

Infinitive Tense-Form Choice: Ephesians as a Test Case

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Verbal aspect and its involvement in the Greek verbal system has been intensely debated since Stanley Porter and Buist Fanning published their dissertations after independently researching the role verbal aspect plays in the Greek verbal system. This essay seeks to take the research done in verbal aspect studies over the past three decades and apply it to a particular test case, namely Paul's use of infinitives in Ephesians. Greek, like most languages, makes distinctions that do not directly translate well into English. Since the Greek infinitive mostly occurs in the Present and Aorist tense-forms, an author has a choice in which to use. However, the choice is not purely subjective but has contextual, lexical, and aspectual influences. This essay explores these influences and shows their exegetical significance in the book of Ephesians.

Key Words: aorist tense, Ephesians, infinitive, lexical influence, present tense, procedural characteristics, verbal aspect

Introduction

All languages make distinctions that are often not easily understandable or translatable into other languages. From Chinese resultative verb endings to the nuances of reflexive pronouns in Latin, it is important to understand a language within its own system and its own particularities rather than simply through translation. Ancient Greek is no exception. In imperatives, subjunctives, and infinitives, *Koine* Greek offers tense-form choices that are not naturally available or immediately understandable to an English speaker. For instance, the difference between the infinitives *περιπατήσαι* and *περιπατεῖν* do not generally translate with any distinction into English as can be observed in translations of Eph 4:1 and 4:17 respectively. As the beginning Greek student quickly finds out, the Greek language often makes a distinction between Present and Aorist forms of various non-indicative moods—the infinitive being the focus here.¹ Traditionally, the student is taught that Aorist means “once-and-for-all” and

¹ For the purposes of this essay, I will use the convention of referring to aspects in lower case (imperfective/perfective) and tense-forms with upper case (Present/Aorist/Perfect).

the Present means “continually.” However, s/he soon discovers that this simple distinction does not always fit and is left wondering why a Greek author would choose one tense over the other. In *Koine* Greek, tense-form choice for infinitives was not arbitrary or fully subjective but involved lexical, contextual, and aspectual influences. An analysis of the infinitives in Ephesians will show the benefits of understanding these influences in the interpretation of Paul’s letter.

Tense-Form Influences

Since aspectual studies have recently seen a tremendous increase in scrutiny, various approaches to understanding verbal aspect will be surveyed followed by summarizing the relevant lexical and contextual factors that influence tense-form choice. These factors will primarily be discussed in their relation to the infinitive. Finally, the infinitives of Ephesians will be examined to demonstrate the fruit of this study.

Verbal Aspect

Though verbal aspect has been studied and applied to languages ancient and modern, it did not influence New Testament studies greatly until Porter and Fanning published their seminal works on verbal aspect and New Testament Greek in 1989 and 1990 respectively.² Since that time, there has been a significant amount of discussion and debate regarding the proper understanding of verbal aspect and its relationship to *Koine* Greek. In sum, these studies attempted to overthrow the dominant view that either *Aktionsart* or time was the primary semantic meaning encoded in the Greek verbal system. Instead, they argued, verbal aspect is the primary meaning semantically encoded in the Greek verb, and other features, such as *Aktionsart* and time, were either secondary or not involved in the basic semantic meaning of the verbal system. By and large, the understanding of verbal aspect being primary in the meaning of the verb has won acceptance, but the nuances and details are still being discussed and debated to this day.³

² Stanley E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament: With Reference to Tense and Mood*, SBG 1 (New York: Peter Lang, 1989); Buist M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, Oxford Theological Monographs (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

³ As evidenced, for instance, in the 2013 SBL discussion “The Perfect Storm,” where Porter, Fanning, and Campbell debated the proper understanding of verbal aspect in the Perfect and Pluperfect tense-forms.

Verbal aspect is largely understood as the “viewpoint” an author/speaker chooses to depict a verbal situation. The two undisputed aspects are imperfective, which views the situation internally, and perfective, which views the situation externally.⁴ Imperfective aspect encodes the idea of viewing the situation as though it is “unfolding before the speaker/writer” without beginning or end in view.⁵ Perfective aspect, on the other hand, views the situation externally as a whole, but without reference to its internal structure.⁶ Oftentimes the illustration of a parade is used to depict this distinction. The spectator on the sidelines views the parade as it passes (imperfective aspect), whereas the news reporter in the helicopter views the parade as a whole seeing both the beginning and end of the action (perfective aspect). Thus, each is describing the same situation (the parade) but from different viewpoints.⁷ It should be noted that perfective aspect does *not* mean “punctiliar” in of itself; neither does imperfective aspect equate to “progressive” or “continuous”—these are more properly understood as *Aktionsarten*.⁸

For the Greek infinitive, perfective aspect is realized in the Aorist tense-form and imperfective aspect is realized in the Present tense-form. The Perfect tense-form has greater diversity of views ranging from imperfective, perfective, or stative aspect. For the purpose of this paper, however, the Perfect will not be considered as it is rarely used in the infinitive and as such does not appear to have a significant influence in an author’s tense-form choice.⁹ The perfective and imperfective aspects are considered to be in *equipollent* opposition rather than *privative* opposition, meaning that there was a positive choice for each aspect rather than one being simply unmarked while the other had a positive semantic meaning.¹⁰

⁴ Bernard Comrie, *Aspect: An Introduction to the Study of Verbal Aspect and Related Problems*, Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 4.

⁵ Constantine R. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect, the Indicative Mood, and Narrative: Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament*, SBG 13 (New York: Peter Lang, 2007), 8.

⁶ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 27.

⁷ However, even though “viewpoint” is the primary metaphor that is used, there is disagreement as to whether this should be understood as a spatial metaphor or a temporal one. See Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 18–27 for a defense of a spatial metaphor.

⁸ Campbell, *Indicative Mood*, 10–11.

⁹ In the UBS5 there are 2291 infinitives with 49 (2%) being in the Perfect tense. One of these is in Ephesians and will be briefly discussed below.

¹⁰ See Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 90; Campbell, *Indicative Mood*, 19–21.

Thus every time a Greek writer would use an infinitive, he had a mandatory choice of choosing one aspect over the other. However, it will be shown that this choice was influenced by a number of factors and was not wholly subjective.¹¹

In Greek infinitives, imperfective aspect is created by using the Present tense-form of the verb (depicting the verbal situation internally), while perfective aspect is created by using the Aorist tense-form (depicting the situation externally). The question before us is why a writer would want to depict an infinitival action one way or the other? Stated differently, what factors were involved in an author’s choice of aspect in the infinitive? Though there is general agreement on what each aspect *is* and what tense-form encodes them, there are a variety of approaches in regards to their significance and the reasons why each aspect would be chosen in particular contexts.

Stanley Porter takes perhaps the most extreme (purist?) view of an author’s aspectual choice. For Porter the aspect choice is almost completely subjective as demonstrated in his definition of verbal aspect: “Greek verbal aspect is a synthetic semantic category (realized in the forms of verbs) used of meaningful oppositions in a network of tense systems to grammaticalize the author’s reasoned subjective choice of conception of a process.”¹² The key term here is “reasoned subjective choice.” In his work, Porter argues this thesis by providing examples of tense-forms that are used in a variety of temporal and aspectual circumstances to demonstrate that since tense-forms can be “contrastively substituted,” there is therefore a subjective choice in how the author desires to depict the action.¹³

In Porter’s discussion of verbal aspect in the non-indicative moods (particularly the imperative and infinitive), he argues that the main discourse function of the differing tense-form choices is due to the author’s desire to display prominence.¹⁴ Thus, for Porter, the Present tense-form of the infinitive is more prominent than the Aorist tense-form.¹⁵ So, in regards to the aim of this study, Porter would argue that the author would choose the Present tense-form when he wanted to make the action of the infinitive more prominent, and an Aorist for an action less prominent.

¹¹ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 34, 50, 85.

¹² Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 88.

¹³ Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 107. Though see Steven E. Runge, “Contrastive Substitution and the Greek Verb: Reassessing Porter’s Argument,” *NovT* 56.2 (2014): 154–73 for a challenge to this claim.

¹⁴ Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 181.

¹⁵ Porter argues this by demonstrating that the Present tense-form is more “morphologically” bulky and thus more prominent (*Verbal Aspect*, 178–79).

Though this position is fairly unassailable, as a defender could always argue for subjective choice, this does not seem to have the greatest explanatory power given other factors that can be shown to influence tense-form choice in actual usage.

Around the same time that Porter was working on his analysis of verbal aspect in Greek, Buist Fanning independently studied the same topic but came to some different conclusions regarding the uses of the aspects and factors that influenced an author's choice of tense-form. Though Fanning describes the semantic feature of aspect similarly (i.e., the viewpoint the author uses to depict an action), he makes it emphatically clear that aspect cannot be separated from other features in a linguistic situation and that a purely subjective choice in aspect is rare.¹⁶ Thus, for Fanning, aspect is but one piece of the puzzle in making sense of an author's choice of tense-form.

In regards to infinitives, Fanning argues that aspectual distinction is primary with each aspect functioning in one of three ways depending on lexeme and context. Imperfective infinitives (Present) will likely be simultaneous/progressive with the main verb, customary/gnomic, or conative.¹⁷ Perfective infinitives (Aorist) will most likely be ingressive, consummative, or constative. Additionally, Fanning remarks upon some unusual aspect-usage in the infinitive particularly regarding certain infinitival constructions (e.g., purpose infinitives) that seem to prefer one aspect over the other.¹⁸ These particularities will be discussed further in the section regarding context below.

Following Porter and Fanning, Campbell published two works that set forth a slightly different model of understanding verbal aspect in *Koine* Greek. For Campbell the crucial understanding of aspect is that it encodes a spatial metaphor of viewpoint and that, as a semantic category, it cannot be cancelled.¹⁹ The Aorist infinitive encodes perfective aspect and is metaphorically more "remote"; whereas the Present infinitive is imperfective in aspect and is more "proximate."²⁰ Further, he argues that this understanding has the greatest power of explanation when analyzing the usage of the aspects in Greek literature. For Campbell, though tense-form

¹⁶ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 34, 50, 85.

¹⁷ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 390–95.

¹⁸ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 398.

¹⁹ Constantine R. Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs: Further Soundings in the Greek of the New Testament*, SBG 15 (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 19.

²⁰ Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 119.

choice is not purely subjective, the semantic reality of aspect cannot be cancelled.²¹

Concerning infinitives, Campbell states that the "aspectual functions of the infinitive are more difficult to ascertain than those of other parts of the Greek verbal system."²² Certain infinitive tense-forms occur based on the varied constructions they are found in. Although Fanning argues that some of these are "beyond explanation,"²³ Campbell argues that they are due to the "appropriateness of such forms with regard to aspect."²⁴ In this way, verbal aspect makes a meaningful distinction between the Present and Aorist infinitive in all constructions.

Though there is wide agreement on the definition of verbal aspect, there is still varied understanding of its application and function in context. Porter views aspect choice as subjective whereas both Fanning and Campbell acknowledge that there are other influencing factors, though this is stated more strongly by Fanning. In regard to the infinitive, verbal aspect plays a factor in how the author wishes to portray the verbal situation, but it is not the only factor as will be discussed below.

Lexical Influence

Contra to Porter, others have argued that the tense-form a writer chooses is influenced by the lexical nature of the verb. Some verbs, such as εἶναι, are lexically *determined*, which means that they have no alternate form available and thus provide no meaningful opposition. Other verbs can exert lexical *influence* on the aspect chosen as it is more naturally expressed by one aspect over the other. Vendler's taxonomy is often used to discuss the procedural characteristics, or lexical aspect, of verbs which can then be used to analyze the verb's influence on tense-form choice.²⁵ Vendler's taxonomy outlines classes of verbs as seen in the table below.

²¹ Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 7.

²² Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 101.

²³ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 399.

²⁴ Campbell, *Verbal Aspect and Non-Indicative Verbs*, 101.

²⁵ Christopher J. Thomson, "What Is Aspect? Contrasting Definitions in General Linguistics and New Testament Studies," in *The Greek Verb Revisited: A Fresh Approach for Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Stephen E. Runge and Christopher J. Fresch (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 48–49. These are not technically categories of verbs, but rather the "verb constellation," which includes its arguments. For convenience, when referring to the procedural characteristics of a verb, the verbal constellation will be implied unless it causes a noteworthy change. Fanning comments extensively on the influence of these factors, though he classifies achievements as climaxes or punctuals (*Verbal Aspect*, 129).

Procedural Characteristics			
Atelic		Telic	
State	Activity	Accomplishment	Achievement

Verbs can be classified first by whether they are atelic or telic. Atelic verbs have no natural terminus and include stative verbs (e.g., love, believe, know, etc.) and activity verbs (e.g., run, work, etc.). These classes of verbs will be expressed more naturally by imperfective aspect (i.e., Present tense-form) as it naturally depicts an action without endpoints in view. Telic verbs are those that do have a natural terminus and are thus considered “bounded” and include accomplishments (e.g., find, create, learn, etc.) and achievements, which are instantaneous in nature (e.g., hit, shut, take, etc.). These are more naturally expressed by perfective aspect (i.e., Aorist tense-form) as it has the endpoints of an action in view. Thus, atelic verbs—especially in non-indicative moods where temporal considerations are minimal—will have a greater propensity toward imperfective aspect, and telic verbs toward perfective aspect.²⁶ This is because imperfective aspect naturally denotes an action that is unbounded and not brought to a terminus whereas perfective aspect will naturally denote an action that is bounded and has come (or will come) to a natural end.

Determining the procedural characteristic of verbs can be messy and imprecise at times. Thompson notes that there is still a good deal of work to be done in accurately identifying the semantic properties of Greek verbs.²⁷ Even though there is still no consensus on precisely determining the procedural characteristic of Greek verbs, or verb constellations, it is still a helpful heuristic in thinking through the lexical influence of verbs on aspectual choice.²⁸

In his discussion on this topic, Fanning argues that “fully subjective choices between aspects are not common, since the nature of the action

²⁶ Benjamin L. Merkle, “The Abused Aspect: Neglecting the Influence of a Verb’s Lexical Meaning on Tense-Form Choice,” *BBR* 26.1 (2016): 68.

²⁷ Thompson, “What Is Aspect,” 50.

²⁸ A way forward for some verbs, however, would be to see if they greatly prefer one aspect or another in a mood like the imperative as it has the fewest additional factors affecting its choice. Thus, if a verb has a great propensity toward one tense-form rather than another, this would be a strong indication of the class of verb it belongs to, at least in determining telicity. Additionally, even though English glosses should not be the primary means to determine procedural characteristics, the conceptual idea of the actions can form an initial hypothesis and prove helpful. Both of these methods were used in defining the procedural characteristics for verbs given below.

or the procedural character of the verb or verb-phrase can restrict the way an action is viewed by a speaker.”²⁹ Fanning explicates the implications of this by showing how the aspects in Greek are affected by the procedural characteristics, or inherent meaning, of the verb. Wallace makes similar observations and states, “Often a choice of tense is made for a speaker by the action he is describing.”³⁰ Merkle further demonstrates this lexical influence in his work on imperatives and convincingly argues that lexical meaning can have a significant impact on tense-form choice.³¹ Porter, however, writes, “Tense usage is not dependent upon lexis, otherwise there is no accounting for the number of different tense forms in Greek that may be used with the same lexical item within the same temporal contexts.”³² The evidence in favor of lexical influence, however, seems to be stronger and provides greater explanatory power.

Comrie notes that the importance of the telic/atelic distinction is that it can greatly limit the semantic range of verbs when combined with verbal aspect.³³ For our purposes, it is argued that the reverse is also the case; namely, that the inherent meaning of the verb will be most naturally expressed with one aspect or the other. Building on Fanning and contra to Porter, Baugh makes a strong argument for “default” forms particularly in non-indicative verbs.³⁴ Merkle puts forth additional research when analyzing verb forms in the imperative mood showing that Greek authors would generally comply with convention when choosing the tense of the imperative and thus, if they do, an interpreter should not overemphasize

²⁹ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 85.

³⁰ Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 504.

³¹ Benjamin L. Merkle, “Verbal Aspect and Imperatives: Ephesians as a Test Case,” in *New Testament Philology: Essays in Honor of David Alan Black*, ed. Melton Bennett Winstead (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 34–51.

³² Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 87. Thomson rebuts this position by stating, “[Porter’s] reasoning suffers from the flaw that it is based on the statistical co-occurrence of aspects with particular lexemes, without regard to the constraints on the types of situations (or more precisely, conceptualizations of situations) that can be expressed by those combinations” (“What Is Aspect,” 69).

³³ Comrie, *Aspect*, 46.

³⁴ Steven M. Baugh, “Introduction to Greek Tense Form Choice in the Non-Indicative Moods,” Unpublished Paper (California: Westminster Seminary, 2009), 7.

the aspect choice.³⁵ These conclusions will be applied and tested in our analysis of infinitives in Ephesians.

Contextual Influence

There are many contextual factors that can influence a writer's tense-form choice. Many have recognized the influence of general versus specific commands that can influence the aspect choice of an imperative. In particular, general commands are normally in the Present tense whereas specific commands are normally in the Aorist tense.³⁶ For infinitives the situation is more complex. In particular, there are many syntactical constructions that tend to heavily impact the author's choice of tense with infinitives. As Stork argues, "One of the most important contextual features that are relevant in the case of the dynamic infinitive, is *the construction of which the dynamic infinitive is a part*."³⁷ The following is a table with infinitive constructions that display a great degree of preference for one tense-form over the other.³⁸

Syntactical Construction Influence on the Infinitive			
Construction	Head Word	Present	Aorist
Complementary	δύναμαι	57	154
Complementary	μέλλω	84	7
Complementary	ὀφείλω	19	6
Object of Preposition	ἐν	44	12
Object of Preposition	διά	24	1
Object of Preposition	μετά	0	14

³⁵ Merkle, "The Abused Aspect." See also Michael Aubrey, "Greek Prohibitions," in *The Greek Verb Revisited: A Fresh Approach for Biblical Exegesis*, ed. Stephen E. Runge and Christopher J. Fresch (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016), 486–538, who shows the influence of negation in the tense-form choice of prohibitions.

³⁶ BDF, §335. Also see Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 327–40.

³⁷ Peter Stork, *The Aspectual Usage of the Dynamic Infinitive in Herodotus* (Groningen: Bouma's Boekhuis, 1982), 38–39 (emphasis original).

³⁸ These data are taken from Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 398 and catalog the aspect-frequency in some uses of the infinitive in the New Testament.

Purpose Infinitive	<i>Simple anarthrous</i>	34	184
Result Infinitive	ὥστε	40	23

Some of these idiosyncrasies are fairly easily explained while others have no obvious reason for preferring one tense-form over the other. The infinitives that are the objects of the prepositions listed are normally temporal in nature and thus conform to the expected tense functions of the aspects.³⁹ The others, however, have no easy explanation for preferring one tense over the other and seem to be just a matter of convention and usage for the Greek author. Baugh mentions that an author who went outside of this expected norm would be making a "grammatical *faux pas*" or indicating some aspectual nuance.⁴⁰

Other contextual factors include infinitives that are a part of indirect discourse, those that are exegetical, and those that are simply the direct object or subject of the main verb. Infinitives in indirect discourse would generally preserve the tense-form that would occur in the direct speech that is reported.⁴¹ As a sub-set of indirect discourse, infinitives that produce indirect commands will need to be analyzed in relationship to the imperative that would otherwise be stated.⁴² The other contextual factors seem to be neutral in their influence of tense-form and thus will be analyzed on the basis of lexical and aspectual influence.

Analysis in Ephesians

In Ephesians there are thirty infinitives: eleven are Present, eighteen are Aorist, and one is Perfect. Some of these, however, are lexically determined: three of the Presents are εἶναι and the one Perfect is εἰδέναι. Since these verbs do not offer an author a meaningful opposition in tense-form choice they will not be included in our study.⁴³ So, of the verbs that are not lexically determined, eight are Present and eighteen are Aorist. Since contextual factors play such a strong role in influencing tense-form choice, the analysis of these verbs will be grouped by contextual categories.

³⁹ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 399–401.

⁴⁰ Baugh, "Tense Form Choice," 20.

⁴¹ Ernest D. Burton, *Syntax of the Moods and Tenses in New Testament Greek*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1892), 51.

⁴² Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 382.

⁴³ Porter labels these as aspectually vague (*Verbal Aspect*, 442–47), though Campbell makes the claim that they are suppletive and thus retain their aspectual distinction (*Indicative Mood*, 27–28).

Complementary Constructions

Ephesians includes a total of nine complementary infinitives. Most of these infinitives are in constructions in which the head verb greatly favors one tense-form over another for its complementary infinitive. Thus, we will analyze these based on their head verb. The table below shows all the complementary infinitives in Ephesians organized in this manner.

Complementary Infinitives in Ephesians				
Eph	Head Verb	Infinitive	Tense	Procedural Characteristic
3:4	δύναμαι	νοῆσαι	Aorist	Atelic: State
3:20	δύναμαι	ποιῆσαι	Aorist	Atelic: Activity
6:11	δύναμαι	στῆναι	Aorist	Telic: Accomplishment
6:13	δύναμαι	ἀντιστῆναι	Aorist	Atelic: Activity
6:13	δύναμαι	στῆναι	Aorist	Telic: Accomplishment
6:16	δύναμαι	σβέσαι	Aorist	Telic: Achievement
3:18	ἐξισχύω	καταλαβέσθαι	Aorist	Telic: Achievement
3:19	ἐξισχύω	γῶναι	Aorist	Atelic: State
5:28	ὀφείλω	ἀγαπᾶν	Present	Atelic: Activity

Δύναμαι is the head noun for six of the nine complementary infinitives. All of these occur in the Aorist which, as shown before, is expected after the verb δύναμαι.⁴⁴ Even though half of the situations depicted by these infinitives are atelic—lexically preferring the Present—the complementary construction holds a stronger influence. Thus, the aspectual distinction of these infinitives is minimized and should not be over interpreted or emphasized.

In Eph 3:18–19, Paul employs two Aorist infinitives (καταλαβέσθαι and γῶναι) with ἐξισχύω as their head verb. Since ἐξισχύω is a NT *hapax*, there is very little data for ἐξισχύω and what kind of infinitive it might prefer. However, it occurs one other time in the LXX (Sir 7:6) and there it is also followed by an Aorist infinitive. Additionally, since ἐξισχύω is semantically related to δύναμαι (both are verbs of ability), it seems best to

⁴⁴ See the chart in the section regarding contextual influences above.

infer that there is a syntactic predisposition for ἐξισχύω to take an Aorist infinitive. Lexically, καταλαβέσθαι is telic while γῶναι is atelic. Thus, while καταλαβέσθαι might lexically prefer the Aorist and γῶναι the Present, it appears that the complementary construction provides the basis for the Aorist tense-form choice.

One final complementary infinitive, ἀγαπᾶν, has ὀφείλω as its head noun. This occurs in Eph 5:28 and is expected both lexically and contextually. As demonstrated above, ὀφείλω greatly prefers the Present tense and thus this usage follows the typical convention. Though husbands should indeed love their wives continually, there is nothing surprising about ἀγαπᾶν being in the Present tense that should form the basis of this action being *grammatically* emphasized as progressive or continuous. The tense is simply working in concert with the atelic nature of the lexeme and the natural understanding of the complementary construction.

It is not all together clear why these trends seem to hold with certain complementary infinitive constructions. As Fanning remarks, “Several of the idiosyncrasies shown . . . appear to be beyond explanation—at least there is no obvious reason to explain the predominance of aorist or present in some of these uses.”⁴⁵ A tentative explanation is that there was something in the mind of the Greek author in which the aspectual identity of the infinitive conceptually fit well with the head verb even if only realized subconsciously.⁴⁶

Indirect Discourse

Infinitives in indirect discourse often require more factors to be considered in trying to determine why an author would choose one tense-form over another because they often function as reported speech and thus mimic the tense that would have been in the direct speech. In Ephesians, however, all the indirect discourse infinitives seem to function as indirect commands. As shown in the table below, there are six infinitives functioning as indirect commands in Ephesians. These will need to be analyzed with a bit more scrutiny as they are subordinate with indicative verbs but together form an utterance that is hortatory in nature. Thus, an understanding of the role of verbal aspect with imperatives and an analysis of the head verb with the infinitive will need to be considered. Fanning

⁴⁵ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 399.

⁴⁶ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*. Stork, however, provides additional conclusions but they have such diversity that it is only moderately helpful (*Dynamic Infinitive*, 346–47).

notes that this form of command “has the same range of modal forces as the direct forms . . . and is merely a stylistic variation rather than a reflection of true ‘reported speech.’”⁴⁷ Thus, these infinitives will be analyzed similar to imperatives.

Infinitives of Indirect Discourse in Ephesians			
Eph	Infinitive	Tense	Procedural Characteristic
3:13	ἐγκακεῖν	Present	Atelic: State
4:1	περιπατῆσαι	Aorist	Atelic: Activity
4:17	περιπατεῖν	Present	Atelic: Activity
4:22	ἀποθέσθαι	Aorist	Telic: Achievement
4:23	ἀνανεοῦσθαι	Present	Atelic: Activity
4:24	ἐνδύσασθαι	Aorist	Telic: Achievement

In Eph 3:13 Paul is completing a parenthetic section on his calling and ministry to the Gentiles and asks that the Ephesian believers not be discouraged by his affliction for them: διὸ αἰτοῦμαι μὴ ἐγκακεῖν ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσίν μου ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν. Thus, ἐγκακεῖν is in a hortatory construction and functions as an indirect command. Since this verb is lexically atelic, it is natural for it to assume a Present tense-form and is not “marked” in any way.⁴⁸ Therefore, the argument concerning lexical influence seems to hold here.

The next two infinitives will be grouped together as they create an opposition of tense even though they are the same verb. The first, περιπατῆσαι (4:1), is an Aorist infinitive, while περιπατεῖν (4:17) is Present and occurs just seventeen verses later. Περιπατῆσαι is the complement of παρακαλῶ and begins a parenthetic section of Ephesians that draws out the practical implications of what has already been discussed in the first three chapters. Lexically, περιπατῆσαι is atelic as demonstrated by the fact that all fourteen occurrences of this verb in the imperative mood are Present. Additionally, Present imperatives are typically found in general exhortations, of which Eph 4 is an example. In light of these considerations and the fact that παρακαλῶ seems to have no preference for being followed by an infinitive of one tense-form or the other,⁴⁹ it seems that an aspectual distinction is superseding other factors and should be

⁴⁷ Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 382.

⁴⁸ Baugh, *Tense Form Choice*, 18.

⁴⁹ In the NT, when παρακαλῶ is used in a hortatory sense and followed by an infinitive, seven of those infinitives are Aorist while six are Present.

commented on. Hoehner mentions that it should be taken ingressively as is typical of Aorist imperatives/infinitives of stative verbs.⁵⁰ The context of the passage, however, contains a general exhortation and does not seem to support this interpretation. Simpson describes it as constative and being reported in “summary fashion.”⁵¹ Fanning comments, “A departure of the normal pattern of general vs. specific makes the command insistent and urgent.”⁵² At the very least, an understanding of verbal aspect makes it clear that this command is being “marked” in some way. Given the context of the passage, it may be that Paul is using the non-typical form to highlight the transition from explanation to exhortation.

In Eph 4:17 περιπατεῖν occurs as a Present infinitive as an imperatival indirect statement with μαρτύρομαι as its head verb. As an atelic verb this is typical of the pattern generally encountered. Additionally, it fits in with a section giving general exhortation. Unlike its Aorist counterpart in 4:1, a special emphasis should not be concluded from the aspect chosen for this verb.

The remaining three infinitives in indirect command are sequenced together in Eph 4:22–24 with ἐδιδάχθητε as their head verb.⁵³ Our first infinitive, ἀποθέσθαι, is an Aorist telic verb, which is lexically expected. Thus, it would be incorrect to emphasize a completed nature of the action such as, “you were taught to *once-and-for-all* take off the old self” based on the tense-form of the infinitive. Neither would it be best to understand this as a specific, rather than a general, exhortation.⁵⁴ The final verb is of a similar nature. Ἐνδύσασθαι should not be construed as a command to “once-and-for-all” put on the new self no more than Jesus’s command in Luke 9:23 should be understood as denying one’s self once-for-all and

⁵⁰ Harold W. Hoehner, *Ephesians: An Exegetical Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 504.

⁵¹ Benjamin I. Simpson, *Translating Ephesians Clause by Clause: An Exegetical Guide*, EBooks for Translating the New Testament (Leesburg, IN: Cyber-Center for Biblical Studies, 2014), 111.

⁵² Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 381.

⁵³ Although there is debate on the nature of these three infinitives, it seems best to conclude that they function as indirect commands. For a survey of opinions along with a defense of the current position, see Benjamin L. Merkle, *Ephesians*, Exegetical Guide to the Greek New Testament (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 142–43.

⁵⁴ Campbell argues that the primary pragmatic implicature of Aorist commands is one of specific rather than general command, not necessarily punctiliar or immediate (*Non-Indicative Moods*, 84). See also Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 325–88.

taking up one’s cross once-for-all.⁵⁵ These telic actions are naturally expressed with perfective aspect and the author conforms to the expected norm of using perfective aspect with telic verbs.

The infinitive between these two, *ἀνανεοῦσθαι*, is a Present atelic verb. Thus, it also conforms to the expected tense-form given its lexical nature. It is a natural outworking of the imperfective aspect to depict actions that have natural process such as *ἀνανεοῦσθαι*. All these commands—taking off the old self, renewing the mind, and putting on the new self—are not stressing different kinds of action but simply conforming to expected conventions of usage based on lexical influence. All are likely to be understood as general commands that should be done throughout a believer’s life.

Purpose Infinitives

Anarthrous infinitives that function to show purpose are overwhelmingly found to be Aorist. In the New Testament there are 184 in the Aorist and thirty-four in the Present.⁵⁶ The table below shows the breakdown of the five purpose infinitives in Ephesians.

Purpose Infinitives in Ephesians			
Eph	Infinitive	Tense	Procedural Characteristic
3:8	εὐαγγελίσασθαι	Aorist	Atelic: Activity
3:9	φωτίσαι	Aorist	Telic: Accomplishment
4:28	μεταδιδόναι	Present	Telic: Achievement
6:11	δύνασθαι	Present	Atelic: State
6:19	γνωρίσαι	Aorist	Telic: Accomplishment

Three out of the five of these infinitives conform to the expected form based on their construction as purpose infinitives. The first two parallel each other and are giving a summary statement concerning the purpose of Paul’s ministry. Although verbs of speaking, such as *εὐαγγελίσασθαι*, are atelic in nature, the purpose construction usually takes an Aorist and so the author conforms to this convention in Eph 3:8. Following *εὐαγγελίσασθαι*, *φωτίσαι* is also in the Aorist, which is expected both in construction and its procedural characteristic. In Eph 6:19, *γνωρίσαι* also conforms to convention both from its lexical nature and the influence of the purpose construction.

⁵⁵ Merkle, “Abused Aspect,” 65.

⁵⁶ As given by Fanning, *Verbal Aspect*, 398.

One that does not conform to the expected Aorist is *δύνασθαι* in Eph 6:11. This particular lexeme is always found as a Present in the NT when it is in its infinitive form (8x) and only once is it an Aorist in the LXX, which seems due to temporal considerations.⁵⁷ It is likely that the idea of being able to do something was so inherently imperfective that it would be strange to a Greek’s ears to hear this verb otherwise.⁵⁸ Thus, the strong lexical nature of the verb and the naturalness of expressing it with imperfective aspect overcome the typical pattern of the purpose construction.

The final purpose infinitive that does not conform to expected convention is *μεταδιδόναι*, which is found in Eph 4:28 where Paul is encouraging thieves to no longer steal but work hard to give to those who have need. Both the purpose construction and the procedural characteristic of this verb should influence it toward being an Aorist. The imperfective aspect of the Present is used, which shows that the author is stressing an aspectual distinction. As a verb that denotes achievement (punctiliar), the imperfective aspect is likely being used to stress the iterative nature of giving to those in need.

Other Infinitive Constructions

The remaining infinitives include those that function as subjects, as direct objects, and epexegetically. These constructions do not show any preference toward one aspect or the other. They are given in the table below and will be analyzed based on congruence with their procedural characteristic.

Other Infinitives in Ephesians				
Eph	Infinitive	Function	Tense	Procedural Characteristic
1:10	ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι	Epexegetical	Aorist	Telic: Accomplishment
3:16	κραταιωθῆναι	Direct Object	Aorist	Atelic: Activity
3:17	κατοικῆσαι	Direct Object	Aorist	Atelic: State
5:12	λέγειν	Epexegetical	Present	Atelic: Activity
6:20	λαλῆσαι	Subject	Aorist	Atelic: Activity

⁵⁷ In the LXX *δύναμαι* is found eleven times in the Present infinitive and is only Aorist in 4 Macc 11:25. Other *Koine* Greek writers employ the Aorist infinitive of *δύναμαι* but it is still overwhelmingly found in the Present.

⁵⁸ Similar perhaps to how English speakers will rarely put a stative verb in an imperfective form whereas other languages, like Latin, might do so commonly.

The two epexegetical uses conform to what would be expected given the procedural characteristic of the verb and so the aspectual distinction of the tense-form should not be unduly emphasized. The two that function as direct objects occur together in Paul's prayer at the end of Eph 3. These two infinitives are the content of what Paul is requesting that God grant them, namely to be strengthened with power and that Christ may dwell in their hearts. Conceptually these infinitives function similar to the way many imperatives do in prayers to a deity. Since it is well attested that the Aorist is used for these kinds of imperatives,⁵⁹ it seems best to understand the context of a prayer to be the main influence in determining the tense form of these two verbs. Finally, the tense-form of the infinitive in Eph 6:20, *λαλήσαι*, appears to be aspectually motivated, meaning that Paul is not so concerned about the continuation of the speaking action but rather that speaking simply happens and that it happens well.

Conclusion

The factors that influence an author's infinitive tense-form choice are the following in order of importance: lexical determination, contextual factors, lexical influence, and aspectual distinction. Outside of a verb being lexically determined, typically the author will conform his choice of aspect (i.e., Aorist = perfective; Present = imperfective) based first on the contextual factors and syntactical constructions. Of those infinitives that are not in such constructions, the procedural characteristic of the lexeme is the primary factor that influences an author's tense-form choice. This should be expected as telic actions are naturally depicted with perfective aspect and atelic actions are naturally depicted with imperfective aspect.⁶⁰ Thus, aspect is not so much negated but working in concert with the nature of the verb. Finally, there are times when an author breaks from the norm to highlight an aspectual distinction such as communicating that giving to those in need should be a customary action throughout one's life (Eph 4:28).

⁵⁹ Porter, *Verbal Aspect*, 347–50.

⁶⁰ This is most clear in situations that are not temporally influenced, such as in most non-indicative verbs.