

Uses of the Imperative Mood

The imperative is the mood of volition as it expresses a command or entreaty. The word imperative comes to the English from the Latin *impĕrāre* meaning “to impose, to command.” The imperative in Greek is found in both the second and third person. And as would be expected, the present imperative expresses action in progress (continuous action). The aorist, however, expresses action whose time aspect is not defined.

Imperative of command. The imperative of command is the most common usage. Examples are as follows:

Matthew 3:2: και λεγων **μετάοείτε** ἤγγικεν γαρ ἡ βασιλεια τῶν οὐρανῶν. (And saying, **repent**, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand).

Matthew 28:19: πορευθεντες ουν **μεθητευσατε** παντα τα ἔθνη, βαπτιζοντες αὐτους εἰς το ὄνομα τοῦ πατρος και τοῦ υἱοῦ και τοῦ ἁγίου πνευματος, (Go therefore, **disciple** all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit.)

Imperative of prohibition. The imperative of prohibition is formed by use of the negative μη preceding the imperative. The result is a process and as Dr. Young writes, “[t]hus ‘Don’t get into the habit of doing it’ or ‘Don’t make it a part of your life-style.’ It is often found in the Epistles where Paul calls for a new life in Christ: Romans 12:2 μη συσχηματιζεσθε τῷ αἰῶνι τουτω, ἀλλα μεταμορφοῦσθε τῇ ἀνακαινωσει τοῦ νοος (Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind). The first imperative συσχηματιζεσθε is a prohibition, and the second μεταμορφοῦσθε is a positive command. Both are present imperatives that focus on the details one encounters as the injunctions are undertaken.”¹

1 John 4:1: Αγαπητοι, **μη** πάτι πνευματιχ **πιστευετε** ἀλλα δοκιμαζετε τα πνευματα εἰ ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐστιν, ὅτι πολλοι ψευδοπροφηται ἐξεληλυθασιν εἰς τον κοσμον. (Beloved, do **not believe** every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone into the world.)

Imperative of entreaty. When the speaker wants to convey a force of urgency or a request, the imperative of entreaty is used. Examples are:

¹ Richard Young, p. 143

John 4:7: ἔρχεται γυνή ἐκ τῆς Σαμαρειας ἀντλήσαι ὕδωρ. Λεγει αὐτῇ ὁ Ἰησοῦς· δος μοι πεῖν· (A woman of Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “**Give** me to to drink.”).

Luke 11:1: Καὶ ἐγένετο ἐν τῷ εἶναι αὐτὸν ἐν τοπῷ τινὶ προσευχομένον, ὡς ἐπαύσατο, εἶπεν τις τῶν μαθητῶν αὐτοῦ πρὸς αὐτὸν κυριε, διδάξον ἡμᾶς προσευχεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ Ἰωαννης ἐδίδαξεν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ. (Now it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, one of His disciples said to Him, “Lord, **teach** us to pray, as John also taught his disciples.”)

Imperative of permission. The imperative of permission is used when the speaker wants to grant permission to do a thing. An example is 1 Cor. 7:36b: εἰναι ἡ ὑπερακμει και οὕτως ὀφειλει γινεσθαι, ὃ θελει ποιειτω, οὐχ ἁμαρτανει, γαμειτωαν. (If she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, **let him do** what he wishes. He does not sin; let them marry.)

1 Cor. 7:15: εἰ δε ὁ ἄπιστος χωριζεται, **χωριζεσθω**· Οὐ δεδουλωται ὁ ἀδελφος ἢ ἀδελφη ἐν τοῖς τοιουτοις· ἐν δε ειρηνη κεκληκεν ὑμᾶς ὁ θεος. (But if the unbeliever departs, **let him depart**; a brother or a sister is not under bondage in such. But God has called us to peace.)

Imperative of condition. The imperative may be used as a condition of the form “If X, then Y will happen.” The imperative is found in the X (the protasis) and is usually of the form *imperative + και + future indicative*.

John 2:19: ἀπεκριθη Ἰησοῦς και εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· **λυσατε** τον ναον τουτον και ἐν τρισιν ἡμεραις ἐγερῶ. (Jesus answered and said to them, “**Destroy** this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” Has the sense, “if you destroy this temple, then in three days I will rase it up.”)

James 4:7: ὑποταγητε ουν τῷ θεῷ, **ἀντιστητε** δε τῷ διαβολῷ και φευζεται ἀφ’ ὑμῶν, (Therefore, submit to God. **Resist** the devil and he will flee from you. Has the sense, “if you resist the devil, then he will flee from you.”)