***The Analysis of Scripture, No. 2

The Greek Verb - PH02-01***

In our study of the book of Philippians, there are some things that I think would be helpful for us to understand at the beginning of this book to give us guidance as we proceed through it. You're probably going to hear something in this session that you may never have heard in a church service before. It may be something that you might consider most unlikely to even hear in a church service. You might feel that suddenly you've been transported into one of the classrooms of Dallas Seminary. I know that we have never systematically gone through what we're going to do in this session, but I think if you will hang in there now, that you will find it of great value and a great insight in terms of background for your understanding of not only the study of this book, but a study of vast portions of Scripture, including everything that we study in the future.

**Interpreting the Bible**

It's important for you to concentrate. My purpose here is to give you an insight as to what is involved in interpreting the Word of God so that you will have a greater respect for the fact that our Father provided the local church institution. He also provided the gift of evangelist to be able to proclaim the gospel in an effective way to draw people into the family of God. Then He provided pastor-teachers to exercise their gift. Once they have been recognized as that right pastor-teacher for that right church, they are the highest authority within that church, and are burdened with the responsibility then of explaining the Word of God to God's people so that they may feed upon the Word.

Now this is not done simply by opinion sharing. There are times when people will say, "Well this is what I heard from the pulpit this morning. I don't think that's true. I don't agree with that." I think that before we're through with this session, you will understand what a fantastic statement that is for any human being to make. That is an extremely presumptuous statement. The pastor-teacher might be wrong, conceivably, in his understanding of Scripture, but he does approach it in a way that's different than just sitting down and reading the English Bible and meditating. That is a bunch of malarkey.

If you sit down, and are restricted only to your knowledge of the Word of God that can come to you as a result of your reading your English Bible and your meditating, you will not go very far in the Christian life. You will be a flittering unstable believer, and you'll be floating around from church to church, from inspiration site to inspiration site, and you'll be going through all kinds of continual changeovers and turmoils, and you will never come to the joys and the fantastic stability and guidance that God has for you. Now I'm hoping to get this across to you by leading you into an area that ordinarily you would not enter. As I say, "ordinarily" nobody would even think about bringing this up in a church service.

**Koine Greek**

Well, you have perhaps now been fired up into the book of Philippians in the introductory stage to remember the book was written in the Koine Greek language--this special language that God prepared over the centuries for the specific purpose of writing the New Testament. This is the finest language that has ever been produced for communication. The word Koine means "common," because it was the language of the streets of the first century A.D. Everybody in the civilized world spoke Koine Greek. That's why the apostle Paul could take his magnificent thesis, his doctoral dissertation called the book of Romans, and he could write it in Greek to the very capital city of the Latin world, and everybody who spoke Latin also could read it in Greek and understand it.

The Greek says it the way God the Holy Spirit wants it to be said in its specific details. There is no way that you can get this from an English translation. I'll tell you one thing. Once you understand this, and once you have gotten a taste of hearing the Word of God explained from the beauties of the Koine Greek language, you will never again be willing to sit in the church where some preacher is getting up to inspire you and to challenge you to do something on an empty soul that can never be fed without the interpretation that God the Holy Spirit put into this Greek language. That's where it all begins. That's where it has to come from. So this language was prepared.

Well, some knowledge of all of this will greatly enhance your understanding when the pastor-teacher starts explaining the Word of God. Then he can use certain terms, and you will say, "Oh yes, I see what that means." If he says, "Here's this verb. This verb is present imperative." What does that mean? It should tell you a great deal. I don't want you to be scared. I don't want you right off the bat to say, "I'm sorry. I was a zero in English and I'll be less than that in Greek." No you won't. Here we go.

**The Greek Verb**

First of all, we're going to look at the verb. You know what a verb. A verb is the action. It tells you what to do. John runs. Now you know what John does. He runs. Alright, now the Greek verb is a very fantastic element of communication. It has several things about it that I want you to learn. All verbs have tense. Normally in English, we talk about the past, the present, and the future. Now one of the most important features of New Testament interpretation is the Greek verb. There is no way to translate this. You have some versions of Scripture, like the Amplified Version, that make an excellent attempt by using extra words to convey to you what the original is saying.

**Tense**

In the Greek, the time is not the big thing--whether it's past, present, or future is not the main thing that the verb tells you. The main thing that a Greek verb tells you is the kind of action. Now the grammatical term for that is actionsart. The actionsart tells you the kind of action. This is just the German grammatical term. You may view actions in various ways. We may view an action as linear; that is, that it is continually taking place. It is a habit. It is a way of life. In the Greek, that is conveyed by the present and the future tenses. It may be punctiliar. It may be an action, once and for all. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Here, "believe" is a once and for all action. Aorist is the expression for the tense which is used in the Greek. Then there is a combination. A thing begins at a certain point, and its results continue. That's a very important tense--it's perfect. It expresses what has happened in the past, and the results continue.

**Present Tense**

The Greek verb, in putting this together, uses, first of all, this linear idea. We call this continuous action. If you're going to express the idea of something continually taking place, for example, in the present tense, you will use the present tense. Something continually taking place in the present is expressed with the Greek present tense. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11:18, we have the expression, "I hear that there are divisions among you." Now when we tell you that, in this verse, the statement "there are divisions" is in the present tense, you will know that it is continual. When it says, "I hear," this is present tense, so you know that everywhere that Paul is going, Christians are reporting about the conditions back in the church at Corinth. They're saying they're squabbling. There are divisions among them. They're fighting. They're taking sides. Some are for Peter; some are for Paul; and, some are for Apollos. It's just terrible. And everywhere that Paul was going, he was hearing about divisions. You don't know that from the English. That tells you how bad the carnality of the church at Corinth was.

**Imperfect Tense**

If it's continual action in the past, you use the Greek imperfect tense. The imperfect, as in Mark 12:41, says something that is repeatedly happening in the past: "And many rich people were casting in much." That is describing something that took place in the past, and continually rich people were walking up to that temple and putting in large sums of money into the offering box.

**Future**

If you do it in the future, you use the future tense in the Greek. John 14:26: "He shall teach you all things." God the Holy Spirit is going to teach us all things--not just once. Continually, he's going to be instructing, instructing, and instructing. Now that tells us a great deal more of the ministry of the Holy Spirit. It tells us that there is no limitation to how much of the Word of God you can learn.

Now please let's, once and for all, put to rest this idea that there are celebrities in the Christian life. I am really sick and tired of personalities. Sometimes I see advertisements on conferences that are being held. They will actually put on one page, in big letters: "PERSONALITIES." Then there are all these mouthful-of-teeth-smile boys sitting there with their pictures, and these are the personalities that are going to be the big wheels that are going to make the conference into something. God has no personalities. There's only one celebrity in the Christian life, and that's the Lord Jesus Christ. You are not inferior to the greatest "saint" that ever lived. God the Holy Spirit will continually instruct you, and we know it from the future linear tense of the Greek. There are no limitations to how far you can go in the Christian life. Your spiritual life can constantly be raised simply by learning the Word of God. And it's up to you to get yourself where you can be taught it, and where you'll be responsive to it.

**Aorist**

Alright, then there is occurring action. This is punctiliar--one point. You have one tense in the Greek that does this, and that is the famous aorist tense. Philippians 4:11: "For I have learned to be content." Here the apostle Paul is saying that there was one time in my experience when I came to a point of spiritual maturity in my soul such that I was stable. Whether I was flush with money or whether I was poor, it made no difference. Whether things were going well or things were not going well, I was content. And the only way we could know that it was a climactic event in the life of Paul is because when we read it in the Greek, we see it's in the aorist tense. There is no point action in the present or in the future. There is the completed action. This is a combination of the point and the continuance.

**Perfect Tense**

We have action in the past with finished results in the present, and that's that perfect tense that we referred to a moment ago. Acts 5:28 says, "You have filled Jerusalem with your teachings." The disciples, at some point in the past, began proclaiming the Word of God concerning Jesus Christ as the promised Savior--the fulfillment of the messianic hope of Israel. And after a while, all of Jerusalem was filled to the point that when the leadership of Israel was confronted with this movement, it had begun in the past and its effects had continued, so that now they had to start beating the disciples and try to do something to stop it. Things that start in the past continue to the present.

**Pluperfect Tense**

You may also have an action that begins in the past with the finished results in the past, and we use the Greek pluperfect for that. That is used, for example, in John 19:22: "What I have written, I have written." Pilate said, "I did it in the past, and the action continues in the past." And he would not change it.

**Future Perfect Tense**

There is action in the future. There is an action that will begin at some point in the future, and it will continue in the future, and this is another expression of this combination action, and this uses the future perfect. Hebrews 2:13: "I will put my trust in Him." I will put my trust in Him in the future, and once I have trusted the Savior, it will continue, for I can never "untrust" myself to Him again.

I hope you will understand something as you think this through. When I tell you that a certain verb in the Greek is a certain tense, that should tell you that it continually repeated; it was an action (aorist) that happened once and for all; or, it was perfect such that it happened in the past and its effects continue.

**Greek Voice**

Now the Greek verb also has what is called voice. The voice tells how the subject of the sentence is related to the action of the verb. Now the voice will also tell you something very significant about the verb. In the Koine Greek verb, there are three kinds of relationships.

**Active Voice**

One was active. Here the subject produces the action of the verb. This stresses the action itself just as we do in the English. Matthew 5:45: "He causes his sun to shine." That's in the active voice. The verb is expressed in the active voice because God Himself is doing this.

**Middle Voice**

The middle voice tells us that the subject participates in the results of the action of the verb. Matthew 27:5 tells about Judas: "And having gone forth, he hanged himself." Judas participated in what he did. He put the rope around his neck; jumped off; and, he hanged himself. He participated in that action which he instigated. The subject acts on itself, or it is benefited by the action of the verb. This stresses the agent. How the subject is involved in the action, we have to determine from the context surrounding the verb. In English, there is no way to express this. We have to use several words to tell you this, but there was no way for a translator to sit down and make a translation, and for you to know that was middle voice. He did this to himself. He instigated this action, and the result was working upon himself.

**Passive Voice**

Then there is one other voice, and that's passive voice. Here the subject receives the action of the verb. This is what we call the voice of grace. Acts 22:30 says, "He was accused by the Jews." He received the action of somebody else.

Now within all of these voices there are refined classifications which are unnecessary for us to go into here. If you want to study the Greek language, you'll find that there are various kinds of active voices; various kinds of middle voices; and, various kinds of passive. But when we tell you that a certain verb is in the active voice, that should tell you something. That person is doing this himself. He is responsible. If we tell you that it's middle voice, that means that he's benefited, or the action turns on himself. He's involved in it some way. If we tell you that it's passive, that means that somebody else is doing it to him, and he's receiving the results of their action.

**Greek Mood**

There is also in the Greek what we call the mood of the verb. Now the mood of the verb explains the viewpoint of the speaker relative to reality. For example, we may say, "The boy runs." That's reality. But we may also say, "If the boy runs," and now it's possibility. And there's a big difference whether the boy is running, or if the boy is going to run. And the Greek tells us, by its form, which one it is. We have it broken down into four moods.

**Indicative Mood**

Number one is the indicative mood. The indicative mood is the mood that states a simple fact. It's just a simple statement of fact of reality or question. It's the mood of certainty. Now the person may be wrong, but he assumes that this is reality. John 1:1: "In the beginning was the Word." This is a simple statement of fact. That's indicative mood. This is the most commonly used mood in the Greek New Testament.

**Subjunctive**

Secondly is the subjunctive mood. The subjunctive mood is potential--not actual. It's the mood of probability. It's a contingency action. Hebrews 4:15 says, "Let us hold fast our confession." We're not sure you're going to hold fast your confession. We think that probably you will. So we exhort you, "Let us hold fast our confession."

**Optative**

Then things become even more uncertain. You notice that's what's happening here. It is the weakening of reality. Indicative mood says there's no question about it. Subjunctive says, "Well, probably, but maybe not so sure." Then we have another mood which is optative, and optative is only possible. It's even weaker than subjunctive. The speaker is even less sure that this will be the situation. It's the mood of possibility. It's a conceivable action. 2 Thessalonians 3:5: "May the Lord guide your hearts." But I'm not sure he's going to. I'm not sure the Lord is going to be able to guide your heart because you may close your mind. Your negative response may keep the Lord from being able to guide you. But there is the possibility, and I pray that you do it. That's the idea.

**Imperative**

Then there is one more mood, and that's the imperative. That's volition. It expresses volition. It's the mood as command. Matthew 5:44: "Love your enemies." Now within the indicative, subjunctive, operative, and imperative moods again, there are various classifications. But when we tell you that here is a verb, and this verb is imperative mood, right away you should know, "That's a command," if it's imperative. That tells you worlds. This is the enrichment of the Word of God. Now who's going to read the Word of God in a translation and be able to come up with this? Yet, we have these smug little people that will come up and say, "I don't agree with what he says," instead of saying, "Now what was the exegesis by which he arrived at that? What was the tense? What was the mood? What was the voice? Are you getting the feel of things?

Alright, these are the factors that make the Greek Koine verb give us exact statements of facts. We have little doubt, consequently, as to what God the Holy Spirit is communicating with each verb of Scripture. Every Scripture has one interpretation, and one interpretation alone. And the verb is one of the key factors that tells what the Holy Spirit meant. If we don't know that, there is no way we can interpret. The Koine is an exact scientific language, and through these grammatical features, it tells us what the writer meant. So the exegesis of any passage of Scripture is not a matter of several meanings. It is not the point of arrogance when we tell you to shy off from the preacher who gets up and is continually saying, "Now here this verse means this, maybe. Then doctor so-and-so over here thinks maybe it means this. And then my dear, beloved, wonderful friend, elderly Mrs. Smallbrain, thinks that it means this. She just feels that this is what it meant. She has always felt this. For 50 years she felt this. Who is going to feel wrong for 50 years? We must take that into consideration.

People think that Christians are going to be developed spiritually, and that they're going to be matured by a lot of uncertain interpretations. That is not so. The thing that was so characteristic about our Lord that made the people who listened to Him grit their teeth, and they hated the innards of Jesus Christ because of it, was because he knew the language. He also knew what that language meant in the original writing of those Scriptures. And he got up and He said, "Here is what the Word means." And the people said, "This is great. Finally, we're coming to a synagogue and we're listening to someone who speaks with authority on the basis of what the Word meant and the way God put it together.

The rabbis were not doing that because they were professional boys. The rabbis knew just as well as you and I know that the old sin nature is filled with lust. And the rabbis knew that if they got up and they did not play ball with the old sin nature, those people would go flitting off someplace else. They knew very well that they would not sit and have their old sin natures humiliated. But the people who were warm and receptive and open to the Word of God said, "Thank God that you've given me the spotlight; you've held up the mirror; and, I see how grotesque I am in these lust patterns, and I'll have no more of it." And they welcomed the teaching of Jesus Christ because it had the ring of authority. Now that is what matures believers. This is what God has provided. It is no accident.

There are two communication gifts that the church has, and those are the evangelist and the pastor-teacher. That is not without reason. That is the key to the Christian's life. And you're going to find local churches few and far between who do this. Oh, they teach the Word, but you never see yourself in that Word. And that is a very very big difference. But it has to come out of the language itself. Uncertainties of meanings are only due when we have limited insights concerning any verse, or limited information that we can bring together on a text. When we have the information that we need, every text is understandable, and every text was meant for us to understand.

Christians make two common errors today. One is that the Bible cannot be definitely understood as to its meaning, but all Scripture was meant to be understood. The other mistake that Christians make is that they can go home; take their English Bible; and, sit down and start reading it, and out of this translation, they can find true interpretation, and that's not true. They think that if they go to the bookstore and buy themselves a little booklet where you fill in the answers as you read the Scriptures, that they will come out as godly men and women. That is not true. That is a very grave mistake.

When somebody comes up and challenges to you the instruction that you have received from the Word of God, you should smarten up enough to say, "Well, would you explain to me what is the exegesis of that verb there? What's the etymology of that word? What's the isagogical background upon which you make that statement of disagreeing with a pastor-teacher's authority and what he has explained? That's a perfectly legitimate question. And you will find that Christians will be a little more careful to be quickly standing up and spouting off. They'll take the Gamaliel's sense and say, "Wait a minute. Let's be careful that we are not resisting God just because this does not seem right to us. It may be just as true as rain."

**Tense, Voice, And Mood**

Here are some examples of the effects of tense, voice, and mood in exegesis. Here's how this works. In Galatians 4:19, we have the expression, "Christ be formed in you." Now what does that mean? First, we go to the word "formed" which in the Greek is "morphoo." And I can tell you now that this is an aorist, passive, subjunctive. Now we're telling you about those three main features of the verb. This word is aorist, passive, subjunctive. Now the etymology (or the meaning--the definition of the word) is "Christ be outwardly expressed in you." This word means an outward expression of what you are inwardly. When he says, "Christ be formed in you," it means that outwardly in your human relationships and expressions, may it be Christ who is functioning through you. May your life be Christ-like in its expression."

Now the question is how are we going to come to an outward performance of Christ through our living? Well, we see that the verb is passive which means that Christ Himself does not do the acting. It means that something acts upon Christ to cause Him to express Himself through your living. Jesus Christ lives in the believer in an inactive passive state. Something moves him into expression. The Word of God tells us that Christ does not glorify Himself. We are told that Christ is glorified through the life of the believer by the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5 tells us about this, as well as John 16:14. In that verse, we have stressed the effect of "that one," the Greek says. "That one" shall glorify me, stressing that Christ is passive. The Holy Spirit acts upon Him, and then your living becomes Christ's living.

Now it's aorist. What does aorist? Aorist means once-for-all actions. There is a point that something happens that the Holy Spirit is free to work upon Christ to express Himself through you. That point of action is the point where you are positive to the Word of God and to the knowledge of the principles of God, because God the Holy Spirit works through the Word. He shines His light upon the Word of God that you have accepted, and that is what he uses to direct your life. It is subjunctive, and subjunctive means probable, but not for sure. It is potential. It means it is up to you, believer, as to whether you are going to be receptive to the Word of God, or you're going to sit there as a resister who keeps looking down your nose and saying, "No I don't agree," right down the line. When you do that, you will find that Christ will not be expressed in you. What will you do?

You become a pseudo expresser. You say, "Well now let's see. Jesus Christ. How would he do it? He smiles all the time." And so you go around smiling all the time, and you make all of us sick. That's not Christ-like. So you say, "I talk nice sweetness-and-light talk. Every time I see people, I say, 'Oh how wonderful is the Lord. Oh, I praise the Lord.'" And I'm not making fun of you praising the Lord. It may be very genuine and very legitimate. But I know there are a lot of pseudo praising and glorifying of the Lord by people who are doing what? They want to have Christ-like lives.

Well this verb in the language of the grammar here tells us that the only way Christ will express himself through you and me is by an action of God the Holy Spirit upon the indwelling Christ through the Word of God that you have received, and then He will express Himself. You see we're right back to home base. Without Bible doctrine, we're dead. And without an explainer of doctrine, you can't get to first base, let alone to get into the ballgame at all. Grammar reveals the way to glorify Christ. It's not by doing it's by learning something.

Here's the use of the present tense and the aorist tense in commands. What I'm trying to do is just give you a variety of the use of tenses to show you how they tell us things, and where we get the things that we tell you. For example, the present imperative, using the Greek negative particle "me" means "stop doing what you're doing." The Greek has a way of telling you to stop something you're already doing. That tells you something when the Scripture uses this. For example, Philippians 4:6 says, "Stop worrying about even one thing." However, because it is in the present imperative (linear action), that means "stop what you're already doing."

So we know that the Philippians we're worrying continually about things. So Paul puts it in the word that says, "Stop the kind of worry that's been going on among you Philippian Christians. I want you to be happy. God was always happy, and this is what He has brought to you--joy and happiness. That's the book of Philippians. The key word--the key summary--is joy and happiness. When you get through with the book of Philippians, you should never have another unhappy moment in your life. They were doing this. They were not just tempted to do this. Ephesians 5:1 says, "Stop having constant fellowship with the works of darkness."

Now if we use aorist subjunctive with "me," it means don't start doing something. Aorist is point action. There is a point at which you might be tempted to start doing something evil. Then we tell you, "Don't even do that." Luke 11:4 says, "Do not ever lead us into temptation." You're facing a temptation, and you're told, "Don't get into that."

**Greek Particles**

As a matter of fact, these Greek particles are rather interesting. We have two of them. One of them is "ou," and the other one is "me," the one we've been looking at. "Ou" is absolute negation. You won't see this in English. All you'll see in English is "not" or "don't." However, if you see "ou" in the Greek, that means, "Boy, that's no, and I mean no." There is no question about it. It's the strong "no." For example, when they went to John the Baptist and they asked, "Are you the prophet that is the Christ--the Messiah? In John 1:21, he answered, "Ou." He said, "No," and he meant "no." When it's used in a question, this is very significant. When you use "ou" in a question in the Greek, it gives you the answer to the question. And if you "ou," it means the answer is "yes." Matthew 13:55 says, "This is the carpenter's son, is it not?" That mean that it is the carpenter's son. Now that's the beauty of the Greek. You never know that in English without a lot of words. The Greek would just say, "Is this not the carpenter's son?" And you might say, "Well, is it or isn't it?" The answer is, "Yes, it is."

Now on the other hand, we've got a weaker "no" which is this "me." This "me" is denying, but with hesitancy. Galatians 4:11 says. "Lest I have bestowed upon you labor in vain." Paul says, "I'm not sure, but I'm hesitant that I may have exercised my labor on you Galatians in vain." This is when you want to say "no," but you don't want to be too positive. It's a qualified negation. If you have "me" in a question, it means that the answer is "no." For example, in 1 Corinthians 12:30, it says, "Not all speak in tongues, do they?" And Paul gives the answer, "No, not all speak in tongues." This is a devastating scriptural testimony against Pentecostalism that says everybody must speak in tongues to evidence the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Now we know from the Greek, on the basis of what God the Holy Spirit put here, He did not use "ou" that would have said, "Yes, everybody speaks in tongues." He used "Me," indicating, "No, not all speak in tongues." And today, of course, nobody speaks in tongues.

Now suppose that you're going to go propose to a girl, and you tell her that she's a beauty, and her eyes remind you of limpid pools, and her teeth are like stars that come out every night, and all that sort of thing. You're really carried away with her, and you would like for her to be your very own. You propose to her, and she says, "Me," that means, "No, but go ahead and coax me." That means, "Maybe," so she wants you to talk a little more. But if you propose to her and she says, "Ou," forget it. Just get up off the floor. Quit your kneeling and walk out. You're through. She means it. That's "no."

Now that's the beauty of Greek. You never could get that from the English. But the minute you read that in Greek, the expositor, the interpreter, the communicator can get up and he can tell you how strong that "no" is. And out of it, he can draw all the implications of the application of the Word of God. So don't let some smart alec come up to you and say, "Oh, I don't agree with that; that that means "no;" that that's absolutely out; that people can't talk in tongues today; and, that everybody can't have this experience. When he tells you that, you say, "What's the exegesis? Give me the Greek analysis on which you base that opinion. Otherwise, shut up, and don't go around parading yourself as some kind of authority because in your soul you feel deeply about these matters, or you've always thought this, or you've always heard it.

And incidentally, we can also put this together. The Greek puts those together sometimes in "ou me," and that is the strongest "no" in the Greek language. That's even stronger than "ou." When you put them together, that's the epitome. We have that in Matthew 5:20: "You shall by no means enter into the Kingdom of Heaven." It's definitive.

Let's look at another one here--the use of the present and the aorist tenses in John 4:13-14. This is to the woman at the well. Verse 13 says, "Whoever drinks of this water shall thirst again." Well, this happens to be in a present participle, so it means present tense is linear action. "Whoever keeps on drinking of this natural water will never permanently be satisfied." The implication being that whatever the world offers never satisfies permanently. But in verse 14, the Lord Jesus, "But whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst." And this is aorist subjunctive. Whoever drinks--one point--one time--and it is subjunctive, so you might or you might not. If you decide to drink, you drink this water once, this spiritual water of life, and you will never thirst again spiritually. It will satisfy you permanently once and for all.

Now the reason for this is even further indicated by the fact that He says, "This will be a well of water springing up within you." The Greek word for "well" is the word "pege" which means a fresh flowing clear spring. This is etymology again. We go back to the New Testament. We look at those papyri remains. We look at the ostraca writings and we see how the people used this language. Whenever they talk about a free, clean, following spring, it was a "pege". But when they talked about a stagnant pool, it was a "phear." This was a brackish unpalatable water. Now the word that Jesus used was "pege." It would be a fresh flowing spring welling up within you because it would be God the Holy Spirit indwelling you. Jesus Christ places the well of eternal life continually springing up within the believer. All he had to do is believe, and then once and for all, it applies.

Let's try another one. Here's the present tense in use. We have one that seems to be rather startling. In 1 John 3:9, we are told seemingly that Christians do not sin. People who believe in complete sanctification like to quote this verse to you. They'll say "You see? When you come to a certain point in your Christian life, you will never sin again. They come to it on the basis of this verse, "That a Christian does not commit sin. He cannot sin." These are the phrases that are in there. Well, what does it mean? Again the Greek verb comes to our rescue. It is present indicative here which means that a Christian does not commit sin as a habit of life. A Christian does not completely, continually, habitually, as a way of life, live under sin. Now the person who is not a believer is continually controlled by his old sin nature out of which flows human good and individual acts of sin (both of which God rejects), and he cannot live in any other way except under sin. However, the Christian, once he is born again, cannot live continually in sin. He does not live in sin as a habit of life.

Now if he does willfully sin, and refuses to exercise the technique of confession of sin, then God brings discipline into the life of that Christian until he is brought around. Either he is brought around; he rejects that sin; he brings confession; and, he removes himself from that sin, or he will experience the sin unto death, and God just picks him up; takes his life; moves him out of this world; and, takes him into heaven. But 1 John 3:9 is not saying that once we are a Christian, we will not sin. We have many imperatives (commands) with this word "me" which means not to sin even once. We have many imperatives in the Word of God telling Christians not to get into sin, meaning that they can.

Here is one use of the perfect tense. In Philippians 3:12, Paul denies that he is spiritually mature, but in Philippians 3:15, he calls himself spiritually mature. Now that seems like a contradiction in the Word of God. The reason for it is again because of the tenses. In Philippians 3:12, we have the perfect tense. This means that Paul says, "I have not come to ultimate sanctification." The perfect means there is a thing that happened in the past and it continues to the present. Paul is saying, "I have not come to the place where I no longer sin (here in the past) and now I continue in that condition now." But in Philippians 3:15, he is using this adjective "teleios" which means mature (perfect) in the sense of mature. Paul is saying, "While on the one hand I have not come to the place where I have sinless perfection (where I never sin); on the other hand, I have come to a state of spiritual maturity in my soul." Paul is saying "I have built, through doctrine, a spiritual maturity structure in my soul. And I have come to the place where I am a stable spiritually oriented Christian. And the two fit together if you know the grammar.

In Matthew 4:4, we have the perfect tense where it says, "It (the Scripture) has been written." It is written. It means as a result of it having been written in the past, it's on record in the present. The Lord is implying that what Moses wrote 1,500 years before was the Word of God, and because it was the Word of God, it has continued to the present in preservation.

Let's look at one more here. Ephesians 2:8 is a familiar verse: "By grace are you saved through faith." Now what is this saying? "By grace were you completely saved in past time, with the result that you are in a state of salvation at the present time." This is what is being said because it's in the perfect. This is one of the eternal security verses that we have in the Bible. How? Because of the perfect Greek tense. You were saved in the past, and it will continue on forever--to the present. This means that it will continue forever. The salvation that we received upon believing the gospel is said to continue in effect forever. Now, if he had said this in the aorist tense, he would have said that a person is saved at some point in the past without any reference to whether that's going to stick or not. But he didn't use the aorist, because it does stick. Once you're saved, it continues. So the Holy Spirit used the right tense--the perfect tense--to say that.

The availability of salvation depends upon what Christ has done, but the continuance depends upon one thing. Once we believe it in the past, the perfect tense says that it continues. And as a matter of fact, the apostle Paul uses this word "este" (you are), which is present indicative of continuing linear action. "By grace you are (a present tense situation) saved (perfect) from the past, continuing to the present." Your status now is a result of what took place in the past, and it will continue forever. This is the strongest possible way for the Bible to express salvation as continuing. So Ephesians 2:8 says, "By grace were you completely saved in past time, with the result that you are in a state of salvation which persists through present time forever."

Now this is the Greek verb. It is one of the key features of interpreting the word of God. Unless somebody goes through the English Bible and tells you what is behind these Greek verbs in their meaning: the tense of the verb; the mood of the verb; and, the voice of the verb, you won't begin to understand what that action is really saying. Now that is involved in interpreting Scripture. Who is to do that for you? Well, almighty God knew that you would not all be studying the Greek language. So He provided two communication gifts: evangelist; and, pastor-teacher in order to be prepared to explain that to the flock.

Now that's the business of feeding God's people. The people of God should be receptive to that. They are to be open to that kind of feeding. They understand that that's what the business of the local church is all about. It's not all of this other rinky-dink stuff that is imposed upon pastors and churches. Christians should understand the importance of the feeding of their souls. A Christian is to understand that the most important thing in his life is to feed his soul on the Word of God. The most important thing in your life is not running off to be a witness or running off to do works of mercy. All of that flows out of the maturing and developing of your life.

But if you are not a stable mature Christian, you'll be a fink. And don't you kid yourself. No matter how much culture and how much money and how many dramatic fronts you can put on, you're going to be a fink. And sooner or later, you will reveal how spiritually shallow you are by the moves you make. The person who has entered into the Word of God and is receptive will mature and will go on. He will know that God is speaking to him through His word, and he will be able to understand it. He'll respect it. He'll appreciate it.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1973

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