for example, such invitations as "'Come to me, all who labor'" (Matt. 11:28); "The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come'" (Rev. 22:17); "'Come to me and drink'" (John

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7:37); "'Follow me'" (Matt. 4:19; John 1:43); "'Come to the marriage feast'" (Matt. 22:4); "'Seek first his kingdom'" (chap. 6:33); "'Enter by the narrow gate'" (chap. 7:13); "'Do not harden your hearts'" (Heb. 3:8, 15; 4:7); "Draw near to God" (James 4:8).

Sometimes the imperatives of salvation demand a real physical action but contain an underlying spiritual movement or reception. Among such are "'Rise, take up your pallet, and walk'" (John 5:8); "'Let him . . . take up his cross and follow me'" (Matt. 16:24); "Take, eat" (Mark 14:22, K.J.V.); "'Stretch out your hand'" (chap. 3:5); "'Lazarus, come out'" (John 11:43); "'Receive the Holy Spirit'" (chap. 20:22); "'Put your finger here'" (verse 27).

Not all the imperatives of evangelism contain the graphic idea of motion or receptive action in either a literal or metaphorical sense; many are abstract verbs referring to the intellect or senses. Nevertheless, even in these cases the idea of a change of attitude is still very strong, as is obvious in two of the most frequently occurring imperatives of evangelism, *believe* and *repent*.

Some examples: "'Repent, and believe in the gospel'" (Mark 1:15); "'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 3:2; 4:17); "'Repent, and be baptized'" (Acts 2:38); "'Repent therefore, and turn again'" (chap. 3:19); "'Believe in the light'" (John 12:36); "'Believe also in me'" (chap. 14:1); "'Believe me'" (verse 11); "'Have faith in God'" (Mark 11:22); "'Believe in the Lord Jesus'" (Acts 16:31).

Besides *repent* and *believe*, the New Testament uses a variety of other verbs as shown by the following verses: "'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'" (Acts 2:40); "Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20); "'Fear God and give him glory'" (Rev. 14:7); "'Listen to him'" (Mark 9:7); "Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts" (James 4:8).

The imperatives of evangelism always presuppose and are grounded in God's prior redemptive act in Jesus Christ. The call to come out (Rev. 18:4), to follow, to take or receive or accept, et cetera, is always the invitation for man to participate in a salvation that God has already established. But true as that is, the human response to the imperatives of salvation is an integral and indispensable factor in the total redemptive activity.

Having entered into the salvation of the Lord does not mean that the man in faith is secure quite apart from a continuing response. This is made clear by the second category of imperatives—the imperatives of the ecclesia.

Whereas the imperatives of evangelism always carry the idea of change and often of movement, the imperatives of the ecclesia convey the idea of constancy, of staying out. Christians are urged to stay clear of sin with imperatives such as these: "Keep yourselves from idols" (1 John 5:21); "Shun the worship of idols" (1 Cor. 10:14); "Abstain from every form of evil" (1 Thess. 5:22); "Put to death therefore what is earthly in you" (Col. 3:5). Perseverance is admonished by using verbs such as *continue, remain, hold fast*. Here are some examples: "'Hold fast what you have'" (Rev. 2:25; 3:11); "'What you received and heard; keep that'" (verse 3); "Guard the truth that has been entrusted to you" (2 Tim. 1:14); "Walk ye in him" (Col. 2:6, K.J.V.).

Notice that most of the examples so far have come from contexts in which apostasy is the major concern, as is the case with such writings as the book of Revelation and the Epistle to the Hebrews, as well as 1 John. This remains true for most of these further examples: "Keep yourselves in the love of God" (Jude 21); "Little children, abide in him" (1 John 2:28); "'Abide in me, and I in you'" (John 15:4); "'Abide in my love'" (verse 9); "Continue in what you have learned" (2 Tim. 3:14); "Cast not away therefore your confidence" (Heb. 10:35, K.J.V.); "'Awake, and strengthen what remains'" (Rev. 3:2); "Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth" (1 Cor. 16:13); "Stand fast therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of a slavery" (Gal. 5:1); "Stand firm thus in the Lord" (Phil. 4:1); "Stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught by us" (2 Thess. 2:15).

The New Testament makes it abundantly clear that these imperatives of the ecclesia are urgent and earnest, for final salvation depends directly on the believer's continuance in a robust and obediently vital faith. A series of conditional clauses found throughout the New Testament puts this beyond dispute. Notice the unequivocal conditional force of the following verses:

Christians are "heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided [*eiper*] we suffer with him" (Rom. 8:17). "Note then . . . God's kindness to you, provided [*ean*] you continue in his kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off" (chap. 11:22). "The gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if [*ei*] you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:1, 2). "To present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him, provided [*ei ge*] that you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:22, 23). "For now we live, if [*ean*] you stand fast in the Lord" (1 Thess. 3:8).

There is no escaping the force of these verses, which unanimously assert that "we share in Christ, if only [*eanper*] we hold our first confidence firm to the end" (Heb. 3:14). This does not mean that the Christian is reduced to a quavering uncertainty about his present or ultimate salvation, but it does mean that the imperatives of the ecclesia and the above conditional phrases, when taken seriously, prevent Christian assurance from degenerating into a hopeless and perilous carnal security.

Oscar Cullmann rightly observes that "the call of the New Testament to us is always founded in the *indicatives* [i.e., the statements about the divine saving events already accomplished in history through Christ] concerning events in which, at the outset, we do not participate at all."—*Salvation in History*, p. 70. This grand truth that salvation is grounded in God's prior acts in history, must not, however, be permitted in any way to reduce the truth that the New Testament's proclamation of these divine events is in itself simultaneously a call to a decision. The announcement of God's saving activity in the death and resurrection of Christ is at the same time a call for sinful man to repent, to move from unbelief to faith. This is the message of the imperatives of evangelism.

The man who has responded to the call to faith is to live in Christ even as he received Him (Col. 2:6). Christ's death to sin, and resurrection unto life and God, are also to be the way of the believer's existence, as well as the basis of his redemption. The believer too is to die to sin and live unto God. (See Rom. 6:10, 11.) To walk in the Lord means to continue in the saving events of the death and resurrection of Christ through faith and to live out those events as children of light (see Eph. 5:6-20). The imperatives of the ecclesia are a call to the Christian to persevere in his faith and to maintain his walk in obedience, the obedience that issues from faith (see Rom. 1:5; 16:26).

Thus the presentation of the full-orbed gospel not only rightly emphasizes the indicatives of salvation but also faithfully urges the imperatives of salvation.

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